



March 1, 2023

New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

Legislation: Intro. 7, Intro. 128, Intro. 213 & Intro. 576

Testimony by: Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, NYC Parks

Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan, members of the Parks Committee, and other members of the City Council. I am Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, First Deputy Commissioner for NYC Parks. I'm pleased to be joined today by our Director of Government Relations, Matt Drury. I want to start by noting our appreciation for the Council's continued advocacy and support for our City parks, which leads us to the topic of today's hearing, the four pieces of legislation being heard - Intros 7, 128, 213 and 576.

Intro. 7 would require the agency to offer free recreation center memberships for young adults aged 18 to 24. NYC Parks is proud to offer an affordable and extensive network of 36 recreation centers throughout New York City, including indoor pools, weight rooms, basketball courts, dance studios, art studios, game rooms, and libraries. Our centers offer a wide range of programs for people of all ages, with a variety of free or low-cost membership options. In September 2021, as we reopened our recreation centers to the public following the COVID pandemic closures, we were pleased to introduce free annual memberships for New Yorkers aged 18 to 24. Our city's young adults can now enjoy, for no cost whatsoever, incredible access to the recreational opportunities, social engagement, community interaction, and healthy lifestyle offered by our recreation centers. We are pleased to report that the response to these new free memberships has been very positive, resulting in an increase in Young Adult memberships of nearly 30% compared to pre-COVID enrollment.

Since Intro. 7 would codify a successful existing policy already in place, as established by agency rules, NYC Parks supports the intent of the bill and has no concerns.

We'll now move on to Intro. 128 and Intro. 576, both of which involve the topic of public restrooms. Intro. 128 would require the agency to install a diaper changing station in every restroom located in a city park. New Yorkers rely on access to our park restroom facilities for their comfort and convenience, especially families with young children. We recognize that diaper changing stations are a vital amenity for parents looking to keep their little ones happy, healthy and clean, which is why we have made diaper changing stations available in the vast majority of our park restrooms.

In October 2019, our Maintenance & Operations staff inventoried our park public restrooms and determined that only 37% of the roughly 1,300 restrooms under our care offered changing tables. This was unacceptable to us, and we began a concerted effort to rectify the situation. I'm pleased to confirm that as of today, more than 700 of our park restrooms offer diaper changing tables. Diaper changing stations are now a standard feature installed in any Parks restroom that is being newly built or fully renovated, and we are hoping to install these amenities in any remaining park restrooms where installation is feasible.

Given that we already seek to install diaper changing stations in park public restrooms wherever possible and have made great strides in expanding their availability in recent years, we support the intent of Intro. 128 and would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor to incorporate some minor technical edits.



Intro. 576 would require the agency to inspect all public restrooms located on City property, or operated and maintained by a City agency, and submit biannual reports on those inspections. The bill further compels the creation of a City website listing all said public restrooms, along with the relevant inspection reporting data. The cleanliness and safety of our park restrooms is a top priority for NYC Parks, as New Yorkers rely on access to these facilities for their comfort and convenience. The agency deploys thousands of dedicated employees to care for our parks, including our park restrooms, and these cleaning and maintenance activities are supervised by an organized and focused team of Chiefs, Supervisors and Managers. Close to 1,300 restrooms are located in parks throughout the city, by far the most widely accessible public amenity available to all New Yorkers in need of a restroom.

We actively monitor and inspect the condition of our park features, including park restrooms, in several ways, most notably the Parks Inspection Program. PIP is a detailed, objective Quality Assurance program led by our Operations and Management Planning (OMP) division, conducted independently from the agency's Maintenance and Operations staff. PIP Inspectors report on the cleanliness and safety of park properties, as experienced by the public at that moment, regardless of cleaning schedules or other pending work. City parks, and the restrooms within them, receive comprehensive and independent PIP inspections two to three times each year, which is above and beyond frequent internal assessments led by our Park Supervisors, as well as the consistent presence of Parks maintenance staff in our parks, who are able to identify and address conditions and concerns in real time. PIP inspection results are shared with management throughout the agency to review performance and take corrective action. This data is also summarized on our agency website and the granular data for these various efforts are made publicly available on the City's Open Data Portal.

We appreciate the intent of Intro. 576, as NYC Parks is proud of our efforts to keep our park public restrooms in the best condition possible. It should be noted that the requirements of the bill as currently drafted are somewhat duplicative, as rigorous inspection and reporting protocols for our park features and amenities, including park restrooms, have already been codified by Local Law 67 of 2022, and Parks already makes granular inspection data fully available to the public. Further, the bill as currently drafted would require the agency to take on duties and responsibilities that are outside of the agency's purview. To that end, we would welcome the opportunity to further discuss the broader goals of this legislation with the Council.

