



**Memorandum of Support
S.8431 (Parker, et al.) / A.10001B (Cunningham, et al.)**

May 13, 2022

S.8431/A.10001B - AN ACT in relation to directing the department of environmental conservation in conjunction with the environmental justice interagency coordinating council and the climate justice working group to conduct a study on the impacts of the urban heat island effect on disadvantaged communities.

Founded in 1991, the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) is a non-profit, 501(c)3 citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income 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 by the coordination of campaigns to inform City and State policies. Through our efforts, member organizations coalesce around specific common issues that threaten the ability for low-income communities of color to thrive.

The New York City Environmental Justice Alliance would like to voice strong support for Bill S.8431/A.10001B. Through our work, we have seen firsthand the disproportionate risk of heat-related illness and devastating impacts of increasing heat stress on frontline disadvantaged communities that are hit first and worst by the effects of climate change. In the course of our work and in support of these environmental justice communities, NYC-EJA's Executive Director and NYC-EJA member UPROSE's Executive Director both continue to serve on the Climate Justice Working Group, which has been instrumental in identifying criteria that would be used to define disadvantaged communities in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, as well as this bill.

Extreme heat already causes the greatest number of fatalities of all extreme weather related deaths, deaths that are not equitably distributed across the population. New York State's annual average temperatures are projected to rise 4.1°F to 6.1°F by the 2080s. Modeling of these projections indicates that the anticipated increases in temperature will not be uniform across the state, and some areas may be more affected by these changes than others¹. Data from the U.S.

¹ https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration_pdf/ccnys2021.pdf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that certain (disadvantaged) population groups face higher vulnerability to heat-related illness and death, including people above the age of 65, children, and non-Hispanic Black residents². In New York City, Black residents face a higher risk of being part of a disadvantaged community and of heat-related illness and death when compared to White residents³. According to the NYC Panel on Climate Change, by the 2050's, New York City can expect to see the number of 90 degree days to double, and the number of heatwaves to either triple or quadruple. Aside from causing heat stress, heat strokes, and potential death, exposure to extreme heat can lead to many other long-term health impacts such as organ damage. As climate change further drives heat, causing higher temperatures and more frequent heat emergencies, these impacts on frontline communities across New York will only increase.

Extreme heat and the urban heat island effect can be mediated by increased green space and tree canopy coverage. The amount of trees and green space are insufficient in New York City, and particularly lacking in disadvantaged communities; Black and Brown communities in NYC have access to 33 percent less park space than residents in largely white neighborhoods⁴. The combination of being at higher-than average risk while having insufficient green spaces to offer relief makes these communities disproportionately vulnerable to extreme heat emergencies.

This legislation will help address the disproportionate public health burdens that extreme heat has on disadvantaged communities across the state. The resultant study will be able to prioritize investments in green infrastructure and tree planting in communities that need it the most. All New Yorkers, particularly those who have been historically and systematically oppressed and deprived, should have access to the wide array of benefits that the urban forest provides. The COVID-19 pandemic only underscored that access to green space is not a luxury, but rather a necessity for all communities. New Yorkers need walkable access to green open spaces for overall health and well-being, especially individuals and families living in communities that grapple with environmental burdens, climate hazards, and social vulnerabilities.

For the reasons mentioned above, NYC-EJA strongly supports S.8431 (Parker, et al.)/ A.10001B (Cunningham, et al.)

² <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-heat-related-deaths#ref9>

³ <https://nyccas.cityofnewyork.us/nyccas2021v9/report/1>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/27/nyregion/parks-access-nyc.html>