



## **New York City Environmental Justice Alliance Testimony on the Oversight - 10th Anniversary of Superstorm Sandy To NYC Council Committee on Resiliency and Waterfronts, Jointly with the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

**October 26, 2022**

Good afternoon Chairs Kagan and Brooks-Powers and members of the Council. My name is Eunice Ko and I am the Deputy Director with the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA). During the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Sandy, I am testifying on behalf of NYC-EJA and uplifting the communities whose lives, families, and businesses were devastated by Hurricane Sandy and are, in some places and ways, still recovering today.

While the City has made some progress and investments in stormwater management, coastal projects, and heat mitigation, these investments and benefits haven't been seen and felt by all, especially by communities who have experienced these impacts first and worst due to historic disinvestment and systemic racism. In the absence of resources, community-based organizations on the ground have been front and center in the fight against climate change, ensuring their neighbors are prepared for and protected from its impacts.

Even still we, as a city, are not ready for the next Hurricane Sandy, Ida, or Irene. These hurricanes, as well as tidal floods and heat waves, exposed additional risks and vulnerabilities and the growing need to uplift projects and policies that are multi-faceted and multi-hazard in approach and impact. The City has no comprehensive climate strategy with real financing and funding mechanisms a decade after Hurricane Sandy. The newly-released AdaptNYC is a far cry from the climate adaptation plan that was legislated by LL 122 by this Council which calls for "identifying and recommending resiliency and adaptation measures and non-structural risk reduction approaches to protect and prepare the city's residents, property and infrastructure." The website released today does not include such recommendations and is woefully inadequate to protect and prepare our communities from this climate crisis. While we appreciate conversations with communities, communities are suffering from planning fatigue and want these conversations paired with funding for and implementation of tangible projects and programs that will actually keep them safe from disaster today and in the future. Additionally, we need to be at a point where climate change is part of every agency mission and climate planning embedded in agency budgets and operations, but that leadership and prioritization is not happening at the very top.

We must move faster to meet our emission goals while also adapting our infrastructure and neighborhoods. The City Council, City agencies, and Mayor, must take on this leadership boldly in partnership with communities to, as the Mayor likes to say, "get stuff done" quickly to prepare

and protect our neighborhoods and communities from a changing climate. Among other things, the City must:

### **Fund and support energy grid resiliency and community owned renewable energy**

- We need to invest in distributed energy resources, especially community distributed generation like solar, which are less prone to extreme weather events and don't have the same challenge of repowering in the event of a disaster.
- Pair renewables with grid-scale battery storage because they provide additional resiliency by maximizing the generation capacity of the renewables and match energy generation with energy demand.
- Update antiquated city policies or create new ones, such as battery fire codes or community co-owned renewable energy generation, to accelerate just energy transition critical to grid resiliency. The city and state are very behind our renewable energy and battery storage goals and mandates respectively.

### **Expand green infrastructure program and stormwater investments and prioritize communities at-risk to flooding and extreme heat**

- Expand City's green infrastructure program and other stormwater management strategies, including nature-based solutions, for each neighborhood, particularly for underserved communities in flood-prone areas that have high percentages of impervious surfaces, which exacerbate flood conditions
- Protect inland communities vulnerable to flooding during storms like Ida and address the city's CSO system shortcomings and the lethal risk to those living in basement apartments.

### **Make resiliency and sustainability upgrades to our public transportation and plan better for climate events**

- MTA needs to improve its emergency preparedness, planning, and operations to ensure service continuity, such as
  - o developing efficient deployment routes,
  - o training crews on how to install and deploy the equipment,
  - o and ensuring that flood control devices remain in a state of good repair
- The MTA and NYC DOT must expand the dedicated bus lane network in the city to continue to provide service before, during, and after storms.
- As the MTA continues to electrify its fleet, it should consider flood barriers and solar panels around on-street chargers (if MTA goes this route) to improve resilience.

### **Reduce our emissions and, for example, fully implement LL97 with no loopholes**

The successful implementation of LL97 presents an incredible opportunity to drastically reduce NYC's emissions while addressing multiple priorities; directly investing in reducing localized pollution in frontline communities, creating thousands of good green jobs that would ensure a

just transition, and upgrading buildings to be more resilient and energy efficient in the face of extreme weather events. The law must be implemented completely and equitably, without any provisions to weaken this legislation.

We can be better prepared for the next hurricane or heat wave and we must because the cost is far too great. People are already dying from a warming climate today here in this city. We can only be prepared if we are fearless and confront and change the limitations of badly designed, inequitable systems and structures and work with our communities. Not one more person should die trapped in their basement from flooding because there is nowhere else affordable in this city to live. Today, we cannot confidently say that is the case. We must do all of this and more to meet the challenge of this moment. Thank you for the time and the opportunity to testify today!