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New York City Environmental Justice Alliance Testimony on CLCPA Draft Scoping Plan, Brooklyn Hearing

Good afternoon members of the CAC, my name is Shравanthi Kanekal and I am testifying on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance.

Founded in 1991, the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) is a non-profit citywide membership network linking grassroots organizations from low-income communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice. Through our efforts, member organizations coalesce around specific common issues that threaten the ability for low-income communities of color to thrive. Our alliance is a key advocate of strong and equitable renewable energy targets, because many of the communities we represent are overburdened by the clustering of power plants and other polluting infrastructure in their neighborhoods.

The most recent IPCC report underscores the overwhelming urgency of this moment. The report states the impacts of the climate crisis, from extreme heat to intense rainfall and flooding, will only continue to intensify unless we choose another course for ourselves and generations to come. The impacts on our economy and the health of New Yorkers will be tremendous if we don't act now. Poor air quality and extreme heat vulnerability will continue to make children sick and shorten the lives of seniors. More frequent extreme weather events will put people in danger, and destroy our communities.

New York must make a rapid transition in energy, urban infrastructure, transportation, and industrial systems. As the years progress and the threats of climate change loom larger, the need for rapid, bold, and holistic approaches to climate and energy policy becomes increasingly essential.

The health and welfare of communities that are at the frontlines of the climate crises must be prioritized. Hundreds and thousands of New Yorker's lives are at stake. Environmental Justice communities across NYS are disproportionately exposed to cumulative burdens that have negative public health consequences. Neighborhoods like Sunset Park, South Williamsburg, and the South Bronx suffer from poor air quality due to fossil-fuel burning, polluting infrastructure sited in these communities. In addition, residents face higher-than-average exposure to diesel particulate matter from nearby highways and related serious health issues caused by poor air quality.

The scoping plan must set clear year-by-year targets for replacing fossil fuels with renewable sources built for and by our communities. We need a guarantee that these targets will be met using proven renewable energy technologies– not false solutions like biofuels, “renewable” natural gas or so called “green” hydrogen.

In order to reach a zero-emissions power sector by 2040, New York needs a rapid, large-scale transition away from fossil fuels. Of the 3 scenarios put forward in the draft scoping plan, we are advocating for **scenario three**: low-to-no bioenergy and hydrogen combustion and the simultaneous increase in electrification of both buildings and the transportation sector to ensure cleaner air and a healthy environment for our communities.

We need a dedicated funding mechanism to ensure reductions of both greenhouse gas and co-pollutant emissions and to begin the state's large-scale transition to an equitable renewable energy economy. An equitable economy-wide polluter fee is likely the best approach to generate the necessary funds in a just manner. The large and growing health and financial costs of both fossil fuel-triggered air pollution and climate change are often overlooked. Now is the time to recognize how much these linked problems are costing us as inaction will be far more expensive. We need to seriously think about the ongoing annual costs of delay in adopting an aggressive decarbonization pathway.

Climate justice is based on the principle that frontline communities are most vulnerable to climate change, and therefore, must play an integral role in planning for the renewable and regenerative energy economy. As climate change advances, leadership from the frontlines of the crisis becomes increasingly important to shape policies, programs, and initiatives needed to ensure the equitable transformation of our energy and economic systems.

When it comes to creating the inclusive green economy of New York's future, the plan must include strong public health guidelines and labor standards including prevailing wage, benefits, and local hire; funding for workforce development; and more. The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act is now the law, but we have a long way to go to ensure that the benefits of this transition truly reach those that need it most. Low-income communities and communities of color still face many obstacles in participating in the clean energy economy.

The Scoping Plan must ensure that the mandates put forth by the Climate Action Council are legally enforceable against industries and include timelines for the reduction of emissions by sector. Provisions for environmental justice and emission reduction mean nothing if they cannot be enforced or if there aren't rules in place for what happens when our climate justice laws are broken.

We are seeing the devastating impacts of climate change worsen over the years and we cannot wait any longer to move off fossil fuels and fund a Just Transition. Our health, our communities,

our economy, and our planet are all at risk. Now is the time when bold leadership can make a difference. The scoping plan must ensure equitable policy measures that will guide the state to an economically sound, just, and equitable clean energy future.