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**New York City Council Committee on Environmental Protection Hearing on
Environmental Justice Legislation, Int. No. 886, Int. No. 359**

Statement of Mychal Johnson on behalf of South Bronx Unite

January 28, 2016

My name is Mychal Johnson. I am a resident of the Mott Haven neighborhood in the South Bronx and a member of South Bronx Unite, a coalition of residents, organizations and allies fighting for environmental, economic and social justice in the South Bronx.

I am here to testify in support of Int. No. 886 and Int. No 359, which we believe will begin to lay an important foundation in response to several decades of cycles of harm in environmental justice communities.

For far too long, proposed economic development and planning have taken place in environmental justice communities without either meaningful community input or heightened environmental review.

Over the course of the last several decades, the South Bronx has been plagued with devastating health impacts from an extensive concentration of highway systems encircling our community and an oversaturation of industrial and diesel truck-intensive facilities spread out across an 850 acre significant maritime industrial area (SMIA), the largest in New York City.

It is well known that the South Bronx suffers from asthma rates eight times the national average and asthma hospitalization rates 21 times that of other New York City neighborhoods.

The cause is no mystery. Twelve years ago, the U.S. EPA administered a study - the "South Bronx Environmental Health and Policy Study" - which linked the extreme levels of asthma to the area's oversaturation of highways and industrial facilities, and recommended reduction of truck traffic and more green space. Yet, the assault on our community continued without incorporating these recommendations.

Within the last year alone, we have been faced with three major environmental struggles:



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First, 15 years ago then Governor Pataki placed four peaker power stations in our community, when he brought 10 online throughout the state of NY. Now, the New York Power Authority seeks to re-permit for the third time these supposedly temporary installations that line our waterfront. When first built, these facilities bypassed heightened environmental review on the basis that they generated 79.9 MW, just shy of the trigger for a comprehensive impact analysis, and no pollution mitigation plan was put in place because ambient air quality was determined on a city-wide basis rather than a South Bronx basis. Over the last several months, more than 200 residents and other environmental leaders wrote letters urging rejection of the re-permitting.

Second, Action Environmental Systems is seeking a permit expansion to operate its 3,000 ton per day waste transfer facility, which also sits on our overburdened waterfront. Hundreds of comments from the community were logged against the permit expansion, citing several permit violations, including extremely noxious odors, leaving garbage-loaded tractor trailers on public streets, and littering the area outside of the gates. The community still awaits a decision.

Third – and perhaps the most egregious - is the proposed relocation of FreshDirect, which would bring 1,000 additional diesel truck trips through the South Bronx every day, all with a \$130 million subsidy. It shows how our own city agencies - EDC and IDA - oversaw and approved FreshDirect's cursory environmental assessment that was based off of a 20 year old Environmental Impact Statement and somehow concluded - with the help of a few lobbyist and government hires - that this volume of additional trucks would not exacerbate our community's chronic respiratory ailments.

These are just three examples of the types of struggles from which this environmental justice community is forced to defend itself.

We thank the members of this committee for the opportunity to testify in this regard. Our community, like others across the city, deserves to have the same opportunity to live full and healthy lives without having to constantly fight for the right to breathe. This legislation is an important step in that direction, particularly as it seeks to develop solutions in partnership with the impacted communities.

We are happy to assist in further discussing the sources of the problem as well as the breadth of solutions. One recommendation we would offer today is that you consider incorporation as interagency working group members both the Department of Sanitation as well as the Department of Small Business Services (as the agency that funds EDC and IDA), because these agencies have a significant presence and impact in the South Bronx. Thank you.