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James F. Gennaro, Chairman
New York City Council Committee on Environmental Protection

Dear Councilman Gennaro:

Thank you for your invitation to speak at today's hearing. As I am not able to attend in person, please accept my written statement in support of institutionalizing a New York City Panel on Climate Change.

I am Lisa DiCaprio, a Clinical Associate Professor of Social Sciences at New York University School of Continuing and Professional Studies, and a member of the NYU Sustainability Task Force.

At a recent screening of "The Island President," Mohamed Nasheed, the former president of the Maldives, reminded us that we, too, live on an island and will be affected by rising sea levels. This local/global connection highlights how the risks that we face from climate change are of a permanent rather than an episodic nature. (1)

We are now past the time for an ad hoc task force. The accelerating rate of climate change requires the establishment of the proposed New York City Panel on Climate Change.

The public reports to be prepared on a regular basis by this panel will facilitate the climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives that are being carried out by a wide spectrum of professionals, including: scientists, architects, engineers, designers, urban planners, government officials, public health administrators, the media, environmental advocates, and educators.

Timely scientific data and analysis on climate change is essential for long-term planning by NYC corporations, insurance companies, government and social service agencies, utilities, and educational institutions that must prepare their students to meet the challenges of our changing world.

A New York City Panel on Climate Change is vital to our democratic process. It will provide the basis for public discussion and debate, motivate individual and organizational change to promote sustainability, and obtain support for measures that will require the expenditure of public funds.

Finally, awareness about climate change is key to our ability to fulfill our responsibilities as global citizens, as climate change increasingly threatens the most basic human rights to water, food, work, health, and human dignity.

(1). Recent articles, reports, and hearings on rising sea levels include the following:

For the link to the April 19, 2012 Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing on the impact of sea level rise on the energy and water infrastructure in the U.S., see: <http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=d841f31d-9b1a-4e7e-b6df-43c8f4ba11b1>

For an interactive map of sea level rise prepared by Climate Central, see: <http://sealevel.climatecentral.org>

Justin Gillis, "Rising Sea Levels Seen as Threat to Coastal U.S.," New York Times, March 13, 2012: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/14/science/earth/study-rising-sea-levels-a-risk-to-coastal-states.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print

Int. No. 834 Testimony of Al Appleton

4/25/12 by email

In terms of my testimony, I definitely endorse the proposal. In terms of details, you might want to specify that the panel will reside in the Mayor's office, which shall provide its budget with funds adequate to do the necessary long range studies and to publicize the results. You should also require that findings should be formally submitted to the City Council.

In addition, I was going to propose that the purposes of the panel should be expanded to encompass what is the biggest gap in the global warming debate, which is the victims, i.e. cities, which will have to pay the adaption costs, do not have a formal voice or a seat at the table and that the users of fossil fuel have no responsibility for the financial consequences. It is a classic cost shifting and perverse incentive and violates every principal of the free market. I was going to suggest something like the following paragraph for additional stage setting findings:

Given that the cost impacts to New York City from global warming are reliably estimated to be in the hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars, and given that the lack of responsibility of fossil fuel users for imposing these costs on what are innocent bystanders, not only New York City and other coastal communities, but also water users, drought vulnerable agricultural producers, communities vulnerable to extreme weather events, elderly populations, etc., it is the sense of the Council that New York City should not passively accept the imposition of these costs but should actively seek to insure that those who are damaged by global warming are compensated by those who benefit from the use of the fossil fuels whose combustion and related emissions are the primary cause of global warming. By establishing a financial accountability link between the users of fossil fuel and those damaged by the global warming consequences of that fossil fuel use, the City can make a major contribution to bringing global warming under control and arresting the runaway rise in the emission of global warming gases.

This leads to the following action paragraph:

The panel shall, by the end of its first two years, develop with City officials a strategy for using the City's legal, financial and political resources to alleviate the cost burdens adapting to global warming will impose on the City by making fossil fuel users financially accountable for the consequences of global warming and incorporate such a strategy into its first report and thereafter report on progress and updates in every report thereafter. . In designing such a strategy, the City should seek to create a coalition of urban areas similarly situated whose goal shall be to ensure that the urban areas that will bear the brunt of the costs of adapting to global warming will have a formal place at the negotiating table in all future negotiations, national and international over global warming policy and will be able to effectively raise the issue of the accountability of fossil fuel producers and users for the costs such urban areas will have to bear..

Al Appleton