



Testimony to the Committee on Environmental Protection
Noah Chesnin, Associate Director, WCS New York Seascape Program
Wildlife Conservation Society
March 8, 2021

Thank you Chair Constantinedes and members of the Environmental Protection Committee. My name is Noah Chesnin and I am the Associate Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society's (WCS) Seascape Program based out of the New York Aquarium.

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), which includes the Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Central Park Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo, and Queens Zoo, saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. Our New York Seascape Program, operating out of WCS's New York Aquarium, is committed to protecting marine biodiversity and habitat in the waters from Montauk, NY, to Cape May, NJ through field research, informed advocacy, and local stewardship. Based in Coney Island since 1957, the New York Aquarium is also committed to working collaboratively with local partners to build coastal resilience in Coney Island, an under-resourced community where residents are increasingly vulnerable to storm events and rising seas.

New York is a city of islands surrounded by water. The coastal and marine waters encircling New York, known as the New York Bight, are an ecological treasure trove, providing critical migration routes for globally threatened species, including sea turtles, whales, and sharks, as well as nursery grounds and critical habitat to hundreds of other marine species. With more than 8 million people living in New York City and one of the busiest ports in the world, the city that never sleeps is surrounded by the sea that never sleeps. Relatively few New Yorkers are aware of their marine wildlife neighbors and the threats that both nature and coastal communities are facing from offshore activities and climate change. In addition to conducting original scientific research on marine wildlife, creating greater awareness of and a sense of place tied to our waters, the New York Aquarium also provides New Yorkers with the knowledge and tools to protect our ocean legacy. These waters and wildlife face significant challenges ranging from pollution and increased vessel traffic to threats associated with climate change and marine habitat degradation. The New York Seascape Program seeks to connect New Yorkers with their ocean backyard and work collaboratively to advance marine conservation solutions that protect marine wildlife and support and empower local communities.

WCS is a member of the City's Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). Like many other cultural organizations, WCS made the difficult, but necessary decision in mid-March to close all of our parks because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the temporary closure of the parks to the public during the pandemic, WCS as an organization never stopped serving the public and our youth. WCS essential staff remained working onsite caring for the animals & maintaining park operations, while shifting our public engagement & youth development programming to digital platforms.

The New York Aquarium's conservation work is grounded in science and community engagement. We strive to expand understanding of local species and habitats, inspire new generations of stewards, and collaborate with diverse partners and communities to build lasting conservation outcomes. Below is a



description of some of the work we are doing in New York City that is connected to the mission of A Greener NYC:

- **Field research and Citizen Science:** WCS NY Aquarium scientists conduct original field research to enhance understanding of species distribution, migration, and habitat use through acoustic and satellite tagging and monitoring of target species of sharks, whales and fish in the waters around New York City and across the New York Bight to guide conservation and management policies. For example, team members conduct long-term ecological monitoring and developing adaptive, ecosystem-based management plans for American eel and river herring as part of our ongoing restoration of the Bronx River. In partnership with academic institutions, we are leading acoustic monitoring efforts for marine mammals in New York waters. As a public facing institution, we also organize opportunities for community members (e.g. students from local schools, residents from communities adjacent to local water bodies, etc.) to participate in citizen science efforts. These activities not only help collect important biological and ecological data, but provide important opportunities to promote community-based stewardship of our local waterways.
- **Coney Island Creek:** Coney Island Creek is an important community and ecological asset. As the northern boundary of the Coney Island peninsula, the Creek and adjacent parklands provide communal and natural open space to all residents. This public benefit has become even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Creek ecosystem also supports a variety of habitats and a diverse array of marine and terrestrial species. During Superstorm Sandy, the Creek was also an agent of destruction as the waters overflowed its banks and flooded streets, homes and businesses across Coney Island. Although severely impacted by a long legacy of historic and current uses and abuses, including industrial pollution, contaminated stormwater run-off and illicit discharges of untreated sewage, residents and community-based organizations have been working to protect and restore the Creek, address associated flood risks, and support the recreational benefits it provides to the community. The New York Aquarium is committed to working collaboratively with local partners and residents to build coastal resilience in Coney Island, an area increasingly vulnerable to storm events and rising seas. We seek to weave together marine conservation, environmental justice and social equity to advance both ecological restoration of Coney Island Creek and community resilience to climate change. In collaboration with partner organizations, we have organized and hosted community workshops where Coney Island residents can share their priorities for Coney Island Creek and co-create a community and ecological resilience strategy. The NY Aquarium Education program works with schools across Coney Island and Southern Brooklyn to provide youth-led conservation programming focused on the Creek. For example, we host or co-organize citizen science activities for students, youth-led nature walks, and beach clean-ups. These hands-on STEM educational activities are simultaneously community stewardship events that help build a grassroots constituency, connecting residents to the nature and waterways around New York City. The New York Aquarium also works with local conservation organizations on a range of policy issues affecting Coney Island Creek. We have shared scientific data and advocated to the NYC Economic Development Corporation regarding the proposed ferry landing in the Creek and have advocated for nature-based solutions and ecological monitoring to the Army Corps of Engineer's New York and New Jersey Harbor and Tributary Study.



