



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Environmental Protection in support of Intro. 1253 in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by through an energy efficiency mandate.

December 4, 2018

Good morning Chairperson Costa and Members of the City Council. My name is Annel Hernandez and I am here to testify on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) in support of Intro. 1253 in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through an energy efficiency mandate. 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 members 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 communities of color to thrive, and coordinate campaigns designed to affect City and State policies including energy policies 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 of clean energy targets. NYC-EJA also co-founded the Climate Works for All coalition with Align and the NYC Central Labor Council with the goal of reducing emissions, creating good jobs, and protecting environmental justice communities. Our coalition knows that no sector or industry is more critical than the building sector if New York City is going to hit its stated goal of reducing emissions 80% by the year 2050.

As we take bolder steps to reduce our carbon footprint, the City should guarantee protections for low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Although improved energy efficiency can potentially reduce the energy burden and increase affordability for low-income tenants, the investment in building retrofits may be used as a justification to drive up rental costs for rent-regulated tenants. We are encouraged that Intro. 1253 also takes key steps toward acknowledging the importance of New York City's rent-regulated housing, by providing a separate compliance mechanism for these buildings which will prevent owners from using MCIs to potentially displace tenants. Low-income New Yorkers should be able to access the benefits of clean energy without the threat of gentrification and displacement. We also hope that State government adopts model rules for protecting tenants from rent increases and evictions, preventing the deregulation of apartments, as they relate to investments in energy efficiency, as well as other much needed updates. We also have concerns around the energy efficiency trading scheme, as market based strategies have had negative impacts on environmental justice communities.

Low-income communities and communities of color also face disproportionate climate risks, many of which could be ameliorated through equitable energy policies and strategic investments. For example, NYC's twelve most heat vulnerable neighborhoods are predominantly high-poverty areas where residents are majority people of color. The confluence of extreme heat and lack of access to energy efficient buildings is a quiet threat facing low-income people, people of color, and the elderly. In New York City, 36 percent of

low-to-moderate income households are energy burdened, paying a much higher proportion of their income on energy costs. During heat waves, citywide use of air-conditioning strains the grid, increasing the likelihood of blackouts and brownouts. For heat-vulnerable residents living in energy inefficient homes, lack of power during a heat wave increases risks of dangerous heat exposure.

NYC-EJA commends the New York City Council for holding a hearing on this transformative energy efficiency legislation. 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, housing, health, and environmental benefits for the most burdened and climate vulnerable New Yorkers.