Lastly, Intro. 213 would require the agency to convene a study of Parks community gardens engaged in food farming & processing. NYC Parks' GreenThumb division is proud to be the nation's largest urban gardening program. Created in 1978, our GreenThumb team sustains over 550 community gardens (350 of which are on Parks property) and supports thousands of volunteer gardeners throughout New York City. We work closely with the garden groups that care for these spaces on a day-to-day basis, and offer a wide range of resources, training and support, so they can operate the garden in the manner that best suits their needs.

We very much recognize the issues of food insecurity that face all too many New Yorkers, and our GreenThumb team works very closely with the Mayor's Office of Food Policy and The Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture, as many of our community gardeners do grow fruit and vegetables, primarily for personal consumption. However, it's important to keep in mind that the majority of our gardens have an extremely small footprint and the level of food production that takes place is of a relatively minimal scale.



We appreciate the intent of Intro. 213, and we already make a great deal of information about our community gardens publicly available in a variety of fashions. Much of the information referenced by Intro. 213 is either already included in an existing report, such as the annual Food Policy Report compiled by the Mayor's Office of Food Policy, or would be extremely time-and-labor-intensive to obtain from our volunteer gardeners. As such, we believe the bill as drafted is somewhat duplicative and would end up diverting finite agency time and resources away from our GreenThumb division's primary objective – making these community garden spaces the best they can be. But we would welcome the opportunity to work with the Council to discuss the broader goals, in consultation with the Mayor's Office of Food Policy and the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to discuss these pieces of legislation with you. We'd like to thank the Council for their continued interest and advocacy regarding these topics, as we know how important parks and open spaces are to the constituents in your districts. If there are questions regarding any of the legislative bills, we would be happy to answer those at this time.



**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Wednesday, March 1, 2023
Hearing - Committee on Parks and Recreation
Sherrise Palomino, Director of Advocacy and Programs, New Yorkers for Parks**

Good afternoon, my name is Sherrise Palomino, and I am the Director of Advocacy and Programs at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). We are a founding member of the Play Fair Coalition, which includes over 400 organizations from across the five boroughs. Thank you to the Parks Committee for the opportunity to speak about our city's need for 1% for Parks. I also want to thank Chair Shekar Krishnan for his leadership on this important issue.

The bills before the committee support equitable access for young people at recreational centers that provide much needed opportunities for youth development, increase critical work community gardens provide in urban farming and much more. Community gardens play a crucial role in communities of color by providing fresh and healthy foods, especially in the South Bronx and other food deserts. Supporting and increasing urban farming has significant public health impacts. We must invest in NYC Park's GreenThumb program and expand urban agriculture to make these programs accessible to all New Yorkers in equitable ways. Increasing the NYC Parks budget to 1% for Parks can do this!

With a well-funded parks department, our parks and recreational centers can be properly maintained. Allocating 1% of the city operating budget to NYC Parks would generate cleaner and safer parks, comprehensive access to the city's 10,000 acres of natural areas and trails, protect vulnerable wetlands susceptible to changing climate, free access to programs at recreational centers for NYC children and so much more.

We are overdue for transformative investment in our parks system – 1% of the city budget for parks could ensure that recreation centers are fully staffed and functioning to provide the programming that young people need. The NYC Parks department does a valiant job maintaining these aging resources but needs more funding to do so. This is one of the many reasons why NY4P and the Play Fair Coalition are calling for an increase in the Parks budget to 1% of the city's budget – a call that the majority of City Council Members support along with Speaker Adams.

For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks](http://www.ny4p.org) (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods.
www.ny4p.org



**Testimony of Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for New York City Policy
New York League of Conservation Voters
City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
March 1, 2023**

Good afternoon, my name is Alia Soomro and I am the Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV is a statewide environmental advocacy organization representing over 30,000 members in New York City. Thank you, Chair Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to testify today.

NYLCV supports Intro 213-2022, sponsored by Council Member Ayala, which would require the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to conduct a study on the prevalence of community gardens engaged in urban farming and agriculture. Intro 213 would also require DPR to provide recommendations to the Mayor and the Speaker on how to support and increase such farming and agriculture.

New York City's community gardens are an integral part of the City's valuable green space and are essential to creating more sustainable agricultural systems and reducing environmental hazards. Urban agriculture in community gardens and urban farms supports education, community building, nutrition, and climate mitigation. Many of them operate community composting, run educational programs, and provide dense urban neighborhoods with open green space. Community gardens also fight the food insecurities that disproportionately plague low income and communities of color.

