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On the ground – and at the table.

New York City Environmental Justice Alliance’s (NYC-EJA) Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Recovery and Resiliency in support of Intro. 1155-2016 to maintain a voluntary registry of people who may need evacuation assistance in the event of an emergency.

Good morning Chairperson Treyger and members of the City Council. My name is Pamela Soto and I am here to testify in support of Int. No. 1155-2016 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 these efforts, our member organizations coalesce around specific common issues that threaten the ability of low-income communities of color to thrive, and coordinate campaigns designed to inform City and State policies— including policies that grapple with the disproportionate impacts of climate disasters, such as Int. No. 1155-2016.

Vulnerable populations, including people of color, low income individuals, the disabled, and the elderly, are at much greater risk from extreme weather events fueled by climate change. In 2010, NYC-EJA launched the Waterfront Justice Project, New York City’s first citywide community resiliency campaign. NYC-EJA discovered that the Significant Maritime and Industrial Areas (SMIAs) are all in hurricane storm surge zones, and that the City of New York had not analyzed the cumulative contamination exposure risks associated with clusters of heavy industrial uses in such vulnerable locations. Through the Waterfront Justice Project, NYC-EJA has worked to mitigate the threat of potential toxic exposure faced by low income communities and communities of color in and around the SMIAs.

Our NYC Climate Justice Agenda is a multi-year research and advocacy campaign to address the need for a comprehensive community-based approach to climate adaptation and community resiliency. In 2016, we released a report which analyzed Mayor de Blasio’s OneNYC plan and made several concrete recommendations for how to bolster the plan’s initiatives regarding community preparedness. The recommendations in this report included creating an inventory or database of vulnerable residents to help CERT teams in their emergency response, designating

community-specific evacuation routes, creating accessible and reliable mobility and evacuation infrastructure, completing the Community Preparedness toolkit, and more.

It is our understanding that the City is currently collecting information on vulnerable populations using data from the Census, voluntary surveys from NYCHA, and voluntary data from Con Edison regarding life support, but has not yet formulated this as a resource for community response. It is critical to balance the need for a registry with the need to protect the privacy of vulnerable residents, in compliance with HIPAA and other privacy needs. For this reason, we strongly support the decision to make the registry voluntary.

To make this registry a useful tool to assist CERT teams in their emergency response, strong community outreach and education efforts will be crucial to encourage the maximum number of people to register. The City should partner with community-based organizations to structure this program, as they are critical partners in bolstering the social resiliency needed to adequately respond to a disaster when it strikes.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and we look forward to continued collaboration with the City in this regard.

Pamela Soto

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