April 29, 2026

The Honorable John Thune
Senate Majority Leader
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
521 Cannon House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
2267 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Protect Communities from Data Center Fast-Tracking in Permitting and Other Legislation

Dear Majority Leader Thune, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jeffries:

On behalf of our 120 organizations and the millions of members and supporters we represent, we urge Congress to reject any legislation that would fast-track permitting and development for hyperscale, artificial intelligence (AI), and other conventional data centers, and to oppose the inclusion of such provisions in any must-pass legislation for the remainder of the 119th Congress, including permitting reform, the National Defense Authorization Act, appropriations, the Water Resources Development Act, the Farm Bill, Reconciliation 2.0, or any other legislative vehicles.

Additionally, the Trump Administration threatens the fast-tracking of data centers through the continued abuse of emergency powers and other authorities—for example the continued abuse of the National Energy Emergency to derail renewable energy projects. Trump has already taken steps to fast-track data centers through the 2025 directive to the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Federal Energy Regulatory Administration (FERC) to fast-track interconnection of transmission lines for colocated data centers—which received push-back from the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), along with FERC's recent central grid approvals to connect AI data centers. With this, we also urge Congress to take needed bipartisan action to restrict President Trump's executive authorities, including his national security authorities, from fast-tracking data centers.

Congress must grapple honestly with what the data center boom means for American communities. Hyperscale data centers ("hyperscalers") are among the most resource-intensive facilities being built today. In 2023, U.S. data centers consumed roughly 4.4% of the nation's total electricity, and that share is projected to rise to 6.7 %–12 % by 2028 as AI workloads

expand, placing unprecedented strain on regional power grids and utility capacity. Water use is equally alarming. Hyperscalers consume 17 billion gallons annually, or enough to supply the many American households experiencing worsening drought stress with necessary water resources. Additionally, communities near AI data centers face higher utility bills, water shortages, noise pollution, and air quality impacts, often with little transparency or input. This lack of transparency and lack of accountability of community impacts is undemocratic. Residents deserve the ability to evaluate the health, environmental, and economic impacts of data centers before projects are approved.

Oil, gas, and tech companies are pushing to fast-track data center buildouts while ignoring the impacts on communities and the environment. Proposals disguised as "common sense" reforms would weaken the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Endangered Species Act, while also stripping residents of their right to participate in decisions affecting their health, water, and air. Congress cannot allow these industries to externalize costs while claiming progress. Lawmakers must prioritize public health, environmental sustainability, and community resilience, and reject rollbacks that hand corporations unchecked control over land, energy, and local resources.

Below are examples of how data centers harm communities, the environment, climate, and democracy, along with recommendations on how Congress can address them:

- **Rising energy use and increasing electricity bills**: The data center boom demands expensive new power plants, transmission lines, and grid upgrades. To pay for this utilities are shifting these costs directly onto ratepayers. The U.S. Energy Information Administration projects electricity prices could rise up to 40% by 2030 compared to 2025. Families struggling to afford their basic needs and keep the lights on should not be forced to subsidize the soaring energy demands of a trillion-dollar tech industry. Congress should take action to ensure ratepayers do not shoulder the increasing burden of rising electricity. This could be done through requiring data centers be categorized as a separate rate class, creating requirements for Big Tech to pay their fair share, and requiring tech companies to report their energy usage to the Energy Information Administration and FERC.

- **Water consumption and pollution**: Many data centers depend on evaporative cooling systems. Some initial data shows that large data centers consume up to 5 million gallons a day. In drought-prone regions, this strains drinking water supplies, agriculture, and ecosystems. Facilities can also contribute to thermal and other forms of water pollution, compounding impacts on local waterways and wildlife. Closed loop cooling systems require the use of toxic chemicals that, if not properly disposed of, can eventually flow and pollute water ways. These systems also typically require more

energy, which further pushes up water demand.

- **Air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions**: Data centers are one of the fastest-growing sources of U.S. carbon emissions—releasing 105 million metric tons of CO_2 in 2023, a 300% jump since 2018, with electricity demand projected to surge another 300% by 2030. Nationwide, 56% run on fossil-fueled power and diesel backup generators, driving significant climate and air pollution. The vast majority of U.S. hyperscale data centers are set to be powered primarily by fracked gas–and could account for 10% of the economy-wide emissions and 44% of the power sector emissions allowable to meet the U.S. 2035 climate target, or nationally determined contribution (NDC). By 2030, this pollution could cause up to 1,300 premature deaths annually and nearly $20 billion in public health costs. Rapid expansion without environmental review, reporting requirements, or other necessary safeguards will lock in decades of emissions and worsen air quality, disproportionately harming overburdened communities.

