



**Testimony of Carlos Castell Croke  
Associate for NYC Programs  
New York League of Conservation Voters**

**City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation  
Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 12, 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 Koo and all of the Council Members on the committee for the opportunity to testify today.

NYLCV supports a Fiscal Year 2022 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 precipice of 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 that will flow from the American Rescue Act package signed into law yesterday. New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation plays a critical role in that fight.

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.

The 2.6 million street and park trees that the Parks Department is responsible for remove 1,300 tons of pollutants from the atmosphere and store one million tons of carbon each 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. That's why NYLCV is proud to join with New Yorkers for Parks and DC 37 again as founding members of the Play Fair for Parks campaign.

Parks not only provide critical infrastructure that have multiple environmental benefits, but they also offer a place for New Yorkers to safely social distance, exercise, and get much needed fresh air. 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. With the summer months coming, parks are poised to see a sharp uptick in usership after having been neglected for months.

Therefore, in this critical 3rd year of our campaign, we are asking 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.

The time to invest in the Parks Department is now. We must Play Fair for Parks Now.

I'd like to thank Chair Koo 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.