



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance Public Testimony to NYC Council Committee on Resiliency and Waterfronts. January 25, 2021.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Jalisa Gilmore and I'm the Research Analyst at the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance. Founded in 1991, NYC-EJA is a non-profit citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their fight for environmental justice.

Our member organizations represent communities that have long struggled with the presence of polluting infrastructure and a lack of environmental amenities, contributing to poor health outcomes for residents. These environmental issues are only worsened by a changing climate that will increase extreme weather events, similar to Superstorm Sandy. Massive investments are needed to ensure NYC communities are resilient to impacts of future coastal storm risks, but these investments must be made intentionally- centering equity and justice.

The United States Army Corps of Engineers' New York-New Jersey Harbor and Tributaries Focus Area Feasibility Study(NYNJHATS) is an opportunity to protect New Yorkers against the risks posed by future storms. NYC-EJA supports the resolution calling upon the United States Congress to restore funding to NYNJHATS and for New York and New Jersey to advance their shares of the next phase of funding to revive the study until it is fully restored by Congress. However, as the project is revived there needs to be a commitment to addressing concerns raised by the community in prior to the suspension of the project.

The majority of the options that the Army Corps presented heavily relied on large harbor-wide barriers and floodwalls to protect the shoreline, without sufficient analysis to how this may disrupt ecosystems or exacerbate flooding in unprotected communities. Instead, options that implement nature-based infrastructure and smaller scale perimeter only flood protections—which can offer a number of environmental co-benefits—should be considered. In this new phase, Army Corps should incorporate recommendations and community input from projects that have already been put forth by frontline communities, yet not always considered or incorporated into final plans, such as the Hunts Point Resiliency and Eastside Coastal Resiliency projects. Lastly, the environmental justice map that the Army Corps is using does not accurately represent environmental justice neighborhoods. As the project moves forward, it should instead consider using the disadvantaged communities screening tool currently being developed pursuant to the NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

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On the ground - and at the table

Again, building NYC neighborhoods to be resilient is critical and NYC-EJA supports Intro 2092 which would develop climate resiliency guidelines and a climate resiliency score metric. We recognize the Council's commitment to environmental justice, with the requirement that 30% of the pilot projects be located in environmental justice communities. However, rather than require 30% of pilot project in environmental justice areas, we recommend the bill matches the NYS CLCPA's commitment of 35-40% for disadvantaged communities. Similarly to the Army Corps study, we are concerned that current maps may lead to an under-investment in communities that need it most and should consider using the CLCPA disadvantaged communities screening tool when it is available. As this resiliency score is developed input from members of the public with expertise in environmental justice should also be consulted to ensure an equitable process.

Since Superstorm Sandy, there has not been nearly enough coastal resiliency investment in the low-income communities of colors in the outer-boroughs where the most vulnerable populations are. These bills and resolutions have the opportunity to remedy this and protect frontline communities from future coastal storm risk. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify.