



**Statement of Julie Tighe, President
New York League of Conservation Voters
City Council Hearing of the Committee on Parks
Preliminary Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2020
March 8th, 2019**

Good afternoon. My name is Julie Tighe, and I'm President of the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV represents over 31,000 members in New York City and we are committed to advancing a sustainability agenda that will make our people, our neighborhoods, and our economy healthier and more resilient. I would like to thank Chair Grodenchik for the opportunity to testify before the Committee on Parks and Recreation regarding the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20).

NYLCV supports the passage of a city budget in FY20 that secures progress on many of the environmental, transportation, and public health priorities Mayor de Blasio has called for in OneNYC and beyond. Our city is staring down a crisis of existential importance, and it is incumbent upon our elected leaders to invest our tax dollars in climate action and solutions. New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation plays a critical role in that fight.

The Department of Parks and Recreation FY20 Preliminary Budget totals \$542.9 million, just over one half of one percent of the city's overall \$92.2 Billion Preliminary Budget. That's .59% for an agency that oversees 14% of NYC's land. This number represents a slight increase (1.5% or \$8.8 million) from the FY19 adopted budget. However, while the overall Parks budget has increased, the Parks FY20 Preliminary Budget includes cuts to critical program areas--most notably a \$5.4 million reduction for forestry and horticulture.

Parks and other green spaces are one of the city's most valuable environmental assets. Preserving these spaces is a top priority for NYLCV. Parks are a major source of the City's urban canopy. In fact, the Parks Department is responsible for over 2.6 million street and park trees. This canopy mitigates climate change, provides clean air and habitats for native wildlife, and contributes to the well-being of our residents and our economy.

These trees remove 1,300 tons of pollutants from the atmosphere and store one million tons of carbon per year. Trees are vital for mitigating urban heat island effect and can lower temperatures by up to nine degrees, cut air conditioning use by 30%, and reduce heating energy use by a further 20-50%. NYC's parks contribute to our resiliency by capturing almost 2 billion gallons of stormwater runoff. We should be investing more, not less, in protecting this green asset.

Further, with soaring population growth, and over 100 million visitors each year, park use in New York City is surging to record levels. It is imperative the Parks Department budget keep pace with



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these trends. That's why NYLCV is proud to join with New Yorkers for Parks as a founding member of the Play Fair for Parks campaign.

We all agree that parks are critical city infrastructure. One does not have to look further than the environmental benefits I pointed to earlier as proof. But these green benefits could not be realized without the Parks employees, particularly gardeners, horticulturalists, and maintenance workers, who work tirelessly to ensure the health of these spaces.

For that reason, it is high time to make a long-overdue investment in the people that care for our parks. **The Play Fair Coalition is asking the City to commit \$100 million in additional funding for FY20 to support much needed maintenance and operations needs citywide.**

NYLCV and the entire Play Fair Coalition requests this funding be allocated in the following ways:

- \$10M to permanently baseline positions for 100 City Park Workers and 50 Gardeners so that once and for all, these workers will have secure, stable green jobs.
- \$4M for an investment in urban forests to help protect NYC from climate change.
 - We also request \$3.74M in capital funding to implement the first year of the 25-year *Forest Management Plan for New York City*.
- \$65M for more parks of all sizes to have full-time, dedicated staff to help keep things clean and green.
- Just over \$8M towards improvements for every GreenThumb community garden in the City. This amount would help provide new soil, raised beds, and other features to ensure urban gardeners in all 550 gardens have the resources they need for the gardens to thrive.
- \$4M to ensure more seasonal after-school programs and other programming for children and families from every neighborhood.
- \$9M for the preservation, safety, and protection of our natural areas and parks with 50 new Urban Park Rangers and 80 additional Parks Enforcement Patrol Officers citywide.

Now is the time to invest in the Parks Department. Now is the time to Play Fair for Parks! I'd like to thank Chair Grodenchik for his partnership and the Committee on Parks and Recreation for their attention to this issue. I look forward to working with you all closely to ensure NYC has healthy and thriving green spaces for generations to come.