- **Offshore Wind, Climate Change and Inclusive STEM Career Jobs Program:** New York City, the State of New York and the Biden-Harris Administration have set forth ambitious and necessary goals with regard to climate change. Offshore wind energy is one of the most abundant sources of zero emissions energy and it will play a significant role in enabling New York City to meet this goal. WCS supports responsibly developed offshore wind power as a critically needed climate change solution. Drawing on our scientific research and expertise, we have advocated for policies and actions needed to bring it to scale in an environmentally protective manner that addresses impacts to marine wildlife and habitats. Responsible development of offshore wind energy avoids, minimizes and mitigates impacts to ocean wildlife and habitat and traditional ocean uses, meaningfully engages stakeholders from the start, and uses the best available science and data to ensure science-based and stakeholder-informed decision making. Responsibly developed offshore wind has the potential to create well-paying union jobs to build, install and maintain these large scale infrastructure projects. The nascent offshore wind industry also has the potential to build the next generation of marine and coastal STEM professionals and ensure that people hired for those positions are reflective of the diversity of New York City and New York. These ecological and biological monitoring positions will be critical to ensure the offshore wind sector in New York simultaneously promotes a carbon neutral, climate friendly economy and a healthy ocean environment.
- **Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary Nomination:** Just 100 miles off the coast of bustling New York City lies the largest submarine canyon along the U.S. Atlantic coast—the Hudson Canyon. Rivaling the depth and scale of the Grand Canyon, this special place supports a remarkable abundance and diversity of marine wildlife, including leviathan whales, endangered sea turtles, majestic sharks and tunas, colorful coldwater corals and many species that support local commercial and recreational fisheries. Ships regularly traverse the waters above the canyon to enter one of the busiest ports in the world, and lying on the bottom is a network of deep sea communication cables that connect us to the world. Yet, this natural wonder remains a mystery to many. In order to secure a conservation legacy for Hudson Canyon, WCS submitted a proposal to NOAA nominating the canyon as a National Marine Sanctuary (NMS). A National Marine Sanctuary in these waters could preclude oil, gas and mineral extraction in the Canyon, helping to maintain fish and wildlife populations and ensure a future for the fisheries and tourism industries that depend on healthy ocean ecosystems. It will also provide a special place for us to enjoy and use today while securing an ecological legacy for generations to come. As a part of its nomination letter, WCS recommended that fisheries within the Hudson Canyon continue to be regulated through existing regional and federal entities, not through an NMS designation. The Sanctuary designation and subsequent management is designed to be a public-facing and stakeholder driven process with multiple opportunities for public comment to ensure all viewpoints receive fair consideration.

Therefore, as the Council determines its budget priorities for FY 2022, we ask that Greener be restored to pre-pandemic levels. New York City Council environmental funding, and initiative funding like A Greener NYC, are critical to support our community-led conservation efforts across the city. It is our hope that this committee and the City Council understand what environmental and conservation organizations like ours have to offer New Yorkers and that we are responsive to the needs of the people of New York. But in the end, we need the City's full support. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. We



appreciate the Council's unwavering support, and ask you to once again assure that environmental justice remains at the forefront of the City's recovery.



**CITY COUNCIL ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE
BUDGET HEARING TESTIMONY
KAREN IMAS, VP OF PROGRAMS, WATERFRONT ALLIANCE
MARCH 8, 2021**

The Waterfront Alliance is a coalition of more than 1,100 organizations working together to inspire and effect resilient, revitalized, and accessible coastlines for all communities.

The New York City Council has taken important steps in recent years to address the threat of climate change, from passing the Climate Mobilization Act - setting a bold target for reducing citywide greenhouse gas emissions - to the recent Renewable Rikers Act. While our City has a long road to a Covid-19 recovery, climate initiatives should remain front and center as part of an equitable recovery strategy that will reduce risks across our communities.

One tool that the City Council has at its disposal is the “A Greener NYC Initiative,” which was established in 2015 to provide environmental education, nature-based programs, and ecological community services directly to New Yorkers. This extraordinary funding commitment supports programs related to environmental education, community stewardship, and green-jobs training, as well as contributing to the improvement and conservation of the City’s air, land, energy, open spaces, and other resources.

Attached to this testimony is letter signed by more than 20 groups that are all committed environmental and educational advocates funded by A Greener NYC. Waterfront Alliance, along with these groups, is calling attention to the importance of this Initiative and the restoration of funding to pre-pandemic levels. In FY 2020, A Greener NYC was funded at \$4.08m, and was cut by 50% in FY 2021.

Environmental education programs around the City, like Waterfront Alliance’s Estuary Explorers program, have long helped New Yorkers make meaningful connections to the natural world that’s vitally embedded, but sometimes overlooked in our urban fabric. Combining interactive and place-based experiences in horticulture, water quality, wildlife, climate science, and ecology, among other disciplines, these

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efforts enhance science and math skills, and inspire stewardship, civic engagement, and career pathways.

The climate crisis we are currently experiencing makes this kind of environmental literacy and advocacy even more critical. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the need to be prepared for future climate risks and to be educated about climate science, as well as reinforces the need for quality open space and nature in the City. The future of our harbor City depends on climate solutions and a creative pool of thinkers and experts working to improve and conserve the city's air, land, energy, water, open space, and other vital resources.

