

Testimony of Jenny Veloz
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New York City Council Oversight Hearing on Protecting Health Through Improving Air
Quality
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Thank you, members of the Committee on Environmental Protection, for the opportunity to speak with you on improving air quality. My name is Jenny Veloz and I am the environmental justice organizer at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest.

We are facing a climate crisis that will only improve if we as a city begin to do our part. And especially in environmental justice communities in our city, the same sources that cause climate change by emitting greenhouse gases also emit air pollutants that contribute to serious health problems like asthma, respiratory and heart disease. We cannot stand by and continue to do nothing as harmful emissions (such as diesel fumes and fine particulate matter) from trucks, buses, and power plants continue to pollute our air and make it increasingly dangerous to breathe.

There are concrete and immediate ways the City Council can take action to improve air quality. One is improving and updating the city's almost 10,000 school bus fleet, which are old and highly polluting. The average age of a New York City school bus 16 years and emits, on average, 113,850 tons of greenhouse gases per year (resulting in 1.8 million tons of greenhouse gases in a bus's lifetime). The emission of these harmful diesel fumes poses a huge health risk to students. Some students spend more than two hours a day on a school bus (sometimes longer for special education students). It is unimaginable to think that a student with asthma continues to ride a school bus that will worsen his/her medical condition.

The unequal impact of this issue is exacerbated because many school buses depots are located in environmental justice communities, where 1 in 4 children have asthma. Every morning and afternoon hundreds of school buses leave diesel fumes in neighborhoods that also house power plants, truck depots, waste transfer stations, and other polluting sites. School buses also frequently idle in front of schools longer than legally allowed resulting in even more toxic fumes near our children and increasing the likelihood of asthma and other respiratory ailments. For

example, of 105 school buses we observed, 95% idled in front of schools for more than a minute.

We urge the Council to vote Intro 455 into law, which would require the electrification of all school buses by 2040, and would be a long-term solution to reducing the environmental impact of our huge school bus fleet. In the short-term, we can lessen the impact of air pollutants by enforcing existing idling laws.

If we are serious about wanting a cleaner New York, we need to start by easing some of the burdens on environmental justice communities. We can no longer justify housing major causes of air pollution (school bus depots, powerplants, etc.) in these overburdened communities. We are risking the health and well-being of the individuals when we should be ensuring that they live healthy, pollutant-free lives. We all deserve the right to breathe clean air.