



NYC-EJA's Testimony for the NYC Council Preliminary Budget Hearing Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management

March 4, 2021

Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Tok Oyewole, and I am testifying 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 fight for environmental and climate justice.

For decades, NYC-EJA has led efforts for comprehensive policy reforms to address the disproportionate burden of New York's solid waste system on a handful of environmental justice communities. The impacts of the solid waste system are greatest in a few low-income and communities of color where truck-dependent transfer stations are clustered, causing higher proportions of health consequences such as asthma, heart disease, and various cancers.

We are here today to advocate for adjustments in City budget allocations for the upcoming fiscal years pertaining to solid waste and composting that we think would dramatically improve equity for environmental justice and frontline communities, and ensure the City's commitments to its stated goals. Some of these changes also pertain to the committee on land use.

Organics and Composting Budget (Save Our Compost Coalition): As colleagues in the Save Our Compost Coalition will also share at this hearing, we are proposing a moderate budget proposal of \$14.75 million dollars for the upcoming fiscal year - that girds us for full implementation of mandatory organics collection and processing in the near term (next fiscal year at the latest). The request includes Community Composting and Food Scrap Drop-off Program at \$7 million; Zero Waste Schools program funding at \$1 million; Multifamily Building Collection and Processing Pilot-to-Implementation, inclusive of NYCHA at \$2 million; an analysis of organics programs toward implementing Citywide Curbside Compost Collection Program at \$250,000, to be concluded by the end of 2021; municipal agency composting at \$1 million, and budget allowing, reinstating and expanding curbside organics collection. As we proposed last year, even a small fraction of the NYPD's budget would help to fully fund a citywide organics collection program, diverting tons of food scraps from transfer stations, landfills, and incinerators.



Today I will speak about building up composting sites in particular, and others in the Save Our Compost coalition will discuss other budget requests pertaining to our collective vision for local organics processing.

Create New Community Composting Sites, \$3.5 million: In order to compost the growing volume of food scraps generated in the Food Scrap Drop-off program and build capacity for localizing organic waste processing and green jobs in composting, the City should fund the construction of community composting sites throughout the city on Parks and/or other city land to provide equitably-sited composting resources throughout the city.

Even with limited drop-off sites compared to pre-COVID times, the current processing sites are facing capacity issues. Currently, there are community composting sites on Governors Island (Earth Matter NY), Western Queens (Big Reuse), in Western Brooklyn (Big Reuse), and Lower Manhattan (LES Ecology Center). The City should partner with nonprofit partners to build community composting sites throughout the city with at least 6 new sites, 2 in the Bronx, and one each in South Brooklyn, Eastern Queens, upper Manhattan, and Rikers Island as legislated within the recently passed Renewable Rikers Act, including open and enclosed sites, using bicycles and electric vehicles for transport. More sites should be added after these 6 to meet our city's capacity and stop waste export, paired with consumer and corporate waste reduction education efforts, as well as the usage of food scrap devolumizing machinery where appropriate.

Composting locally would also save funds on exporting recyclable materials out of the City, and we can project broader transport savings via the expansion of local residential and commercial organic waste collection and processing with a universal, mandatory organics program.

There are many local organizations on the ground who are adept at handling local organics collection and processing work: As the Lower East Side Ecology Center is being pushed out of their site during the ESCR process, the City should fund a temporary relocation to a site nearby, such as the one identified under the Williamsburg Bridge, and ensure that a compost site is incorporated into the reconstructed East River Park. The Big Reuse site under the Queensboro Bridge should be allowed to remain in place, given overwhelming public support, in general, and during a recent visioning session with the community that was held by NYC Parks, and due to the beneficial environmental/educational services they provide. This would ensure the continued use of the capital investments already put into this site.

Robust Universal Organics Program: We request that all feasibility studies and pilots should be done by the end of 2021 for rapid and thoughtful implementation of a robust mandatory organics program, as soon as 2022. We see reducing surplus funds from bloated budgets in the City such as the NYPD's overtime budget, or the receipt of federal funds for environmental and climate initiatives, as potential



ways to fund this program. We have until 2030 to curb GHG emissions to prevent global warming above 1.5 degrees celsius, and so we must advance bold, hard-hitting decisions at every chance we get - this means building the infrastructure now to plan for when we can manage all of our City's organics capacity.

Commercial Waste Zones & Additional Waste Equity Concerns: We and the Transform Don't Trash Coalition are asking for \$4 million for staffing and oversight of the Commercial Waste Zones system passed in Local Law 199 of 2019. We support the program aims of reducing truck miles, improving working conditions, and reducing community burdens - we particularly want to see facilities that have not been in compliance with laws relating to public health and safety either 1) not contracted with in the CWZ system or 2) brought up to code without any further delay. The funding will help with oversight of facilities.

Additionally, we ask the city to explore and implement comprehensive reusables programs in food retail, restaurants, and shipping, to circumvent a large portion of our city's avoidable waste.

Such waste reduction strategies listed above will aid in preventing our City's export of waste to polluting infrastructure, within our City, and to incinerators and landfills in other municipalities, such as nearby Newark.

Finally, the City has committed to building the Gansevoort Marine Transfer Station by 2026, to displace the quantity of metals, glass, plastics, and paper going to transfer stations in communities of color, using a more efficient mode of transport than heavy-duty diesel trucks. This requires coordination between the City and the State, and as 2026 is approaching, we are requesting to see the City's plans for the build out of the project this year.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise these urgent concerns pertaining to zero waste, waste equity, and greenhouse gas and co-pollutant reductions. We encourage you to invest in the development of long-term waste reduction and waste equity plans, to reduce burdens unjustly faced by a handful of communities in and out of NYC, and to better preserve our planet's limited resources.