- **Environmental Justice concerns**: Similar to fossil fuel infrastructure, data centers are disproportionately sited in low-income communities and communities of color, compounding existing health and economic inequities and concentrating environmental harms in places least equipped to counter them. Nearly half[1] of U.S. data centers are located in these communities—meaning new facilities can potentially add pollution, raise electric rates, strain infrastructure, and worsen existing challenges. In some states, data centers are clustered in areas with significant environmental justice concerns; in California, nearly one-third are in the state's most polluted neighborhoods. Nationwide, at least 56% of data centers rely on fossil fuels and diesel backup generators, contributing to harmful air pollution and serious health risks. In the Memphis area, a coalition of environmental justice and grassroots advocates including NAACP, Young, Gifted & Green, Memphis Community Against Pollution has raised serious concerns about Elon Musk's xAI facilities threatening harm to air quality in overburdened, predominantly Black neighborhoods, and the NAACP has threatened to sue xAI and affiliates for installing and operating a power plant with no air permit. In Louisiana, seven new methane gas plants are being built near "Cancer Alley" to power a single Meta data center. These projects add to existing environmental justice burdens that disproportionately harm low-income communities and communities of color. Fast-tracking data center development could worsen these impacts and weaken critical protections for frontline communities.

[1] Approximately 45.2% of data centers are located in census tracts with above-median EJI values (RPL_EJI > 0.5), while 54.8% are in tracts with below-median EJI values. According to a national study on Environmental Justice and Data Center location patterns in the US.

- **Critical minerals and Tribal impacts**: Data center infrastructure including server boards, circuits, semiconductors, and microchips require critical minerals like copper, arsenic, and platinum. This demand is compounded by associated energy infrastructure like power plants and transmission lines that also use critical minerals. Hardrock mining is associated with significant environmental and human health impacts including water and energy usage, deforestation, land clearing, and pollutants. Tribal communities are particularly impacted, with 600,000 Indigenous people living within 6.2 miles of an abandoned mine. Additionally, 97% of nickel, 89% of copper, 79% of lithium and 68% of cobalt reserves and resources in the U.S. are located within 35 miles of Native American reservations. Data centers will increase chronic health issues associated with critical mineral mining, particularly in Tribal communities.

- **Threats to democracy**: Data center developers and the AI industry are pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into lobbying, campaign contributions, and sophisticated public relations efforts to expand their influence over public decision-making. Despite clear and repeated public concern and growing support for halting new construction and adopting commonsense safeguards, these corporations continue to sideline voters while obscuring critical information through non-disclosure agreements and sweeping trade secrecy claims. At the same time, they are consolidating power by acquiring vast tracts of land for hyperscale campuses and securing massive amounts of electricity through long-term agreements, giving them outsized influence over energy infrastructure and local economies. Some firms are going further by buying or partnering directly with utilities; for example, Blackstone Infrastructure Partners is attempting to acquire the Public Service Company of New Mexico, which would give them control over electricity transmission and distribution for roughly 800,000 customers, showing how private equity can shape infrastructure and regional development. In this context, any legislation that fails to address corporate opacity, curb outsized influence, or tackle concentrated market power risks further undermining democratic accountability.

- **Threats to jobs and workers**: While an increasing number of local and national unions have expressed support for data centers, the actual job benefits of data centers are often smaller than commonly advertised, mostly creating short term construction jobs that disappear after a facility is operational. Permanent job gains are relatively modest because data centers largely rely on expensive equipment, operational costs and infrastructure rather than workers. As a result communities can find themselves in an unequal and unfair tradeoff: surrendering significant land, energy, water, and public resources for relatively little long term employment. Beyond local impacts, data center development is facilitating the AI industry's disruption and automation of jobs across multiple sectors of the economy.

- **Land and ecosystem impacts**: Data center construction can also drive habitat loss and fragmentation, disrupting wildlife movement, reproduction, and genetic diversity, as seen in California where development and road expansion have contributed to mortality and genetic isolation in Central Coast and Southern California mountain lions. These risks are growing as demand for digital services and data center workloads continue to surge, driving expansion of hyperscale facilities that often span dozens to hundreds of acres and require extensive supporting infrastructure such as transmission lines, substations, and access roads that further fragment habitats. Beyond direct land clearing, associated infrastructure corridors divide ecosystems into smaller, isolated patches, reducing biodiversity and limiting species connectivity, while the sector's rising energy use contributes to climate change, further stressing habitats. Noise from data center construction and associated infrastructure can push wildlife away from otherwise suitable habitat and disrupt reproductive behaviors, such as mate attraction, effectively fragmenting ecosystems and reducing population viability. Together, these trends highlight how rapid, large-scale data center expansion can compound long-term ecosystem degradation if not carefully planned. Congress can help mitigate these impacts by requiring comprehensive environmental reviews and incentivizing redevelopment on previously disturbed land rather than undeveloped habitats.

