TESTIMONY
of the
NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

before
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

REGARDING
INTRO. 270 AND INTRO. 1720
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Good morning Chairman Constantinides and other members of the Committee. My name is Marisa Guerrero and I work at the Natural Resources Defense Council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today about important bills that would help New York City better track its greenhouse gas emissions. As you probably know, NRDC is an international, non-profit legal and scientific environmental organization headquartered in New York City. And here in New York, NRDC has worked hard to combat climate change by advocating for renewable energy deployment, increased energy efficiency, and clean transportation. We also fight the fossil fuel industry, the primary driver of climate change: as just one example, we have opposed the Northeast Supply Enhancement fracked gas pipeline and have fought other new fossil fuel infrastructure, as well.

On behalf of NRDC, I thank the City Council for considering Intros. 270 and 1720, which will help to ensure that New York City adheres to the critical climate goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050.

Cities occupy only 2 percent of the world's landmass, but account for more than 70 percent of greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.[1] Such an enormous contribution to emissions means that cities play a significant role in the fight to reduce our carbon footprint across the globe.

As the most populous city in the nation and the country's media and financial center, New York City is uniquely positioned to build upon its leadership role on climate. Though our per capita emissions are the lowest of any big city in the country and among the lowest in the world, the sheer mass of our emissions is nevertheless staggering. New York City produced 52 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO2e) in 2015.[2] While that number has been in decline[3] and New York City has made big strides on fighting climate change, we need to do all we can to make sure the City is on track to meet its 2050 goal.

In large part due to the production and combustion of fossil fuels,[4] New Yorkers are already suffering from the harmful effects of climate change firsthand. From 2000 to 2011, heat waves killed 13 people, and sent 400 more to the hospital, per year on average,[5] with environmental justice communities particularly at risk to the effects of extreme heat.[6] Rising sea levels are eroding our most cherished beaches like the Rockaways. Flooding and extreme weather events, like Superstorm Sandy, are becoming more likely and more frequent. New York City is particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts because it is situated on one of the world's largest natural harbors[7] and its coastline is extensive.

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[1] C40 Cities, Why Cities? https://www.c40.org/why_cities (last visited Feb. 24, 2020).

[2] New York City Mayor's Office of Sustainability, Inventory of New York City Greenhouse Gas Emissions in 2015 13 (2017), available at https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration_pdf/nycghg.pdf.

[3] New York City Mayor's Office of Sustainability, supra, at 13.

[4] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2016 ES-8 (2018).

[5] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Heat Illness and Deaths—New York City, 2000-2011, 62 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 608 (2013).

[6] Bruce C. Mitchell & Jayajit Chakraborty, Landscapes of Thermal Inequity: Disproportionate Exposure to Urban Heat in the Three Largest US Cities, 10 Environ. Res. Lett. 9 (2015).

[7] Federal Writers' Project, New York Panorama: Essays from the 1930s 326 (2018).

These climate threats affect all New Yorkers, but disproportionately harm environmental justice communities. These communities face heightened exposure to environmental hazards and pollution; they are, for example, especially vulnerable to the hotter temperatures caused by the Urban Heat Island effect,[8] which causes higher daytime temperatures and less nighttime cooling.[9] Once exposed, they generally have fewer economic resources to prepare for and recover from climate hazards[10]—in the extreme heat example, low-income residents are less likely to have functioning air conditioners, the absence of which is linked to heat-related deaths.[11] And, they experience cumulative negative health effects when exposed to these harmful environmental, health, and/or economic conditions.[12]

The New York City Council is already a leader in driving ambitious climate action from the adoption of the Greener, Greater Buildings suite of legislation in 2009,[13] to the ambitious and landmark Climate Mobilization Act adopted last year,[14] as well as many other laws that reduce energy consumption and increase the deployment of renewables and clean transportation. But we can, and must, do even more to ensure a livable city for present and future generations.

Intros. 270 and 1720, especially when taken together, mark another important step toward reducing our carbon footprint. If passed, they would help the City understand the climate implications of its proposed budget and better track emissions to curtail them, and would be a tool in line with the goals of the New York City Panel on Climate Change 2019 Report to develop methods to assess climate risk and implement region-wide resilience.[15] We encourage the City to go even further to include 20-year global warming potentials (GWP) for methane and upstream gas leaks, in keeping with state policy under the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).

In short, these bills would build upon New York's strong leadership on climate and help the City to better account for and reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, thereby prioritizing justice for New York City residents, especially communities on the frontlines of climate hazards. And they can serve as a model for other cities looking to level-up their climate ambition. For these

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[8] Bruce C. Mitchell & Jayajit Chakraborty, Landscapes of Thermal Inequity: Disproportionate Exposure to Urban Heat in the Three Largest US Cities, 10 Environ. Res. Lett. 7 (2015).
[9] Zoe Hamstead, How We Can Use Climate Action Planning to Beat the Heat, WeACT for Environmental Justice (last visited Feb. 24, 2020), https://www.weact.org/2016/09/climate-action-beat-heat/.
[10] Cathleen Kelly & Tracey Ross, One Storm Shy of Despair, Center for American Progress (July 17, 2014, 2:30 PM), https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2014/07/17/93981/one-storm-shy-of-despair/.
[11] New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Extreme Heat and Your Health (last visited Feb. 24, 2020), https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/emergency-preparedness/emergencies-extreme-weather-heat.page.
[12] Rachel Morello-Frosch, et. al., Understanding the Cumulative Impacts of Inequalities in Environmental Health: Implications for Policy, 30 Health Affairs 879 (2011).
[13] Local Laws No. 84, 85, 87, 88 (2009).
[14] Local Laws No. 92, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98 (2019).
[15] Cynthia Rosenzweig & William Solecki, New York City Panel on Climate Change 2019 Report Chapter 1: Introduction, Ann. N.Y. Acad, Sci., 1439, 22 (2019), available at https://nyaspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/nyas.14004.

reasons, NRDC supports the proposed legislation before you today and looks forward to continuing to work with the Council and the Administration in its fight against climate change.