NYLCV supports the passage of Intro 213 because this type of report would provide the information the City needs to understand the effectiveness of urban agriculture, where expansions should be made, and where further funding is needed to operate programs effectively. We recommend that the bill's reporting requirement incorporate equity by prioritizing funding and urban farming investments in food deserts and historically underserved communities.

NYLCV is also a proud founder of the Play Fair Campaign, along with New Yorkers for Parks and DC37, and has fought hard over the past years for adequate parks funding. As our City gears up for budget season, we urge the City Council and Mayor to continue to value investments in our community gardens and the irreplaceable services they provide to their local communities. NYLCV supports Intro 213 because we must invest in and expand urban agriculture to make these programs accessible to all New Yorkers. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

3/1/23 NYC Parks Hearing Testimony
Diamond Y. Moseley
info.diamondthedoula@gmail.com

Int. No. 7 Testimony- Our young adults need access to safe, free recreational spaces within their own communities. It's imperative that we keep that age group in mind, as they transition from students in school institutions to forward-thinking young contributing members of our society. Recreation centers bridge the gap between our multigenerational neighborhoods through community play.

Int. No. 128 Testimony- Our public park bathrooms need accessible changing stations for both men and women identifying parents. It's 2023, and our parents are still walking up to locked park bathrooms, without soap, and no changing station. In the greatest city on Earth, it's human public health right to have access to clean, safe, hygienic excretory facilities in-utero to elder age. As a doula in this city, we demand more for the caregivers and children. It's not an option or luxury to support all families, especially the youngest, most vulnerable folks in our society.

Int. No. 213 Testimony- As our country continues to burn food processing plants, deny farmers access to funds to grow, and farmland being monopolized, our city needs increased support in urban farming and infrastructure. As a local microgreen farmer, I walk, live and work through the food deserts from Buffalo to the Bronx. In the Bronx, we can't afford to wait any longer to support. The rates of obesity, chronic health conditions, air pollution and overall quality of life are the highest in the state of NY. Help us help ourselves as we fight for climate resiliency in expanding urban agriculture.

Int. No. 576- As a NYC Park goer, I have complained several times about the lack of access to open, and clean restrooms in NYC parks. We should have soap, warm water, toilet tissue, and everything else that a working, hygienic excretory facility would possess. Comfort stations within our parks are a must, including access to clean water. Our comfort stations should service our communities adequately.



March 1, 2023

Honorable Shekar Krishnan, Chair
NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

Re: Testimony Supporting the Four Bills Being Considered Today

Dear Chair Krishnan,

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on behalf of Brooklyn Parks and Open Spaces Coalition (BPOC).

We support all four of the bills being considered at the hearing today at 1pm.

Re: Int. No. 7, to be truly equitable, recreation centers must be free and accessible to all young people.

Re: Int. No. 128, safe and sanitary diaper changing tables in all park bathrooms are a matter of equity and public health.

Re: Int. No. 213, urban agriculture programs must be accessible to all New Yorkers.

Re: Int. No. 576, unsanitary and unsafe comfort stations reflect insufficient funding for NYC Parks. Mayor Adams and the City Council must allocate 1% of the budget for parks to address long-standing maintenance and staffing needs, and to achieve an equitable 21st century parks system.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Mayock".

Joe Mayock
Steering Committee Member
Brooklyn Parks and Open Spaces Coalition (BPOC)

cc: Adam Ganser, Executive Director, New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P)



NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Hon. Council Member Shekar Krishnan, Chair
250 Broadway
New York, NY

Re: Int 0576-2022 codifying the reporting process for cleanliness of public bathrooms in NYC, including in park comfort stations.

Dear Committee Members and Chair Krishnan,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter of public health. I am the President of the Friends of Morningside Park a 501c non profit partner with the NYC Dept of Parks and Recreation that has been a community steward of our 30 acre Harlem park for over 40 years.

Morningside Park stretches for 13 blocks and has three comfort stations. All of these comfort stations are currently closed and have been for months. Reasons for the closures relate to inadequate or non existent comfort station weatherization, plumbing repairs, and park closures for unrelated park improvements. While the park has one toilet available to the Parks staff, as of now, visitors to Morningside Park literally have *no toilet facilities to use*. It is not uncommon for our volunteers to come across piles of human feces within the park in the course of their weeding, pruning and planting efforts to beautify the park. These conditions are unacceptable.

