TESTIMONY OF THE WATERFRONT ALLIANCE

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ON BEHALF OF ROLAND LEWIS, PRESIDENT AND CEO

NYS ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

The Waterfront Alliance is a civic organization that brings together a diverse coalition of more than 1,000 stakeholders with ties to our regional waterways to inspire and enable resilient, revitalized and accessible coastlines for all communities. Waterfront Alliance has been a strong advocate for smart coastal policy since its inception, and is the developer of WEDG, or the Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines, a rating system and set of guidelines for catalyzing resilient, accessible, and ecologically-sound urban waterfront decision-making for major projects.

The Waterfront Alliance supports the Climate and Community Protection Act and the regulations to achieve statewide greenhouse gas emissions reductions. New York State has an opportunity to be a national leader on climate policy when it is needed most.

VISION FOR OUR FUTURE
We envision a future in which our coastal region is resilient, vibrant, healthy, and accessible for all communities.

SCALE OF THE PROBLEM
We’ve been told by scientists that we have around ten years to make aggressive cuts in our greenhouse gas emissions. This is a generational effort that needs to start now with serious commitments to greenhouse gas reduction and to adaptation of our coastlines.

We’ve already been paying the costs of inaction. From extreme heat to the increased flooding, pollution and resulting climate change have levied a huge toll on us and the globe. Here in New York City, co-pollutants from
fossil fuel emissions have led to some of the highest asthma rates in the country. Heat waves are affecting the lives of our most vulnerable populations. And, in 2012, Hurricane Sandy ravaged the East Coast, causing over $60 billion of damages to the region. As a nation in 2017 alone, we suffered over $300 billion in damages from extreme events, the majority of which was due to flooding and hurricanes Harvey, Maria, and Irma. And, from Howard Beach to Newark, from Norfolk to Louisiana, to our coastal communities across the globe, we are facing hard decisions about the sea level rise we are already locked into. By 2050, more than one million people will be located within the floodplain in our region, and far more beyond.

WE NEED ACTION ON MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION
We need to not only lessen these impacts, but seek opportunities for making a better city, state, and region for generations to come, and to be a model for the rest of our nation. This generational effort begins now. And so let’s legislate emissions reductions and investments in renewable technologies and jobs.

Let’s also invest in resiliency and adaptation. As part of any climate change legislation, let’s ensure that adaptation is part of investments in our communities. We need a variety of options to redefine our relationship with the environment and particularly heat and water: green and grey infrastructure, natural landscape features, and elevation, or even relocation and safe quality housing options in areas of highest flood risk. These safeguards, designed well and with community leaders, can improve the lives of our residents, the health of our infrastructure, the safety of our jobs and businesses, and our recreation options and environmental health. We call on our legislators to increase funding through this and future legislation to reflect the magnitude of the challenge.

We are working with New Yorkers and New Jerseyans to do just that – to identify strategies for how we ensure the safety of millions of lives and billions of dollars of property and infrastructure; how we finance and govern those investments; and how we communicate the urgency of the need. We invite you to join us now, and in 2020 as we build a campaign to build the resilience of our region.
THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR JOBS & JUSTICE

As we think about fossil fuel divestment, alternative energy sources, and coastal resiliency investments, we have an opportunity to rethink how we make these investments, who bears the brunt of the cost, and who benefits. Absent proactive solutions that heartily incorporate an equity lens, there will be winners and losers. It is not the time for the Same Old Deal.

Alternatively, we have the opportunity to not only re-envision our relationship with energy efficiency but also with our coastlines, and think of what we want our future to look like. We also have an opportunity for new jobs and investments that reap returns – one dollar invested now will return eight later in resiliency investments. It takes jobs to protect, replace, retrofit, and redesign existing infrastructure. These safeguards can help protect citizens, industry, utilities, recreation and so many other facets of our lives.

We also see tremendous potential in the New York region with the growth of renewables, clean tech, and with the wind energy sector. The potential to harvest clean energy is enormous, both offshore and in the open ocean, as New York is one of the windiest states in the nation. The Waterfront Alliance supports efforts to build wind turbines off the shores of New York City to reduce the state’s carbon footprint. This effort will support thousands and thousands of waterfront-related green jobs from openings in traditional maritime trades like stevedores, deckhands, and tug captains to new positions in engineering, environmental monitoring, technology development, and turbine maintenance.

We need to aim our sights on a broad framework for planning, action, and financing of resiliency projects in a way that helps to lift all boats citywide, regionally, and nationally, particularly as many of our most vulnerable areas are also those with the highest rates of poverty.

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