



## **NYC-EJA Testimony for the Commercial Waste Zones Scoping Hearing December 11th, 2018**

My name is Priya Mulgaonkar, and I am testifying on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA). Founded in 1991, NYC-EJA is a non-profit citywide membership network linking 10 grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice.

For decades, NYC-EJA has led efforts for comprehensive policy reforms to address the disproportionate burden of New York’s solid waste system on a handful of environmental justice communities. New York City creates roughly 35,000 tons of garbage every day. Garbage trucks needlessly travel thousands of miles throughout New York City polluting our air with diesel fuel, clogging our streets, and diminishing our quality of life. These impacts are greatest in those few low-income and communities of color where truck-dependent transfer stations are clustered. Not surprisingly, these same communities deal with many sources of pollution and the related negative health consequences – such as asthma, heart disease, and cancer.

The commercial waste industry in particular places a significant health and safety strain on environmental justice communities, the toxic impacts of which are well documented. In 2016, along with our partners in Transform Don’t Trash, NYC-EJA released a report that assessed the overconcentration of truck traffic in communities in the South Bronx, North Brooklyn and South Brooklyn. Our volunteers counted waste trucks and collected data on particulate matter associated with diesel exhaust. To offer just one example, volunteers in the South Bronx at a particularly bad street corner counted 304 commercial trucks per hour, almost half of which were commercial waste trucks, which amounts to one commercial waste truck every 24 seconds.

Our victory in passing the Waste Equity Bill this year will begin to bring some environmental justice to our communities by cutting the permitted capacity at facilities located in overburdened neighborhoods, while also protecting these communities from handling any more waste in the future. In addition, DSNY has taken steps to shift residential waste export to the three operational, City-owned export facilities, the North Shore Marine Transfer Station (MTS), the Hamilton MTS, and the Staten Island Rail TS – an important step toward reducing vehicle traffic and pollution in EJ communities.

Yet even with this progress, there is much more to be done. NYC-EJA has always seen the Waste Equity Bill as a first step – one piece of a larger set of policies necessary to truly address

the environmental racism in our solid waste system. And among these policies, the switch to commercial waste zones has major potential to take us even closer to our Waste Equity and Zero Waste goals.

As members of the Commercial Waste Zones Advisory board, we saw firsthand the rigorous research and engagement that informed the implementation plan. Overall, we were pleased to see many of the TDT-NYC coalition's recommendations in the final report – for example, we support requiring that carters prioritize investments in clean, modern fleets and facilities; that carters increase diversion from landfills and incinerators that affect EJ communities outside our city limits; and that the system improves health and safety for the workers, many of whom hail from EJ communities. There are other aspects of the plan we look forward to seeing implemented. However, I'd like to share some ways the plan can be strengthened to improve the lives of workers and the communities impacted directly by the private waste industry. We hope to see the Environmental Impact Review include these elements.

1. **Exclusive Zones:** We urge the Department of Sanitation to include an exclusive zone model – in which a single, high-quality waste service provider is contracted to collect and process waste in each commercial zone – as one of the alternatives in the Environmental Impact Review. I'd like to share three of the many major benefits that exclusive zones can offer:
  - a. **Efficiency from Collection:** We strongly support the improved efficiencies in avoided emissions and truck miles that will result from the proposed system. But ultimately, whatever efficiencies are gained in the collection side will still be diluted for communities of color where facilities are clustered. Exclusive zones will ensure the steepest reductions in pollution for EJ communities by far.
  - b. **Avoided Carbon Emissions:** Pursuing the most efficient system has implications for the climate as well. After transportation and energy, sanitation is the third largest source of greenhouse gases. New York will not be able to meet our 80 by 50 emission reduction goals if we do not dramatically decrease emissions from this industry, which come in the form of methane pollution from landfilled waste. Leading West Coast cities have used exclusive commercial waste zone systems to achieve recycling rates that are three times higher than New York. Given that the same EJ communities dealing with the impacts of our current waste system are also among the most vulnerable to the climate crisis, maximizing emissions reductions from landfills and incinerators is essential to achieving environmental and climate justice.
  - c. **Reaching Zero Waste Goals:** The City's goal of diverting 90% of our waste from landfills by 2030 requires immediate and bold action. The scope of the Environmental Review should take into consideration how exclusive versus non-exclusive zones will allow for better alignment with the Mayor's Zero Waste goals. Having only one carter per zone will allow for better enforcement of diversion, and will give carters the long-term customer base required for meaningful investment in practices and programs for recycling and organics.
  - d. **Improved Oversight:** In addition, with just one carter operating per zone, we can hold accountable those responsible for traffic violations, idling, missed pickups, and even the frequent fatal accidents for which this industry is infamous. All in

all, we believe having an exclusive zone system is the best option to ensure that our communities and workers are protected under the highest labor, safety and environmental standards.

2. **Disposal Facilities:** We also hope to see the City include a closer look at facilities in the Environmental Impact Review. The complete overhaul of commercial collection is a long overdue and bold undertaking – one that should not leave out the facilities where waste ultimately ends up for processing and export.
  - a. **Protecting EJ Communities & Workers:** Because of the disproportionate siting of waste facilities in low-income communities of color, the new zoned system should ensure that poorly sited facilities with a history of violations not be permitted to handle our city’s waste. The City should also ensure that transfer, recycling, and compost facilities are required to meet the same basic labor standards as the carters.
  - b. **Oversight:** And finally, the same oversight over carters that this system promises should apply to facilities; communities of color should not have to deal with the noise, pollution, and disruption of poorly-operating waste facilities. And of course, however successfully carters are separating recyclables and organics along the collection routes, all that effort is wasted if facilities do not do their part to ensure maximum diversion rates. We need the same transformative benefits of commercial waste zones to reach disposal facilities.

I want to thank the Mayor and the Sanitation Commissioner for their leadership on pursuing the Commercial Waste Zone plan – a huge undertaking. We look forward to continuing to partner in strengthening the plan as much as possible. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.