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On the ground – and at the table.

New York City Environmental Justice Alliance testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Consumer Affairs and Committee on Environmental Protection in relation to the Feasibility of Microgrids.

November 21, 2017

Good morning Chairperson Espinal, Chairperson Costa, and Members of the City Council. My name is Annel Hernandez and I am here to testify in support of evaluating the feasibility of microgrids across the five boroughs, 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 struggle for environmental justice. NYC-EJA empowers its member organizations to advocate for improved environmental conditions and against inequitable environmental burdens. Through our efforts, member organizations coalesce around specific common issues that threaten the ability of low-income and communities of color to thrive, and coordinate campaigns designed to affect City and State policies – including renewable energy, resilient energy, energy storage technologies, microgrids, and community-owned projects directly benefiting these communities.

Because a number of the NYC-EJA member organizations come from communities overburdened by greenhouse emissions and co-pollutants from power plants and dirty industries clustered in their neighborhoods, our organization is a key advocate of emission reduction and renewable energy targets. Our NYC Climate Justice Agenda is a multi-year research and advocacy campaign to address the need for a comprehensive community-based approach to community resiliency. In 2017, we released a report which analyzed Mayor de Blasio's OneNYC plan and made several recommendations to strengthen the City's policies in environmental justice communities. We highlighted that in addition to its promising economic potential, microgrids and solar-plus-storage technologies can have extensive environmental and health benefits, particularly for vulnerable communities who have been historically exposed to noxious pollutants generated from traditional fossil fuel energy infrastructure. Resilient energy can provide power during emergencies, blackout periods, and peak demand, especially to vital facilities such as emergency shelters, hospitals, public housing, schools, and in particular the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center. This technology has the potential to displace inefficient and dirty peaking plants, thus significantly reducing air pollution in environmental justice communities. The City should study, prioritize, and streamline the deployment of microgrids and resilient energy systems in the coming years. The City should also study progress made to date and strategies to reduce barriers for microgrid development including technical, policy, and regulatory barriers. We recommend that any microgrid cost-benefit analyses include economic, social, environmental, and resiliency benefits. In pursuit of a Just Transition, New York City should be leading the nation in the procurement of renewable energy and energy storage technologies that meet ambitious emission reduction and resiliency targets.

NYC-EJA commends the New York City Council for holding a hearing on the feasibility of microgrids, and creating an opportunity for public comment on this important strategy to increase community resiliency. We urge the City Council hold a hearing early next year on Int. 1567. A just energy policy is central to NYC-EJA's work, and we look forward to a continued collaboration with the City to mitigate the threats of climate change.