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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 relation to Facilitating the Use of Wind Power in New York City, and in support of Intro 598.

February 26, 2018

Good morning Chairperson Constantinides, Speaker Johnson, and Members of the City Council. My name is Kartik Amarnath and on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA), I am here to testify in support of facilitating the City's use of wind power. 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. Through our efforts, member organizations coalesce around common issues that threaten the ability of low-income communities of color to thrive, and coordinate campaigns designed to affect City and State policies, including energy policies that impact these communities.

Because a number of the NYC-EJA member organizations come from communities overburdened by greenhouse emissions and co-pollutants from power plants and dirty industries clustered in their neighborhoods, our organization is a key advocate of emission reduction and renewable energy targets. Our NYC Climate Justice Agenda is a multi-year research and advocacy campaign to address the need for a comprehensive community-based approach to community resiliency. In 2017, we released a report which analyzed Mayor de Blasio's OneNYC plan and made several recommendations to strengthen the City's policies in environmental justice communities, including committing to an offshore wind power purchase agreement. We highlighted that in addition to its promising economic potential, wind power - particularly through large-scale offshore wind development - can have extensive environmental and health benefits in vulnerable communities who have been historically exposed to noxious pollutants generated from fossil fuel energy infrastructure. Resilient energy systems, including wind power coupled with energy storage, have the potential to displace inefficient and dirty peaking plants, thus significantly reducing air pollution in environmental justice communities. The City should study, prioritize, and streamline the deployment of wind power systems in the coming years. The City should also study progress made to date and strategies to reduce barriers for wind development including technical, policy, and regulatory barriers.

We recommend that any offshore wind power cost-benefit analyses include economic, social, environmental, and resiliency benefits inclusive of robust equity metrics. We are confident that a cost-benefit analysis that is truly inclusive of all co-benefits would justify the procurement of wind power, despite potentially high initial costs, due to long-term net benefits such as the establishment of local renewable energy industries that bring sustainable jobs to the City. We also support Intro 598 because requiring all city-owned buildings to be powered by green energy sources by 2050 can be an important step in catalyzing local offshore wind and renewable energy industries. In pursuit of a Just Transition, New York City should be leading the nation in the procurement of large scale renewable and resilient energy technologies that meet ambitious emission reduction targets with strong environmental justice principles and labor standards.

NYC-EJA commends the New York City Council for holding a hearing on facilitating the use of wind power, and creating an opportunity for public comment on this important strategy to increase community resiliency. 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 while optimizing economic, health, and environmental benefits for the most burdened and climate vulnerable New Yorkers.