Another significant budget priority related to climate is institutionalizing funding for the Mayor's Office of Resiliency beyond September 2022, when the federal money allotted after Hurricane Sandy will be exhausted. The Mayor's Office of Resiliency and its knowledgeable staff have played a critical role in preparing neighborhoods for a future of extreme storms and sea level rise. The Agency guides the City in strengthening coastal defenses, upgrading buildings, protecting infrastructure and critical services, and making homes, businesses, and neighborhoods safer. MOR developed the City's Climate Design Guidelines which direct planners, engineers, architects, and others involved in project delivery on how to use regionally-specific future climate projections in the design of city facilities. The guidelines aim to ensure that resilient design becomes an integral part of the project planning process for City agencies and designers.

Currently, efforts are underway through legislation to codify these important guidelines which Waterfront Alliance supports.

For large-scale and complicated resilience infrastructure projects, MOR is responsible for interagency coordination and integration into the City's multi-layered citywide resiliency strategy. This is an important role that should be sustained through future administrations.

Thank you.

New York City Council
Speaker Corey Johnson
City Hall Office
New York, NY 10007

March 2, 2021

Re: A Greener NYC

Dear Speaker Johnson and Honorable Council Members,

The New York City Council has taken important steps in recent years to address the threat of climate change, from passing the Climate Mobilization Act - setting a bold target for reducing citywide greenhouse gas emissions - to the recent Renewable Rikers Act. Among these important steps in the fight against climate change is A Greener NYC, a City Council initiative established in 2015 providing environmental education, nature-based programs, and ecological community services directly to New Yorkers. This extraordinary funding commitment supports programs related to environmental education, advocacy, community service; and green-job training, contributing to the improvement and conservation of the City's air, land, energy, open spaces, and other resources.

The undersigned are all committed environmental and educational advocates who are calling attention to the importance of this Initiative and calling for the restoration of funding to pre-pandemic levels. In FY 2020, A Greener NYC was funded at \$4.08m, and was cut by 50% in FY 2021.

Environmental education programs and organizations around the City have long helped New Yorkers make meaningful connections to the natural world that's vitally embedded, but sometimes overlooked, in our urban fabric. Combining interactive and place-based experiences in horticulture, water quality, wildlife, climate science, and ecology, among other disciplines, these efforts enhance science and math skills, and inspire stewardship, civic engagement, and career pathways.

The climate crisis we are currently experiencing makes this kind of environmental literacy and advocacy even more critical. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the need to be prepared for future climate risks and to be educated about climate science, as well as reinforced the need for quality open space and nature in the City. The program providers funded through A Greener NYC are already proven experts in this work, have continued delivering on the initiative through the pandemic, and are ready to continue providing essential resources and pathways for developing a climate ready citizenry and creating the next generation of conservation stewards.

A Greener NYC also significantly supports equity in environmental education and advocacy, and in economic potential. The vast majority of funded programs are run by nonprofits, which are guided by missions to address community needs. The programs and stewardship developed by the organizations signed on to this letter generate advocacy organically within neighborhoods, empowering people across communities to advocate for green solutions.

With our economy pivoting to green and blue jobs, such as in renewable energy, sustainable building systems, landscape architecture, and coastal engineering, the program providers of A Greener NYC are also enabling those opportunities to be



attainable in environmental justice communities. By providing the relevant educational background and/or career awareness, and in some cases, even targeted training, A Greener NYC also makes a more equitable NYC.

Through the challenges of the pandemic, the program providers of A Greener NYC have adapted to deliver virtual services, including programs created by youth benefitting from this support, at-home educational activity toolkits, engaging video presentations, live streams with experts, and public zoom workshops. These activities provide authentic and exciting options for teachers, families, and the public to continue to help build a sustainable city and contribute actively to that goal, while remaining isolated or distant. Yet while filling this need to high acclaim, the organizations involved continue to struggle with questions of funding reliability for the initiative, which can ultimately undermine capacity much better spent on community-based environmental programming.

The Waterfront Alliance and the undersigned call on the New York City Council to commit to annual funding for the initiative, A Greener NYC, and to restore FY 2022 funding of the initiative to pre-pandemic levels. Together, we can achieve the important work of education, advocacy, community service, and green-job training contributing to the improvement and conservation of the city's air, land, energy, open space, and other vital resources, and create an equitable and sustainable future.

Sincerely,



Cortney Worrall, Waterfront Alliance
Irene V. Scheid, Alley Pond Environmental Center, Inc.
Peter Malinowski, Billion Oyster Project
Sawdayah Brownlee, Brooklyn-Queens Land Trust
Heather Lubov, City Parks Foundation
Mac Levine, MPH, Concrete Safaris Inc.
Evie Hantzopoulos, Global Kids
Andrea Parker, Gowanus Canal Conservancy
Dorothy Browne, Greater New York Councils, Boy Scouts of America
Sarah McCollum Williams, Green Guerillas
Christine Datz-Romero, LES Ecology Center
Lynn Kelly, New York Restoration Project
Willis Elkins, Newtown Creek Alliance
Katie Denny Horowitz, North Brooklyn Parks Alliance
Manuela Zamora, NY Sun Works
Juan M Carrion, OSS Project
Christopher J. Collins, Solar One
Jennifer, Beaugrand, The Bronx is Blooming
Melony Samuels, The Campaign Against Hunger
Jennifer Mitchell, The HOPE Program
Stephanie Ehrlich, Christina Taylor, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance
Peggy Shepard, WE ACT For Environmental Justice
John F. Calvelli, Wildlife Conservation Society, New York Aquarium



In the words of participating New Yorkers, the benefits of A Greener NYC:

"Being able to test our own local water allowed students to have the real-world connection that they need and they were super excited." Teacher from PS 124, Yung Wing School, participating in Waterfront Alliance's Estuary Explorers program.

