



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance Testimony to NYC City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation (in support of Intro 1065 and Intro 1066)

June 13, 2023

Good afternoon Chair Krishnan and members of the Council. My name is Victoria Sanders and I'm testifying on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA), which is a 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.

As a major proponent of creative and multifaceted green infrastructure solutions for mitigating both flooding and heat risks in NYC's most environmentally burdened communities, NYC-EJA supports both Intro 1065 and Intro 1066. With scientists and researchers predicting warmer summer temperatures in the years ahead, we must look to more nature-based solutions that are equitably implemented to address the severe conditions that lay ahead. Each summer, an estimated 370 New Yorkers die prematurely because of extreme heat in New York City. Black New Yorkers are more likely to die from heat stress, with death rates two times higher than among white New Yorkers. In addition, Black and Brown communities in New York have access to [33 percent less](#) park space than residents in largely white neighborhoods. The disproportionate heat burden and risks that environmental justice and frontline communities experience due to the lack of trees and green space, increased pavement, and air pollution underscores the significance of and need for green infrastructure in these neighborhoods.

While we are very supportive of the intention of Intro 1065, we believe that the efficacy can be strengthened by improving the language with a few key additions and caveats. Intro 1065 covers many key points in relation to the need for an citywide urban forest plan and reaching 30% canopy cover in NYC, but the critical component of equity is not currently reflected in the bill language. For example, an authentic equity analysis should prioritize expanding canopy cover, among other things, in EJ/Black & Brown communities first. In order for these plans to be beneficial to those New Yorkers that most need them, the bill should specifically address equity and outline its importance in the plan and execution of 30% canopy cover distribution.

Investments to manage, protect and expand the urban forest canopy are crucial to providing more equitable access to the urban forest's benefits - from shade and cooling to mental health,

particularly in the most heat vulnerable and frontline communities. To ensure that an effective Urban Forest Plan is both drafted and implemented, there needs to be adequate funding dedicated to the Parks and Recreation Department. Without an appropriate and dependable budget allocated to the urban forest and its expansion, maintenance, and protection, these bills will be unable to meet the goals they outline.

In addition, the 30% canopy cover goal must be tied to a firm timeline. As a member of the Forest for All NYC Coalition, NYC-EJA aligns with the coalition's goal of equitably reaching 30% tree canopy cover by **2035**.

And finally, as outlined in Section 1c of the bill, we feel that the following list of agencies, though not comprehensive, should be involved in the execution of Intro 1065: Department of Parks and Recreation, Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of City Planning, and New York City Housing Authority. Though we know there are likely other agencies that will be important in this process, we feel that these five agencies should certainly be included to work together and ensure this legislation is implemented effectively.

It's time that New Yorkers living in communities without sufficient parks and green space have increased nature-based public investment and greater access to the benefits of our urban forest. Now is the moment for New York's leaders to advance the investments and policies needed to protect, maintain, and most importantly grow the urban forest – with a focus on environmental justice communities. Thank you for the time and opportunity to testify.