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On the ground — and at the table.

New York City Environmental Justice Alliance testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Environmental Protection in support of Intro. 1159 in relation to amending the administrative code of the City of New York in relation to the installation of solar water heating and thermal energy systems on city-owned buildings.

February 28, 2017

Good morning Chairperson Constantinides and Members of the City Council. My name is Kartik Amarnath and I am here to testify in support of Int. 1159 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 grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice. NYC-EJA empowers its member organizations to advocate for improved environmental conditions and against inequitable environmental burdens. Through our efforts, member organizations coalesce around specific common issues that threaten the ability of low-income and communities of color to thrive, and coordinate campaigns designed to affect City and State policies — including energy policies that directly affecting these communities.

Because a number of the NYC-EJA member organizations come from communities overburdened by greenhouse emissions and co-pollutants from power plants clustered in their neighborhoods, our organization is a key advocate for the City's emission reduction goals. NYC-EJA was a member of the Building Technical Working Group (TWG) that analyzed the potential GHG reduction pathways for the building sector and supports the goal of reducing emissions while achieving co-benefits such as increased public health and job creation in energy efficiency strategies and the emerging renewable energy economy. NYC-EJA commends the New York City Council's Committee on Environmental Protection for holding a hearing on Int. 1159, creating an opportunity for public comment on this important milestone.

We support an amendment to the Administrative Code that requires feasibility studies on the costs of installing solar thermal energy systems on all buildings or structures owned by City agencies and departments. Furthermore, we support the requirement that all city-owned buildings install solar thermal energy systems where they are cost effective. Through the widespread installation of solar thermal systems in city buildings, the City will be taking a strong step towards reducing the overall energy demand from polluting sources. By extension, reducing overall energy demand from these sources can have environmental health benefits in low-income communities and communities of color where older and more inefficient power plants have been historically clustered, and cause disproportionate public health burdens. We also support the bill's public awareness campaign around the multiple benefits of installing solar hot water systems.

As we take bolder steps to reduce our carbon footprint, the City should guarantee protections for low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. We encourage solar installation feasibility studies include considerations for equity and access for low-income communities and communities of color. As solar thermal installations proceed, the City should partner with installers who commit to hiring locally and provide fair wages to their workers. Parallel to any efforts in educating property owners on the benefits of using solar hot water systems, we need to create safeguards for rent-stabilized and rent-regulated buildings to ensure that families are not priced out of their homes and communities through Major Capital Improvements. A just energy policy is central to NYC-EJA's work, and we look forward to a continued collaboration with the City to mitigate the threats of climate change.