"I was never big on nature, I really never liked it! But when I was part of the Green Team, I started appreciating nature more. I started appreciating the surroundings in New York more." Gowanus Green Team Apprentice, 2020.

"NY Sun Works has steered my passion for the sustainability sciences, now I advocate for environmental justice for mine and future generations." Eva, high school senior.
"The community of NY Sun Works is ever so motivated and resilient to share their work and shed light on educating others about environmental issues and more." Winnie, high school sophomore.

"Lower East Side Ecology Center's enthusiastic and well-informed staff do a great job explaining the complex topics of marine ecology and municipal composting to our predominantly international students who often don't have much background in the environmental issues NYC has to face. Observing the living marine organisms we pull up in oyster cages and watching compost get made from food scraps are experiences my students remember and they form the basis for subsequent class discussions on sustainable design strategies for life on this planet. LESEC's location in the East River Park makes it a great venue from where to discuss the challenges faced by coastal communities in the face of climate change and rising sea levels. I would highly recommend LESEC's educational programs to instructors at all levels and to anyone else interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the urban environment." Oliver Kellhammer, Parsons The New School for Design

For additional information about the impactful programs supported by A Greener NYC, we invite you to explore these web pages:

www.waterfrontalliance.org/what-we-do/education
www.BQLT.org
www.concretesafaris.org
www.globalkids.org
www.gowanuscanalconservancy.org/green-team
www.lesecologycenter.org
www.nysunworks.org
www.outerseedshadow.org
www.bronxisblooming.org
www.tcahnyc.org
www.thehopeprogram.org
www.vancortlandt.org/programs-overview/community-stewardship
www.weact.org
www.nyaquarium.com/learn



NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE

March 8, 2021

Hearing on the New York City Department of Environmental Protection Budget

Testimony of
Carter H. Strickland, Jr.
New York State Director
The Trust for Public Land

Thank you Chairperson Constantinides and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the Fiscal Year 2022 budget for the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the priorities reflected in that budget.

My name is Carter Strickland and I am the New York State Director of The Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit organization that creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. One of The Trust for Public Land's guiding principles – supported by numerous studies – is that parks and open space are critical infrastructure that make cities and their residents healthier, happier, more prosperous, cleaner, greener, and more resilient. Since 1978, The Trust for Public Land has worked with New York City residents to improve their neighborhoods by creating public spaces where they can safely play while connecting with nature and each other.

I am testifying today to support DEP's allocation of funds for green infrastructure and for working with community partners like The Trust for Public Land to manage stormwater runoff. For more than 20 years, The Trust for Public Land has created

community playgrounds for a growing city by renovating schoolyards owned and operated by the Department of Education. As part of our agreement with the city, these community playgrounds are then kept open for the general public after school hours and on weekends. Under this public-private partnership, The Trust for Public Land assembles the capital costs for such projects from a variety of sources (e.g., City Councilmembers, Borough Presidents, the State, corporations, and private funders), provides designs that are approved by the Schools Construction Authority, oversees the bidding process from construction firms that are on a pre-approved list and that pay prevailing wage, and provides construction oversight. To date, we have helped create 214 playgrounds across all five boroughs.

The Trust for Public Land has worked hand-in-hand with the City to incorporate green infrastructure elements like trees, permeable pavers, rain-absorbing gardens, and turf fields that retain stormwater into our playgrounds, which become multi-purpose infrastructure that deliver recreational, health, stormwater, and urban heat island mitigation services. The incremental cost of adding green infrastructure to another infrastructure project is a cost-effective way to mitigate potential storm water damage by collecting millions of gallons of runoff that would otherwise flood streets, overwhelm sewers and pollute local waterways.

Moreover, through our participatory design process we work with students, community members, teachers, principals, and custodians on the playground layout and features. In that design process, we educate the public on the need for stormwater management, and our finished playgrounds include informational signs about how the green infrastructure elements are helping to make the city more resilient.

The green infrastructure playground partnership with The Trust for Public Land allows DEP to extend the reach of the NYC Green Infrastructure Plan to public schools, just as DEP's relationship with the Parks Department through the Community Parks Initiative extends green infrastructure to city-operated parks. While all of our playgrounds built over the past 20 years seek to maximize permeable features such as gardens and tree pits, since 2013 we have worked with DEP's green infrastructure program to design our playgrounds to pitch runoff to storage areas under turf fields and on other features that have significantly increased retention. Since then, The Trust for Public Land has created 42 new green infrastructure playgrounds, with more under construction. Of these, DEP has funded 24 new playgrounds and several have the capacity to divert over a million gallons of stormwater every year. In total, the TPL sites (those funded by DEP and others) collect 23,251,000 gallons of stormwater every year. With sites in four of the five boroughs, these playgrounds help improve the water quality for all New Yorkers, while bringing the benefits of nature and public spaces to many.

Going forward, we are working with DEP to retrofit some of our older playgrounds that were built 10 or more years ago. While these sites have mature trees and gardens that can absorb a lot of rainfall, generally they have first-generation turf fields that do not absorb stormwater. During renovations we will be working with DEP to remove those turf fields, add a gravel storage area underneath, and top it with modern turf, and will also be adding other green infrastructure features where possible. Over the next five years, The Trust for Public Land will be working with DEP to retrofit 50 community playgrounds.

In summary, we urge the Council to support the DEP's budgetary allocation for green infrastructure partnerships with community partners such as The Trust for Public Land and with other city agencies, which increases the scope and speed of these important public services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.



**Committee on Environmental Protection
March 8th 2021**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Phoebe Flaherty, I'm an Organizer at ALIGN: The Alliance for a Greater New York. ALIGN is a community-labor coalition dedicated to creating good jobs, vibrant communities, and an accountable democracy for all New Yorkers.

We coordinate the Climate Works for All coalition and the Transform Dont Trash Coalition, the coalitions that led the organizing to pass Local Law 97 the Dirty Buildings bill and Local Law 199 Commercial Waste Zones.

As we all know, we are still in the midst of this pandemic, and New York's Black and brown and environmental justice communities are bearing the brunt of the impact of the virus and the economic downturn. We're seeing record high unemployment, concentrated in BIPOC and environmental justice communities.

Our City's budget must prioritize investment and job creation for the communities that have been hit the hardest by this pandemic.

The Climate Works for All coalition created an Equitable Recovery Report, a roadmap to creating 100,000 good green jobs for New York City's Black and brown communities and moving us out of the pandemic and recession towards our climate goals by investing 16 billion dollars over 3 years. This is the comprehensive plan we need to move our city through crisis and towards equity and climate justice.

We know that the city is still reeling from the crisis, and we have developed interim Climate budget priorities that will lead us on the same path towards investment in communities and green job creation.

Within the City's 2022 budget, we are calling for an investment of \$200 million to climate, environmental justice and job creation strategies. We are calling for the following investments:

\$80 million toward retrofitting public schools to meet LL 97 standards

Funding would go towards schools that are currently emitting above 2030 - 2034 standards. An annual investment of \$80 million would bring a large portion of high-emitting schools into compliance by 2035.

\$100 million toward Solar on Schools

Funding would go towards solar installation on public schools. An annual investment of \$100 million would allow us to meet our solar goals by 2025.

\$17 million in Public Waste Management

\$4 million of funding would go to DSNY to hire staff to implement the Commercial Waste Zone program
\$13 million of funding would go towards doubling the impact of current community composting and food scrap dropoff programs by adding more local-scale processing sites and compensating staff, ongoing support for school composting, beginning government building composting, and piloting and studying organics collection and recycling in multifamily buildings in preparation for a citywide organics recycling program.

\$3 million for Clean Transportation Expansions

\$3 million in funding towards 14 electric school buses for NYCSBUS, the City's new municipal school bus fleet. Further funding should prioritize community led transportation planning to determine local transportation needs for clean, resilient, and accessible public transportation and street safety.

These investments will create over 1000 jobs for New Yorkers, and are what is necessary to invest in New York's BIPOC and frontline Environmental Justice communities, address the inequities of the pandemic and move us out of the COVID crisis while addressing the climate crisis. We believe these investments will move us forward on the path towards an Equitable Recovery.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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ALIGN is a local affiliate of Jobs with Justice and the Partnership for Working Families

**FY2022 Expense Request Testimony
NYC Council Committee on Immigration Preliminary Budget Hearing**

March 8th, 2021

Good afternoon. My name is Maryam Mohammed-Miller and I am the Manager of Government Relations at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York. Thank you to Immigration Committee Chair Carlos Menchaca for convening this hearing, Speaker Corey Johnson, and to the entire City Council for your continued support and the opportunity to testify about our FY22 expense budget requests.

PPGNY has proudly provided the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services and quality education programs to all New Yorkers for over 100 years. Last year, despite the pandemic, our New York City health centers conducted over 70,000 patient visits and enrolled 5,600 people in health insurance programs, providing care to all regardless of immigration status, identity or ability to pay for services. Our education programs also engaged over 6,500 people in 2020 --including 118 young people. Project Street Beat (PSB), through their offices and mobile health center, conducted over 1,300 additional encounters.

The COVID-19 pandemic we are living through has had a devastating impact on all of New York, especially on the marginalized communities PPGNY serves. We saw that many of the patients and communities we serve, many of whom are people of color, were hardest hit by the COVID-19 virus and the ripple effects it had on the city's economy and social service system. Communities that were already marginalized have proven to be disproportionately impacted by this disease. To help combat the impacts of COVID-19 on our communities, we transformed our care delivery model at our health centers and PSB to help ensure individuals could safely access our services while adhering to government guidelines to decrease the spread of the virus. Also, we continued to provide critical education programming virtually and conduct community outreach to ensure communities obtained the sexual and reproductive health information they need. As an organization, PPGNY also faced several challenges that presented financial hardship due to decreased revenue from service fees, and a 15% cut in council discretionary funding in the FY21 budget.

Planned Parenthood continued to face attacks from the federal government and conservative state governments that used the pandemic as a tool to restrict sexual and reproductive health care access around the country. Also, the changing landscape of the Supreme Court presents a real threat to *Roe v. Wade* and reproductive freedom throughout the country. We are also still dealing with the devastating impact of the domestic gag rule on Title X recipients, forcing Planned Parenthood to withdraw from that program.

Despite these attacks, we remain committed to providing quality health care services and educational programs to our communities, no matter what. Our outreach programs are crucial in ensuring that patients have access to health care services and information whenever, wherever, and however they are needed. Today, we again turn to the generosity of the City Council to help us to continue to provide affordable health care for all New Yorkers.

Protecting and Expanding Access to Immigrant Communities

Immigrant communities PPGNY serves are still coping with the harmful legacy of the Trump-Pence Administration, whose anti-immigrant sentiment left marginalized communities unable or reluctant to access health care and coverage. These same communities were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the immigrant community begins to rebuild during this pandemic, it is important to us at PPGNY to ensure all New Yorkers are able to access care in a safe, comprehensive way. Today, we respectfully request **\$100,000 from the Access Health Initiative to support our Promotores de Salud (PdS) program** throughout New York City. PdS seeks to expand access to sexual and reproductive health care and information for immigrant New Yorkers facing cultural and socioeconomic problems. In 2020, PPGNY engaged over 1,800 people in the community and virtually through this comprehensive community health promotion model.

Promotores are native Spanish-speaking peer advocates and educators who integrate sexual and reproductive health information about health topics and the health care system into their community's culture, language, and value system, thus reducing many of the obstacles that Latinx individuals face in obtaining services.

It is estimated that six in ten New Yorkers are either immigrants or the children of immigrants, nearly one-third of whom are from Latin America. The cultural and language barriers among newly arrived immigrants and foreign-born New Yorkers often keeps these populations out of more formalized health care. It is a priority to reach these populations with culturally-resonant information about sexual and reproductive health and services in order to address health disparities.

Funding will also allow PPGNY to expand the PdS program to conduct targeted outreach to transgender and gender nonconfirming individuals (TGNC) of color using the same community health promotion model. TGNC individuals of color are disproportionately impacted by socioeconomic barriers and often experience discrimination and stigma when navigating the healthcare system. PPGNY has already recruited two Ambassadors from the transgender and gender non-conforming community who are working to build relationships with partner organizations, raise awareness of our culturally competent care, and link individuals to expert services at PPGNY. We aim to build ways to connect this community to care in a comprehensive and culturally relevant way.

We are also requesting \$100,000 from the Immigrant Health Initiative to support PPGNY's work to reduce barriers to health access for foreign-born New Yorkers by providing culturally competent access to high quality medical services for patients in our health centers as well as our Project Street Beat (PSB) mobile health center.

PSB patients face some of the greatest health disparities and inequity and face increased risk for HIV and other chronic health conditions due to structural barriers--such as immigration status and language access-- that impact health. We would use funds to increase this access. In 2020, approximately 21% of PSB mobile health center patients were mono-lingual Spanish speakers who required medical interpretation services and were not eligible for health insurance.

Additionally, funds would be used to expand PPGNY's capacity to provide culturally and linguistically competent care to immigrants within our traditional health centers by training additional staff to provide high-quality medical interpretation. We know that immigrants face additional barriers to accessing full health care and we work to address those barriers: we have expanded health center hours in order to allow for more flexibility in scheduling an appointment time that works for an individual's schedule; we offer insurance enrollment, but also full sliding scale services for those who don't want to use insurance or are ineligible; and, we provide culturally and linguistically competent services in person, and offer access to additional translation services through a dedicated phone system.

Ensuring Access to Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare Services

We also request an enhanced funding amount of **\$750,000 from the Reproductive and Sexual Health Initiative**. This funding supports the clinical healthcare services offered at our five New York City health centers and our Youth Health Promoters program. We offer care to our most vulnerable patients who qualify for low or no cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns. Enhanced funding will also support our clinical staff with Electronic Medical Records (EMR) telehealth care training that will allow our patients to continue to receive quality healthcare during the pandemic and beyond, given the consistent demand for care through the telehealth modality. **This funding also supports our Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program.** The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about teens' rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care to overcome barriers and stigma that teens may experience in accessing care. During the pandemic, the YHPs continued to engage their peers through a series of virtual events and with a robust social media presence.

We also seek \$500,000 from the Dedicated Contraception Fund Initiative to strengthen our ability to provide long-acting reversible contraceptive (LARC) devices free of charge to patients who choose LARC and are uninsured, ineligible for public insurance coverage, facing financial hardship, or unable to use their health insurance due to confidentiality concerns.

We provide no-cost LARC insertions and removal at our health centers as well as on our Project Street Beat (PSB) mobile health center whose client base is individuals who use drugs, work on the street or are unstably housed. The PSB mobile health center addresses these risk factors by bringing free reproductive health care--including LARC devices, navigation and referral services--to hard-to-reach communities.

PPGNY has extensive experience providing comprehensive contraception options counseling and administration, which includes LARCs, thanks to support from public and private sources. However, we recently faced a \$500,000 decrease in private contributions for New York City LARC services, which will impact our ability to sustain our volume of patients on a sliding scale.

Fighting to End the Epidemic through Project Street Beat

We also ask for enhanced funding from the **End the Epidemic Initiative of \$350,000, \$150,000 from the Speaker's Initiative, and \$50,000 from the HIV/AIDS Faith Based Initiative to support our Project Street Program (PSB)**. For over 30 years, our PSB mobile health center has provided targeted outreach and services to communities most in need through our mobile health center and our PSB offices in the Bronx and Brooklyn. PSB currently provides services in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Northern Manhattan and Queens.

