



**Testimony of Carlos Castell Croke
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New York League of Conservation Voters**

**City Council Committee on Finance
FY22 Executive Budget Hearing
May 25, 2021**

Good afternoon, my name is Carlos Castell Croke and I am the Associate for New York City Programs at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV represents over 30,000 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 Dromm and all of the Council Members on the committee for the opportunity to testify today.

NYLCV supports a Fiscal Year 22 City budget that secures progress on many of the environmental, transportation, and public health priorities Mayor de Blasio has committed to in OneNYC and beyond. Our city is on the road to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is incumbent upon our elected leaders to invest our tax dollars in climate action and solutions as we rebound from this crisis and not lose ground, especially with the influx of relief funds coming in from the Federal Government.

NYLCV is pleased to see the Mayor reinvesting in the environment through the revival of the curbside composting pilot and a commitment to electrify our city's school buses. These two initiatives are critical steps towards reducing our emissions, cleaning our streets and air, and protecting our vulnerable communities that have been overburdened by decades of environmental racism. It is imperative that the City provide adequate funding for these programs and, in the case of curbside organic waste, that we rapidly roll the program out citywide. We are also happy that there will be significant investments in pedestrian safety through funding for speed cameras, bikes lanes, and open streets.

While federal dollars are providing the financial relief needed to implement these critical initiatives, there is still much more we must do to make a permanent commitment to the environment.

Parks and other green spaces are one of the city's most valuable environmental assets and are a major source of the city's urban canopy, which mitigates climate change, provides clean air

and habitats for native wildlife, and contributes to the well-being of our residents and economy. Preserving these spaces is a top priority for NYLCV.

But over the past year, through the hardships of the pandemic, we have seen the cleanliness and safety of our parks drop significantly due to unfair budgetary cuts to staffing and programs, which also impacts access to parks for people most in need. Due specifically to the \$45 million in cuts to seasonal staff spending and forestry contracts last year, parks saw one of their worst years for cleanliness on record.

Therefore, in this critical 3rd year of our play fair campaign, we ask the council to Play Fair Now and restore \$78.9 million in the FY22 Parks budget to ensure our parks are safe, clean and accessible. *NYLCV and the entire Play Fair Coalition requests this funding be allocated in the following ways:*

- *Baseline **\$10M** to make permanent 100 City Park Workers and 50 Gardeners, and create secure, stable jobs.*
- ***\$30M** to restore the critical Seasonal staff budget for maintenance and operations workers citywide.*
- ***\$3M** to restore the Parks Opportunity Program and provide a pathway to full-time employment.*
- ***\$4.5M** for NYC's natural forests, wetlands, and trails to receive the proactive care and maintenance they need to remain healthy and resilient in our changing climate, and as they receive unprecedented use by New Yorkers.*
- ***\$15M** to restore critical parks forestry contracts for tree pruning, stump removal and sidewalk repair, and invasive species control.*
- ***\$4M** to restore the Parks Equity Initiative, and support park stewardship organizations citywide.*
- ***\$3.4M** to restore 15 GreenThumb staff, and expand access to plant materials, resources and tools for community gardeners citywide.*
- ***\$3M** to hire 50 Urban Park Rangers to connect New Yorkers with the nature that surrounds us, and help ensure our parks remain safe and accessible for all.*
- ***\$6M** to restore 80 Parks Enforcement Patrol officers citywide to make sure our parks are safe.*

In addition to parks funding, it is imperative that the city baseline funding for full staffing in critical environmental offices such as the Office of Building Emissions and Energy Performance and the Mayor's Office of Climate Resiliency. These offices must be operating at full capacity to ensure NYC is at the forefront of the fight against climate change.

The COVID-19 crisis is still placing stress on our economy and communities. This was apparent in the FY21 budget but does not need to be the case again this year now that the federal government has provided relief. We urge the Mayor and City Council to have foresight and prepare for the climate crisis by making permanent commitments to environmental investments.

Bold action can be taken by implementing a citywide curbside organics collection program, baselining one percent of the city budget for parks, and doubling down on the Mayor's commitment to electrify all NYC school buses by passing legislation that mandates it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.