



462 36th Street 3rd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11232 NYC-EJA.org

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 1591, Intro 1592, and Intro 1593.

January 28th, 2020

Good afternoon Chairperson Constantinides, Brannan, and Members of the City Council. The New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) is a 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 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 directly impacting our communities.

Climate justice is based on the principle that frontline communities are most vulnerable to climate change and, therefore, must play an integral role in planning for the renewable and regenerative energy economy. These are communities where climate vulnerabilities intersect with historic patterns of environmental burdens, many of which could be ameliorated through equitable energy policies and strategic investments. The massive systems change required to stave off dangerous climate change impacts and public health hazards requires a consideration of the unique vulnerabilities facing environmental justice communities.

New York City is home to 16 peaker plants, many with multiple generating units, both publicly and privately owned. These highly polluting, fossil fuel power plants known as “peakers” fire up in the South Bronx, Sunset Park, and other communities of color on the hottest days of the year, when air quality is at its worst, and sensitive populations are warned to stay indoors. Peakers then spew even more harmful emissions into neighborhoods already overburdened by pollution and exacerbating widespread health problems.

Many of these plants, particularly the largest, oldest, most polluting plants, are owned by out-of-state private developers, taking these billions of dollars in wealth out of these communities. Instead, New York City government can use public land to invest locally renewable energy and energy storage that could meet peak demand needs, reduce electric bills and provide local resilient power. Renewable and resilient energy systems will advance energy democracy, reduce energy cost burdens, improve air quality, strengthen the resiliency of their communities, and capture the community and workforce benefits sustainable systems can deliver. To this end, Intro 1593 is critical as it helps New York City assess the potential different types of renewable energy sources combined with battery storage within one year. We need ensure we are prioritizing our accelerated timetable for meeting our emission reduction targets.

Additionally, Intro 1592 sends a clear message that Riker’s Island will be used for environmental purposes by transferring jurisdiction from the NYC Department of Corrections to the NYC Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP). As part of this effort, we should also seek to understand how a large-scale renewable energy will be owned and managed by the agency, as well as set standards for the jobs creation

and potential subscriber benefits to new system. Moreover, Intro 1591 can provide us with more information on the feasibility of other critical pieces of infrastructure, including a wastewater treatment facility, organic waste processing, and large-scale composting operations. The development of a state of the art anaerobic digester, alongside composting operations, would also provide the opportunity to process large quantities of organic waste diverted from landfill and incinerators, therefore helping to combat climate change and furthering the City's zero waste goals.

As we envision a Renewable Riker's, New York City must ensure that the former sites of polluting infrastructure on our waterfront land can be used by the community as parks, affordable housing, or resilient industrial uses based on local needs and community-led planning within particular neighborhoods.

New York City's current electricity generation and organic waste management are polluting, antiquated, and inequitable. The recent passage of the New York State Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act serves as a catalyst to move us toward a renewable energy and sustainable future, and we must collectively recognize the opportunity to re-envision Riker's Island as a demonstration of a Just Transition in New York City.