The first and foremost need is to adequately fund our Parks Department so that it is able hire the staff and do the necessary repairs needed to maintain their existing restroom facilities. As a long time member organization of the Play Fair Coalition, we call for the city to step up to allocating 1% of the city budget for NYC Parks as the Mayor promised when running for office. This funding must be allocated and used in part to maintain the existing stock of comfort stations and staff their maintenance. Before the comfort station closures in Morningside Park in 2022, horticultural staff were being called on to maintain clean toilets in the park instead of focussing on their jobs as gardeners. Once the Mayor's funding promise becomes reality, Parks will be able to conduct the additional reporting on comfort station conditions called for in this bill.

Beyond that first and most fundamental step, the city needs to make a concerted investment to provide **additional restrooms in parks and other city properties** . As noted in the Comptroller's 2019 report *Discomfort Stations The Conditions and Availability of NYC Parks Bathrooms*, "NYC Parks comfort stations must be weatherized, made accessible, and significantly expanded. These efforts should be directed by a comprehensive plan and coupled with procurement reform to standardize the design and costs of new comfort stations."

Submitted in respect,

Brad Taylor, President

Friends of the Hutchinson river Greenway

Hutchinson River Parkway, Bronx NY

Kevin Daloia, Administrator

646-404-1491

02/28/2023

NYC Council

Parks & recreation Committee

Mayor Adams and the City Council must allocate 1% of the city budget for NYC Parks to address longstanding maintenance and staffing needs and to achieve an equitable twenty-first century parks system.

- Recreation center programming and amenities provide critical opportunities for youth development through exercise, education, and socialization. To be truly equitable, these facilities must be free and accessible to all young people regardless of financial status.
- Accessible and convenient public bathrooms are a matter of public health. Comfort stations in parks must include essential amenities for parents and guardians of babies and small children.
- Unsanitary and unsafe comfort stations reflect insufficient funding for NYC Parks maintenance and operations. Codifying the public bathroom reporting process in addition to allocating 1% of the city budget for NYC Parks is necessary to improve and maintain consistent sanitary conditions and increase the agency's capacity to service comfort stations.
- Urban agriculture in community gardens and urban farms supports education, community building, nutrition, and climate mitigation. We must invest in and expand urban agriculture to make these programs accessible to all New Yorkers.

Thank you for considering,

Kevin Daloia

Administrator, Friends of the Hutchinson River Greenway





Date: March 3, 2023

Re: Testimony in Support of 4 Bills before the Committee on 3/1/23

Red Hook Conservancy (RHC) is writing in support of bills Int.No7, Int. No. 128, Int. No. 213 and Int. No. 576. As an organization that was birthed as a friends of the Red Hook Recreation Center, and over time broadened our aim to include parks, we are acutely aware of the benefits of both amenities.

Community recreation centers such as Red Hook Recreation Center (RHRC) are central gathering spaces, offering users access and enjoyment of weight rooms, gyms, games, and other programming. RHRC is a hub of activity where we get to check in with each other, catch up on news, and maintain the relationships we've built with residents and center staff over the years. Red Hook Conservancy wants all New Yorkers to enjoy these public jewels regardless of income or location. This is only possible if we ensure that access is more equitable for all. From personal experience I can relate that over the years our RHRC workout group has lost many young members due to lack of funds to pay the continued membership fees. Making NYC Parks recreation centers free to more youth between 18-24 would go a long way to expanding access for many while offering them a safe space to socialize and exercise.

For some time now, RHC has been advocating for parks including more accessible and cleaner public bathrooms in the community. Lack of financial investment and the resulting understaffing in the Parks Department continue to endanger such critical infrastructure and amenities. Public bathrooms are already difficult to find in NYC, and locating clean ones, with safe diaper changing stations can be challenging. Codifying the reporting process for public bathrooms would go a long way in increasing accountability and improving sanitary conditions. Having staff to maintain and manage comfort stations would result in better safety for users and improve these facilities which are a public asset.

Another part of the Parks ecosystem is Red Hook urban farms and compost sites. They are significant resources for the community. As part of our neighborhood tree stewardship in parks and along streets, through other partnerships, and volunteer service with farms, we can speak to how crucial access to locally grown nutritious food and locally produced compost has been to RHC and residents. Without these critical infrastructure and services, Red Hook residents would be forced to travel some distance to other communities for these healthy options. RHC has also seen how important urban farms are for training youth and providing employment opportunities. It is high time for New York City to invest in and expand urban farming in communities, so that all New Yorkers can enjoy healthy options and build a sustainable city. To do so, it is imperative that Mayor Adams and the City Council allocate 1% of the city budget for NYC Parks to address longstanding maintenance and staffing needs and to achieve an equitable twenty-first century park and recreation system. Success for future generations demand it.

