



**Statement of Adriana Espinoza, NYC Program Director
New York League of Conservation Voters**

City Council Committee on Environmental Protection
February 25, 2019

Good afternoon. My name is Adriana Espinoza, Director of the NYC Program at 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 Constantinides and members of the Environmental Protection Committee for holding this important hearing on the sustainability and resiliency of the City's wastewater treatment plants (WWTP).

New York City's fourteen WWTPs treat 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater per day. The intricate network between our drains and these treatment plants consists of 7,400 miles of sewer pipes, 135,000 catch basins, and 95 wastewater pumping stations.

On an individual level, there is plenty we can do to promote clean waterways and protect the sustainability of our WWTPs. Properly disposing of garbage and household chemicals, conserving water, and limiting use of water during heavy precipitation events, are all behaviors New Yorkers can adopt to promote clean water.

We must do all we can in the fight against climate change. That's why today, I want to highlight an opportunity New York City has to enhance the sustainability not only of our WWTPs, but also meet two One NYC goals; first, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by 2050 and, second, to achieve zero waste by 2030. And there are things entirely in control of the City that can and must be done. In this case, NYLCV strongly recommends that the City upgrade DEP's existing digesters which manage sewer sludge to be more efficient. The energy used at modernized digesters could be used to offset or eliminate the need for demand response generators at those locations. This would reduce air pollution, and cut down on methane emissions, a greenhouse gas 30 times more potent than carbon dioxide. We urge the Mayor and Council to invest the funds necessary to modernize the DEP's network of digesters.

But those digesters can do more than just manage waste created by the WWTPs. In 2015, NYLCV's Education Fund released a series of policy recommendations for an effective organic waste program in NYC.¹ These recommendations asked the City to maximize the use of anaerobic digestion at the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Wastewater Treatment Plants. While the Newtown Creek WWTP is authorized to accept up to 500 tons per day of organic waste and has a contract with Waste Management to receive waste, none of DEP's other digesters do.

¹ <http://nylcvef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Organic-Waste-Recommendations-for-NYC-2014.pdf>



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In addition, we support a collaboration between DEP and the Department of Sanitation to make provisions for high-quality organic waste, similar to capacity at the Newtown Creek plant, at other WWTPs. This investment could contribute to the City's Zero Waste goal and support the struggling residential organic waste program by stimulating demand for organic waste.

Converting this waste into renewable energy contributes to better air quality, lower emissions, and can potentially save the City money over time as the energy generated is used to power the WWTPs.

I would like to thank Chair Constantinides and the entire Committee for your leadership on environmental issues, and I look forward to working with you all closely moving forward.