Congress must block efforts being pushed by oil, gas, and tech companies that would weaken environmental and consumer protections to accelerate data center buildouts. Protecting communities' access to clean air, safe water, and meaningful participation in decisions is essential to keeping corporations accountable to consumers impacted by these data centers.

Thank you for considering our recommendations. Our organizations are ready to work with lawmakers to create sustained solutions for communities impacted by the rapid expansion of data centers.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
Climate Justice Alliance
Earthworks
Food & Water Watch
Friends of the Earth
Memphis Community Against Pollution
WE ACT for Environmental Justice
Young, Gifted & Green
21st Century Memphis or Bust!
350 Triangle

350.org
350Hawaii
A Community Voice ACORN
AFGE Local 704
Alabama Rivers Alliance
Alliance for Democracy
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
Alternatives for Community & Environment (ACE)
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.
Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake Counties Farmers Union
Bold Alliance
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Environmental Justice Ministry
Center for Progressive Reform
Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN)
CHIPS Communities United
Citizens Awareness Network
Clean Air Council
Clean Water Action
Clean Water for North Carolina
Clean, Healthy, Educated, Safe & Sustainable Community, Inc.
CLEO Institute
Climate Justice Alliance
Climate Reality Project: Memphis and Mid-South Region Chapter
Climate Reality Project: Nashville TN Chapter
Climate Solutions Accelerator of the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region
CODEPINK
Common Ground
Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety
Concerned Health Professionals of Pennsylvania
Conservation Law Foundation
Conservation Voters NM
DAACE
Data & Society
Democracy Out Loud Indivisible
Don't Waste Michigan
Earth Ethics, Inc.
Ecosystems Study Group
Empowered by Light
Extinction Rebellion Houston
FreshWater Accountability Project

Fridays For Future NYC
Georgia Conservation Voters
Global W.E.
Greater Troy Neighborhood Association, Indianapolis IN
GreenLatinos
Greenpeace USA
Hilltown Vision
Human Nature
Inland Ocean Coalition
Institute for Policy Studies Climate Policy Program
Kairos Action
Kettle Range Conservation Group
League of Conservation Voters
Long Beach Alliance for Clean Energy
Moms Clean Air Force & EcoMadres
Montana Environmental Information Center
Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment
National Coalition Against Cryptomining
NC Environmental Justice Network
Nevada Nuclear Waste Task Force
New Mexico Climate Justice
New Mexico Environmental Law Center
Newark Water Coalition
Next 100 Coalition
North American Water Office
Northeast Organic Farming Association-Interstate Council
Nuclear Energy Information Service (NEIS)
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Ocean Conservation Research
Ohio Farmers Union
Oil & Gas Action Network
Oil Change International
Paradox Farm
Partnership for Policy Integrity
Peacework CSA
Physicians for Social Responsibility PA
Pipe Line Awareness Network for the Northeast
Pitt Co. Coalition Against Racism (CAR)
Portsmouth/Piketon Residents for Environmental Safety and Security (PRESS)
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada

Protect Decatur Township
Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights
Protect PT (Penn-Trafford)
Putnam Progressives
Rachel Carson Council
Retired Nurse-Midwife
Rivers Run Through Us
Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center
Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples
Santa Fe Forest Coalition
Seneca Lake Guardian
Snake River Alliance
SoCal 350 Climate Action
Southeast Climate and Energy Network
Stand.earth
Sustain SJ
Sustaining Way
TaosProgressive
The Alliance for Democracy
The People's Justice Council
Third Act
Troublemakers
Tualatin Riverkeepers
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Vermont Yankee Decommissioning Alliance
Virginia Interfaith Power & Light
Warren County Environmental Action Team, Inc
Waterkeeper Alliance
West End Revitalization Association
Women, Food, and Agriculture Network
Women’s Well-Being

CC:
Senate Agriculture Committee Members
Senate Appropriations Committee Members
Senate Armed Services Committee Members
Senate Budget Committee Members
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Members
Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee Committee Members
House Agriculture Committee Members

House Appropriations Committee Members
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