The program serves clients who are at high risk for HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and those living with multiple chronic conditions, including individuals who are homeless/unstably housed, active substance users, and/or exchange sex for food, drugs, or shelter. PSB staff offer reproductive health care, HIV/STI testing, syringe distribution and disposal, opioid overdose prevention training, HIV prevention and harm reduction counseling, case management, and wraparound support services.

PSB provides a range of services including PrEP/PEP, STI testing and treatment, birth control, pap smears, and routine gynecologic care as well as conducted HIV tests. Additionally, as a registered Expanded Syringe Access Program (ESAP) site, PSB distributes Narcan kits and syringe packs. Funding support from the City Council will allow PSB to continue to increase access to these vital services.

We also ask for \$100,000 from the Viral Hepatitis Prevention Initiative to enhance PSB's ability to combat the spread of viral hepatitis among people who use drugs and others who are at high risk for acquiring hepatitis. Additionally, this funding would be used to increase Hepatitis C screening in our health centers. This funding would be used to train our HIV prevention specialists to provide hepatitis counseling and rapid Hepatitis C screening on the mobile health center, Project Street Beat offices and our health centers; increase screening and intervention for people who use drugs by training Project Street Beat staff to implement an evidence based screening, intervention and referral tool; offer linkage to HAV/HBV vaccinations; and offer fentanyl strips as part of opioid overdose training.

Conclusion

PPGNY recognizes the tremendous difficulties the COVID-19 pandemic has presented to the marginalized communities we serve. But the immigrant communities have been especially impacted by the pandemic due to issues around immigration status and the lack of culturally relevant care. PPGNY is committed to ensuring that all New Yorkers, no matter their background, get the care they need. As the city begins to recover, it is important that the Council support services and programs to support those most in need. We look forward to working with the council to ensure healthcare access to all.

Thank you.



Tuesday, December 15, 2020

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Oral Testimony
Before New York City Council
Committee on Environmental Protection

Introduction 2149 & Oversight

Sonal Jessel
Policy & Advocacy Coordinator
WE ACT for Environmental Justice

Good afternoon Chair Constantinides and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Introduction 2149 and the importance of climate change initiatives.

My name is Sonal Jessel, and I'm the Policy Director at WE ACT for Environmental Justice. Over the past 32 years, WE ACT has been combating environmental racism in Northern Manhattan. I myself have received my Master in Public Health from Columbia University. I am here to discuss the potential of Introduction of 2149 and the importance of tracking efforts related to climate change.

Passing Introduction 2149 provides a lot of opportunity for New York City. As a climate justice advocate who works with community, we use data from the City for public education, and to understand what needs to be done to address the climate crisis. Often, the City's open data is missing key information that will help move our work forward. For WE ACT's Heat Health and Equity Initiative, which is an initiative aiming to address extreme heat in Northern Manhattan, we created a number of public education materials to raise awareness and understanding about how extreme heat impacts our communities. It was difficult to find climate information, such as the number of heat advisories the City issued in 2019. Without an official number, we used temperature data, and past Notify NYC alerts to get an estimate.

There is a lot of data that feels missing from public access. Particularly, data about environmental justice neighborhoods. When collecting new items for reporting under Introduction 2149, we advise there be special attention taken to reporting the listed indicators for neighborhoods with environmental justice concerns.

Too often, we find the climate data is not given at the right spatial level to move our work forward. Micro-level data, which could be data by block, will be extremely valuable information for resiliency, adaptation, and mitigation planning for us. Especially in neighborhoods that have been under-resourced, formerly redlined, and have disproportionate placement of industrial sites. We ask this be considered for data items in Introduction 2149.

Additionally, we are excited to have climate monitoring indicator projects in the bill. It is important those projects are centered in environmental justice



communities and prioritize data missing in those communities. And, it is vital environmental justice communities are represented sufficiently in the working group.

Lastly, it is imperative we continue to work on climate justice in New York City and track its progress strictly. We were frustrated to see in the OneNYC progress report that the greenhouse gas emissions reduction rate has in fact increased. We understand it is due to increased use in A/Cs and winter heating, which is vital to ensuring residents stay healthy and safe in their homes. However, we think there is a lot that could be done to offset the increased energy use.

The Mayor in February, announced a plan to ban new gas hookups in New York City. Why has this measure not passed? Renewable Rikers Act is an extremely obvious pathway to providing communities with renewable energy. How come the City Council has not passed this yet? We must pass introduction 1591, 1592, and 1593 immediately. Furthermore, as we were increasing the use of A/C's this summer with the great GetCool program, did we ensure big electricity sucking office buildings increased their temperatures while everyone was at home, to reduce the City's energy use?

We look forward to continue working with our partners in City Council, the Mayor's Office, and other City agencies to answer these questions, and to continue to push for major changes. The COVID-19 crisis has made it even more clear that we need to ensure people's homes are safe and healthy. A focus on retrofitting, electrifying, and ultimately decarbonizing our household energy is vital to ensuring people have access to adequate energy that does not increase greenhouse gas emissions. That is why WE ACT has launched our Out of Gas pilot project to prove moving away from gas stoves is healthy for our residents and our climate. We believe it is vital the city move forward with project like ours and expand this to a large scale in the City quickly.

