U.S. House Oversight & Reform Committee
Environmental Subcommittee
Testimony of Chris Castro, Director of Sustainability and Resilience, City of Orlando, Florida

September 24th, 2020

Good afternoon Chair Rouda, Ranking Member Green, and distinguished members of the subcommittee.

It is with great honor and privilege that I appear before you today. My name is Chris Castro, and over the last 14 years, I have devoted my studies, professional career, and my life to advancing solutions to climate change and implementing practical sustainability strategies in cities and communities.

Today, I come before you on behalf of the City of Orlando, Florida in my capacity as the senior climate advisor to Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer and the Director of the City's Office of Sustainability and Resilience. In this role over the last 6 years, I've helped to foster a wide array of public policies, community programs, and creative partnerships that aim to advance local climate actions and our collective vision of Orlando becoming a model city of the future; one of most environmentally-friendly, socially inclusive and equitable, and economically vibrant cities in America.

Orlando has quickly become a critical player in climate leadership throughout Florida and in the Southeastern U.S. We became an early signatory of the Paris Climate Agreement for cities in 2016, became one of the first to join the Global Covenant for Climate & Energy (GCoM), we sit on the steering committee for the US Climate Mayors network, and currently a participant of the American Cities Climate Challenge.

In addition to national peer-network of cities working together on this work, we have engaged with several federal agencies on the topic of climate and clean energy solutions, such as US GSA, US Department of Energy, NREL, US EPA, NOAA, and most recently, we contributed to the "Solving a Climate Crisis" congressional action plan that was published earlier this year by the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis.

In Orlando, we utilize the most accurate science and data to determine our climate action strategy. After performing an annual greenhouse gas emissions inventory for each of the last 12

years, we have uncovered that the majority of our carbon emissions, 72%, were associated with energy use in commercial and residential buildings, followed by 25% from transportation, and the rest from our waste system.

Following a year's worth of community engagement and feedback sessions, we developed the Green Works Community Action Plan, which includes a comprehensive set of goals, objectives, and strategies that are guiding our pathway forward towards a net-zero carbon future by 2050.

With the remainder of my time, I plan to share highlights of these solutions:

1. **Priority #1: Boosting energy efficiency in existing buildings and spurring green construction**

   With buildings contributing the vast majority of our emissions, and often wasting up to 30% of it's energy use, we have prioritized energy efficiency in buildings as one of the most cost-effective and impactful climate solutions today.

- Learning from the efficiency investments we made with the EECBG funding from the Recovery Act, the City decided to pursue a $17.5M municipal green bond to invest in City property, retrofitting outdated City buildings with high-efficiency LED lighting and HVAC technologies, building controls, and even rooftop solar. Today, we are saving over 20% of the energy when compared to the baseline across 7+ million square feet of real estate and more than $2 million in operational savings per year.
- Regarding new construction, we have established a mandatory green building policy for the City, resulting in LEED certification for all City-owned buildings since 2012, from Firestations, to community centers, to major civic venues including the Amway Center and Camping World Stadium. And to go further, we established "Green affordable housing criteria" for publicly-supported housing projects to begin addressing energy burden in low-income communities.
- And regarding the private real estate sector, the City of Orlando work with building owners and managers to develop and establish a building efficiency policy requiring commercial and multifamily buildings to annually report their energy and water use and make it publicly transparent for the real estate market. Similar to a "MPG for cars", this ENERGY STAR rating helps consumers better understand the cost of utilities and how efficient one building is versus another, thereby creating a market for the more efficient real estate.

2. **Priority #2: Decarbonize electricity generation and rapidly advance renewable energy:**

Over the last few years, a 'solar panel installer' has become one of the fastest growing jobs of any sector in the State of Florida, but yet we still only get less than 2% of electricity from this abundant resource...

- So in partnership with our hometown utility, OUC, we are ramping up solar in the community as a green economic development strategy – installing rooftop solar arrays on City buildings, solar canopies over parking lots, ground-mounted solar arrays on brownfield sites, and even floating solar at the Orlando International airport stormwater ponds.
- We have also enabled clean energy financing programs, such as the Property Assessed Clean energy (PACE) and the Solar Energy Loan Fund (SELF), to support home owners and business owners with financing qualified clean energy and climate solutions.
- Our ultimate goal is to achieve net-zero carbon and 100% clean energy by 2050 citywide.

3. **Priority #3: Accelerate adoption of zero-emission Electric Vehicles (EVs) and E-buses**

With transportation contributing 25% of our emissions in Orlando, we have been looking to address this by enhancing more safe and alternative transportations options, as well as ramping up electric vehicle adoption for fleets and buses.

- Today, more than 500 public EV charging stations have been installed regionally at City parks, recreation centers, parking garages, and even theme parks...making us a top "EV-Ready" destination.
- We are purchasing more electric fleet vehicles for the City every year, reducing local air pollution and reducing cost from lower maintenance and fuel savings.
- And in partnership with the Central Florida Regional Transit Authority, known as LYNX, we will begin to deploy electric buses this month, in an effort to transition 100% of the public transit fleet to electric and alternative fuel by 2030.

In closing, I wanted to outline a few ideas where Federal support could propel our efforts and those of other states and local governments even further, including:

- Refund the EECBG program that has catalyzed clean energy implementation at the local level over the last 10 years.

- Extend investment and production tax credits for wind, solar, electric vehicles, and batteries, and consider the reallocation of the federal subsidies that exist for other legacy energy sources, such as oil and gas.
- Standardize the cost-effectiveness tests used for state energy efficiency programs and ensure that efficiency is considered a “first fuel” in utility rulemaking.
- Assist public transit agencies with electrifying their bus fleets by expanding the Low-No grants that are improving air quality, lowering operational cost, and addressing climate change.
- And continue explore putting a price on carbon or another form of valuing the externalities that are currently accelerating the problem.

If you take away anything from this testimony, I hope that you realize that the work at the local level is happening and momentum is building, but there is no doubt that we need Federal climate leadership, partnership, and support, now more than ever, to help us double-down on the climate solutions that advancing a greener and more equitable future for all Americans.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

Sincerely,

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