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Testimony on air quality impacts and ways to measure and address them in NYC environmental justice communities

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Maya Pinto and I am a Senior Researcher and Policy Analyst at ALIGN. ALIGN is a long-term alliance of worker and community organizations united for a just and sustainable New York.

Firstly, I would like to commend Chairperson Richards and members of the Environmental Protection Committee for calling this hearing to shine a light on air quality issues affecting New York City's environmental justice communities.

I will focus my comments on the negative air quality impacts of the commercial waste management system on the city, especially on low-income communities and communities of color, and on the opportunity to dramatically reduce these impacts by transitioning to a franchise system of waste collection for which ALIGN and our coalition partners in the Transform Don't Trash NYC coalition are currently advocating.

New York City's businesses generate over 4 million tons of solid waste each year, and the system in place to handle that waste is highly polluting, inefficient, and inequitable. While the city's residential waste is handled by a relatively rational system that utilizes clean trucks and is moving towards borough equity, New York City's commercial waste collection industry is a "Wild West" lacking adequate regulatory oversight. While a handful of carters struggle to maintain high environmental standards, hundreds of companies deploy over 4,000 dirty trucks to collect waste along crisscrossing routes, emitting diesel pollution that damages public health. A single block can be serviced by up to 10 different carters. The vast majority of waste is transported by heavy truck to and from waste transfer stations in a handful of low-income communities and communities of color in North Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and Southeast Queens, which suffer negative health impacts as a result—these communities suffer elevated asthma rates up to five times the city's average rate.

Diesel pollution causes over 1,100 premature deaths, 2,200 non-fatal heart attacks, and almost 40,000 asthma attacks in New York State each year. Diesel pollution poses a three times greater cancer risk than all other 181 EPA-tracked air toxins combined.

Furthermore, diesel-burning waste trucks emit particulate matter, which includes black carbon, a global warming agent 2,000 times more potent over a 20-year period than carbon dioxide. Half of the black carbon in the U.S. is emitted by diesel fuel

engines.

Working with many of the groups in this room, the City took a significant step toward addressing the gross inequity in the solid waste management system by passing the 2006 Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP). When fully implemented, the SWMP will more equitably distribute waste transfer stations and replace long-haul truck transport of solid waste with rail and barge transport to reduce diesel emissions by millions of metric tons. And the City should be commended for recent clean truck legislation that places stricter emissions standards on commercial waste trucks.

But the City can and must do more. The clean waste truck legislation will not eliminate overlapping truck routes and reduce the number of commercial waste trucks on the road. No enacted City policy currently calls for an enforceable commercial recycling and composting targets that will reduce the amount of waste being sent to overburdened communities.

We urge the Environmental Protection committee to support full implementation of the SWMP, capacity reduction legislation that will reduce the amount of waste sent to the overburdened communities of North Brooklyn, South Bronx, and Southeast Queens, and to support Transform Don't Trash NYC's call for a commercial waste collection franchise system that would accomplish the following:

- Establish a series of franchise zones throughout the city that would each be serviced by a single hauler, eliminating overlapping truck routes, and cutting millions of excess waste truck miles travelled and diesel emissions; and,
- Increase commercial recycling rates, currently abysmally low at 16 to 26%, by establishing an enforceable recycling target, which would reduce the amount of waste going to waste transfer stations in overburdened communities.

Thank you and we look forward to working productively with the Environmental Protection Committee, Council, and administration to improve air quality and build an environmentally just solid waste management system in New York City.