We support Introduction 2149. It is an important step for addressing the climate crisis. But we believe there is much much more that needs to be done much more quickly than we are doing now.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sonal Jessel, MPH
Director of Policy



WE ACT for Environmental Justice
1854 Amsterdam Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10031
212-961-1000

March 4, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Reynoso, and members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify in support of **increasing funding for GrowNYC & other compost programs** in the Department of Sanitation budget for Fiscal Year 2022.

I am Makini Chisolm-Straker and I am a resident of **Harlem in Manhattan**. I am disheartened to learn that the City is planning yet another year of inadequate funding for composting programs. Pre-COVID I used composting to decrease my eco-footprint for my godchildren and their children's children and to keep bugs and bad smells out of my home! Dropping of my compost at my local drop site weekly meant I got to connect with the young people doing this work, and I really appreciated getting to hear their perspectives. This is loss on multiple levels. It's time to bring composting back, and back with a vengeance! We need MORE composting sites, not fewer.

In the last year, we've seen Department of Sanitation funding for composting decrease by 90%, from \$26.6 million in FY20 to just \$2.8 million in FY21. Funding was reduced by 34% for the NYC Compost Project, 75% for the GrowNYC Compost Program, and 100% Curbside Composting program. This meant that, as an essential worker who cannot socially distance in order to care for people like YOU and everyone else, I could not drop off my compost on my way to work. There is no convenient place for me to drop it, and to be respectful of the social distancing efforts, I don't go miles (LITERALLY) out of my way to drop off compost now. The food scraps go into my apartment building's trash bins, which allows rats and other undesirables to feed. This contributes to the roach problem in my building and it's disgusting.

I support the **Save Our Compost Coalition's request for \$14.75 million in FY22**, which includes:

- GrowNYC Compost Program - \$2.5 million
- Other Community Composters and Food Scrap Drop-off operators - \$4.5 million
- New compost processing facilities - \$3.5 million
- Multifamily building collection and processing pilot - \$2 million
- Zero Waste Schools & NYCHA Organics pilot projects – \$1 million
- Composting in municipal agencies and facilities \$1 million
- Feasibility study on citywide Curbside Composting - \$250,000

We need programs that contribute to a more sustainable future, and composting gives people hope that through collective action, our individual choices can make a difference. I ask that the City increase funding for composting in FY22, including restoring the GrowNYC Compost Program to its FY20 funding levels.

I would like to thank Chairman Reynoso and the Committee for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Makini Chisolm-Straker, MD MPH
2265 5th Ave
NYC, NY 10037

Testimony – Monday March 8, 2021, 10am, Committee on Environmental Protection:

Good day Chairman Constantinides and Councilmembers. My name is Robert Cooney. I'm testifying in support of backup power for the Croton water plant in the Bronx. Most of the plant's water needs to be pumped but the plant has no backup power.

The Croton plant was built underground in a Bronx park in the face of strong community opposition. The plant replaced two old pumping stations that had backup power. Just before the DEP discovered the current site in mid-1998 a report (Feb. 1998: *Conceptual Plans*) shows that all seven sites under consideration had backup power. The selected site was the closest the DEP could get to the Jerome Park Reservoir where their underground plumbing comes together. The DEP left out backup power to reduce their footprint in the park and obtain site approval. So, after spending \$3.7B on the plant, the City's water supply is at risk in an emergency.

Most of New York City's water comes from the Catskill and Delaware systems. However, the Cat/Del water system is vulnerable at several locations where the systems come together. The Croton system is entirely separate but most of the water needs to be pumped. It is the City's backup water supply.

The Croton plant uses gravity to send some of its water to low lying areas in Manhattan and the Bronx. Most of the water, however, needs to be pumped to reach Riverdale, Washington Heights, Morningside Heights, most of Midtown, and Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island.

New York City is the only American City that been attacked by foreign operators since Pearl Harbor. It happened twice. The next time could be a huge blast that will also knock out power. The lack of backup power for this plant could destroy thousands of lives and considerable property.

From 2010 to 2018 AECOM, the Consulting Engineer for the Municipal Water Finance Authority stated in their yearly report, "NYCDEP is reviewing the energy demand for standby power for the Croton water plant to increase dependability in case of a major power outage."

The Administrative Code should be changed to require backup power at this plant. Temporary power should be in place ASAP until it can be made permanent. It should be in place before the Delaware Aqueduct is taken out of service next year. This was detailed in a letter sent to this committee on Jan. 21, 2021.

Thank you

Robert Cooney, P.E. (retired)

Challenges facing the NYC with the accumulation of litters

Submitted by:

Sara AbdAlfatah

3056 30th St, Apt 6k

Astoria, NY 11102

Dear members of the Environmental protection committee

My name is Sara Abd Alfatah and I live in Astoria for five years now. We have been facing a huge issue after the pandemic with the litters on streets and the increase in plastic use due to takeout from restaurants, we really need to increase the funding on the street cleaning and also encouraging people and businesses to break free from plastic use completely.

I urge you to support break free from plastic completely in NYC so that the people of our state can learn how to respect the public spaces and nature. Thank you for your consideration.

Need for More Garbage Cans in LES

BEFORE



AFTER



WHY SO MUCH GARBAGE?

In the four block radius of the area (Cherry Street, Monroe Street, Rutgers Street, Madison Street) there is only ONE garbage can. The photos below show what the garbage can looked like on Thursday, February 25.



Soleil Sabalja