

Testimony from THE POINT CDC for the Public Hearing on Climate Change

By: Fernando Ortiz

My name is Fernando Ortiz; I am the Climate Preparedness and Resiliency Organizer for THE POINT CDC . We are leading a community based climate resiliency plan, called the *South Bronx Community Resiliency Agenda*. I am here today to call on the State of New York to take bold action on climate change and to prioritize frontline communities, through the passage of the *Climate and Community Protection Act*. I represent Hunts Point, which is in the South Bronx Significant Maritime Industrial area – an area zoned for its heavy industrial and maritime use – one of six in New York City. The Hunts Point Peninsula is also home to Hunts Point Food Distribution Center which is a major economic hub, supporting over 25,000 jobs and \$55 billion dollars in economic activity each year. In addition to the food markets, the neighborhood includes a whole host of industrial businesses and is an environmental justice community of about 13,000 residents.

The neighborhood is also a low income community of color where 41% of the total population lives below the Federal Poverty Level. Since the area is industrial in nature, there are many examples of facilities handling, storing or transporting hazardous substances or toxic chemicals located in the storm surge zones as well as in very close proximity to the Food Distribution Center which could represent a significant threat in the event of severe weather. Imagine what could happen if these substances compromised the food supply chain for all of New York City as well the potential threat to a community with a vulnerable population grappling with public health issues and extreme poverty .

Residents and workers in these neighborhoods suffer the negative health effects associated with undue environmental burdens; traffic fatalities, lack of open space and disproportionately high rates of asthma and heart disease, while; ironically, lacking access to fresh food. The area’s vulnerability to sea level rise and flooding presents a tremendous risk to both the



50,000 residents surrounding the SMIA and the millions of people dependent on the food markets. Hunts Point residents are victims of spatial inequalities such as massive highways that bypass and border their communities, lack of waterfront access and green spaces, zoning policies that favor heavy industrial activity and the unfair amount of waste handling that occurs in these areas. Climate Change is predicted to lead to a rise in temperatures and sea-level- both direct threats to Hunts Point. Hunts Point suffers from extreme heat and has been identified as a heat vulnerable community. The average surface temperature in August for Hunts Point is 98 degrees and due to high industrial activity in these communities, they have a stronger issue with the Urban Heat Island effect. The mean annual temperature is expected to increase by 2050 by 4-6 degrees Fahrenheit and heat waves are expected to average between 6 and 8 per year.

Despite the many challenges that Hunts Point faces, we are resilient, tough and are at the forefront of our own climate solutions and just transition. The POINT through the SBCRA manages programs such as the Be A Buddy - a program that aims to build social cohesion and climate health awareness and education for those most vulnerable in the Hunts Point-Longwood community, Hunts Point Community Solar - a program which addresses the community's long standing energy burden and Free Hunts Point Community WiFi- a network that can provide resilient communications even in the peril of a climate-related emergency such as a storm.

We see the CCPA as a innovative solution since it aims to set aside 40% of the the State's Clean Energy Funds to be reinvested in frontline, environmental justice, and disadvantaged communities. The equity provisions of the bill make it the most progressive climate legislation in the country, because at its heart – the CCPA is about racial, climate and environmental justice. As we demonstrated, communities like Hunts Point are disproportionately overburdened by climate change. We are calling on you, The New York State Senate, to work with us, and the many other communities calling for justice, and to take long overdue action through the passage of the CCPA. Thank you for your time.



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