Sincerely,

Marlene Pantin
Executive Director

Dear New York City Council Committee on Parks,

While it is crucial that we need more housing. It is also evident that we do not have enough nature and parks in many of our city's neighborhoods, especially downtown Manhattan.

We need nature for more than it's beauty, but also for it's calming, healing energy. Yes. Healthy earth, just like the sun, gives off energy, but in the form of negative ions which are alkalizing. Nature keeps us human. Every school should have a garden.

Housing is about to go through a big change in that once commercial buildings will become mixed use allowing for housing in many, once commercial only, buildings. But, when an empty lot is developed it is gone for a long time at best.

Also, the amount of people owning dogs has doubled. There is a mistake in the perception that these recreational areas are for the dogs. They are not. They are for our tax-paying residents who choose to live with dogs. This is how they want to spend their recreation - with their dog, but we need adequate places for them to do this.

Please do not build on lots that have not been developed, especially if they are near parks, schools and especially if they are in downtown Manhattan.

Sincerely,
Lynn Pacifico
lynnpax@juno.com
4th generation Villager

Warrie L. S. Price
Park Avenue
New York, New York
10128

March 1, 2023

New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation

Re: NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation Hearing 3/1/23

I offer the following statements on the inclusion of diaper changing stations (Int 0128-2022), the reporting of bathroom maintenance (Int 0576-2022), and the report on community gardening and agriculture (Int 0213-2022).

As the Founder and President of The Battery Conservancy, and a former Community Board Parks Committee Chair, I have spent much of my adult life working in New York City parks.

[Int 0128-2022: A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to diaper changing accommodations in parks](#)

I commend and support the addition of changing tables in the public area near washing stations in New York City park bathrooms. It's important to accommodate families with multi-age children.

[Int 0576-2022: A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to requiring reporting on the features and condition of public bathrooms](#)

As the Founder of The Battery Conservancy, the nonprofit partner to NYC Parks, we designed and rebuilt one complete bathroom in The Battery and at this time are planning a new "family bathroom" for exclusive use of the new Battery Playscape playground. It is our responsibility with NYC Parks to fund the maintenance of the bathroom on the north side of the park. The Battery has above average volume as the tourist destination for the ferries to Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, and as a transportation hub, so use of bathrooms is greater than most city parks. No matter the size of the park, the cost to truly clean bathrooms is not insignificant. It must be tended to with 3 shifts, every 2-3 hours, from 8am - 7pm, 7 days a week. The average cost of service to maintain the bathrooms in The Battery is over \$80,000 annually. Maintaining bathrooms is a full-time job. I respect the Council's intent to have a monitoring system that guarantees clean bathrooms, but I think all laws should be realistic from the cost and labor needs of those providing the service. NYC Parks and its Friends Groups throughout the city try to engage the community

in maintaining various parts of public parkland. It's an important gesture, but I'm concerned about the drain on an already strapped budget for the NYC Parks system.

I realize this is not being considered at this time, but I would like to voice my support for gender neutral bathrooms as NYC Parks creates new comfort facilities throughout the city. I think it is important for the design and construction of new comfort facilities to be inclusive to all New Yorkers.

Int 0213-2022: A Local Law in relation to a report on community garden food processing and agriculture

This year The Battery will celebrate 12 years of the Battery Urban Farm, which was created in response to a request from 8 high school students who asked for a vegetable garden in the park. With the help of 300 volunteers, we gave them a one-acre urban farm. It has been a remarkable success and from those 8 women students from Millennium High School we have now grown to 5000 students per year from over 200 schools. It's important for all New Yorkers to be able to understand where their food comes from and especially for our youth to have improved food choices and an agricultural education. In considering the limited budget of the NYC Parks Department, I would recommend they partner with a nonprofit group (e.g. GrowNYC, Green Guerillas, City Growers) whose mission is to bring urban agriculture to all corners of the city, from NYCHA, to community gardens, and to neighborhood backyards.

The New York City parks system is more important today than it has ever been as we seek nature for physical as well as mental health. I commend the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation and its Chair Shekar Krishnan for their participation to ensure our parks system continues to meet the needs of our city. Thank you for your time today and for the submission of my comments.

Respectfully submitted,



Warrie L. S. Price

March 1, 2023

Date

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/1/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Iris Rodriguez Rosa

Address: _____

I represent: First Deputy Commissioner

Address: NYC Parks

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/1/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Drury

Address: _____

I represent: Director of Government Relations

Address: NYC Parks

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: March 1, 2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: THOMAS GOBAN

Address: Brooklyn 11215

I represent: MOVE THE MONEY - NYC

Address: move the money - nyc@gmail.com