



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance Testimony Regarding the CORE Act and the New York City Budget

6/15/2020

Hello, thank you to the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Dr. Tok Michelle O. 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 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. To handle nearly 35,000 tons of garbage generated each day in NYC, waste trucks needlessly travel thousands of miles per night through multiple boroughs of New York City, polluting our air with diesel fuel, clogging our streets, and diminishing our quality of life. The impacts are greatest in those 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 cancer. Today we are testifying to urge that the City not sidetrack its Climate Justice and Zero Waste goals by eliminating opportunities for recycling organics and other waste streams - in the short term, we urge the City to immediately restore food scrap drop-off sites by funding them at the relatively small amount of ~ \$7 million. Additionally, passing the CORE Act (Intros 1942 and 1943) would increase access to food scrap and textile recycling for all New Yorkers, including the outer boroughs and NYCHA residences, by ensuring that there are at least three drop-off sites per community district.

Organics collection and local processing

Local-scale organics processing can divert waste from being trucked to transfer stations clustered in three environmental justice communities in NYC: North Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and Southeast Queens. Completely eliminating all forms of organics collection in the City means that the majority of this will go to the intermediary local transfer stations, then to landfills and incinerators in environmental justice communities outside of the city. A better solution would be to process this organic waste locally, which in the long run could reduce costs from truck transport and tipping into facilities. This requires the City to make a commitment to increasing its local organics processing capacity in the very near term. Some of the drop-off sites selected within the CORE Act should be coupled with processing capacity, to ensure that we are streamlining processing organic waste at a local level.

It is also critical that the collection programs do not replicate harms in environmental justice communities, by ensuring that we are optimizing truck routes for organics collection throughout the city. One way to aid this would be to have GPS tracking and route submissions for drivers collecting organic and other waste streams.



Collection using zero- or low-emissions vehicles like bicycles and electric trucks would also significantly reduce PM 2.5 emissions in the areas where waste is collected and processed.

Cutting just 5% of the NYPD's \$516,000,000 overtime budget would provide 3-4x the amount of funding needed to restore the composting program at \$7 million, while avoiding the compounding negative effects of completely eliminating all forms of public organic waste collection on our road to Zero Waste by 2030. This funding would also be a great start toward increasing organics processing capacity and ensuring staffing for these sites.

Textiles, e-waste and hazardous materials

We also support the safe collection of e-waste and hazardous materials, either via drop-off sites or collection events, because it would reduce the incidence of materials improperly going to landfills, or burning in incinerators near communities such as Newark's noxious Covanta facility. Improper disposal of things like medical waste into incinerators can increase the amount of particularly harmful chemicals like dioxins and iodine in the air, which can cause or exacerbate respiratory illness.^{1 2} Ideally, opportunities for e-waste and hazardous material drop-off would be more frequent, more publicized, and highly accessible (in terms of personal ability, and geography).

Regarding e-waste and textiles, our member organization Morningside Heights/ West Harlem Sanitation Coalition (Sanitation Coalition) was instrumental in leading such recycling programs in NYCHA.³ Expansion of textile recycling through the CORE Act would be beneficial in that it would help to divert up to 6% of NYC's residential waste that consists of textiles, from going to landfills and incinerators - and it would reduce water pollution from textile dye and treatment contamination.^{4 5}

Education and staffing

Part of the reason for the success of new and existing recycling programs is the education that goes alongside them. The Sanitation Coalition's 2006-2009 recycling program in a NYCHA residence was successful because neighbors of the housing development taught one another. Anecdotally, we have also learned that spurring composting in the existing drop-off program has been improved by having consistent hours that are paired with education about how best to separate materials.

¹ Op-Ed: Coronavirus Crisis Demands Environmental-Justice Response

<https://www.njspotlight.com/2020/05/op-ed-coronavirus-crisis-demands-environmental-justice-response/> (5/19/2020)

² In the Shadows of America's Smokestacks, Virus is One More Deadly Risk <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/17/climate/pollution-poverty-coronavirus.html> (5/17/2020)

³ Mark Levine, Recycle Your E-Waste & Textiles http://www.marklevine.nyc/recycle_your_e_waste_textiles

⁴ GrowNYC Recycling Facts

<https://www.grownyc.org/recycling/facts#:~:text=Waste%20in%20New%20York%20City&text=7.5%25%20of%20our%20waste%20stream,up%205.7%25%20of%20our%20waste.>

⁵ Kant, R. (2011). Textile dyeing industry an environmental hazard. https://www.scirp.org/Html/4-8301582_17027.htm



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

462 36th St, 3F, Brooklyn, NY 11232 | www.NYC-EJA.org

On the ground - and at the table

Any community recycling programs should include staff that are able to provide this educational component, and ideally would allocate a significant portion of these jobs to low-income Black and Brown residents from within the communities themselves - with leadership and decisions driven in partnership with the communities.

In closing, while here we have made a case for the importance of immediately restoring drop-off sites, increasing the equity and access of drop-off sites and collection events, and co-locating drop-off and organic processing in the short term, we reiterate to the council the urgency of introducing legislation for mandatory organics collection and increased organics processing capacity citywide. Together, these pieces of legislation would enable access to convenient recycling of various waste streams for all residents; divert one-third of all waste from landfills, incinerators, and polluting clusters of transfer stations in NYC; and would enable NYC to locally process organics - providing good, green jobs within our communities; reducing greenhouse gas emissions; and sequestering carbon in soils.

Thank you for your consideration.