

September 21, 2023

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Support for Bill to Preserve Community Gardens (S.629-A/A.4139-A)

Dear Governor Hochul:

We write today, as community gardeners from across New York State, to urge you to support the state's community gardens by signing S.629-A/A.4139-A into law. The bill, which passed the Senate and Assembly unanimously, would support community gardens by requiring the New York State Community Gardens Task Force to assess whether community gardens on publicly owned land are eligible for designation as Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs) and to recommend CEA designation for eligible gardens.

Signing this bill will advance your goal of expanding community gardens,¹ as supporting existing community gardens is a crucial first step to expanding them. During this summer of high food prices, extreme weather, and dangerous air pollution, supporting community gardens is more important than ever. As discussed below, community gardens effectively mitigate all these harms, very often in the marginalized and under-resourced communities that are most burdened by them. In so doing, community gardens are helping to restore communities by providing the critical nature-based resources that enable them to equitably recover their dignity-affirming self-sufficiency, resilience, and sustainability.

Community gardens contribute to a resilient and sustainable food system by supporting local, affordable food production. During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent supply chain disruptions, which exposed and exacerbated food insecurity in marginalized and under-resourced communities, community gardens served as a lifeline for many New Yorkers, acting as trusted distribution sites for free fruits and vegetables. Chloe Smith, Founder of 490 Farmers in Rochester, explains, **“The array of community gardens throughout downtown Rochester that offer free produce is absolutely vital for folks with limited access to grocery stores and helps mitigate some of the damage created by widespread food insecurity.”** Community gardens also allow New Yorkers to grow foods that reflect their diverse backgrounds and cultures. According to Tim Chen, Executive Director at Grassroots Gardens of Western New York in Buffalo, **“Witnessing food being grown in one’s neighborhood opens up a wealth of opportunities and imagination and provides a gateway to the local food system for many, while simultaneously offering the chance for education and culturally relevant food growing and sharing.”** Community gardens thus increase New Yorkers’ access to affordable, healthful food while honoring their sense of human dignity.

Community gardens support resilience against extreme weather, which is increasingly common and devastating in New York. Trees and other vegetation in community gardens offer relief from extreme temperatures.² As Gary DiPasquale, Garden Treasurer at Oasis Community

Garden in New York City, puts it, **“You walk by the garden, and you can feel the coolness from the garden on the sidewalk.”**³ Sustainable, nature-based green infrastructure in community gardens—such as rain-collection systems, pervious surfaces, rain garden plantings, bioswales, and compost-amended soil—helps communities cope with flooding due to extreme precipitation. Heat and flooding disproportionately burden marginalized and under-resourced communities in New York.⁴ Because community gardens are often located in and stewarded by these communities,⁵ they support equitable resiliency against the effects of extreme weather.

Community gardens also help improve air quality, as their trees and vegetation filter pollutants from the air.⁶ According to Karen Washington, a garden activist and original gardener at Garden of Happiness in New York City, **“We say the gardens are the lungs of the City.”**⁷ Like extreme weather, air pollution disproportionately burdens marginalized and under-resourced communities.⁸ Community gardens help address this unequal burden.

Despite offering these and many other benefits, community gardens have few legal protections. Too often, community gardens have been destroyed without appropriate regard for their immense value to the community or adequate opportunity for community input. CEA designation would address these problems by triggering additional procedural steps for proposed projects that threaten designated gardens. Decision-makers would be required to take into account the gardens’ important contributions, while ensuring that gardeners’ views receive fair consideration. In this way, CEA designation supports an equitable and inclusive decision-making process. By directing the New York State Community Gardens Task Force to collect the information necessary for CEA designation, this bill would bring community gardens closer to the protection they need and deserve.

In short, S.629-A/A.4139-A would help to ensure that community gardens continue to promote sustainability, advance equity, and strengthen New York communities for generations to come. Signing this bill will make clear to New Yorkers that they can and should increase the resilience and vitality of their neighborhoods by investing in community gardens. We urge you to sign this bill, which will benefit all New Yorkers, without delay. Thank you for your timely and thoughtful consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Aaron Diskin	New York, NY
Aazam Otero	Bronx, NY
Abigail Wilson	New York, NY
Abigayle Barry	New York, NY
Addison Moore	New York, NY
Adriana Mayobre	Manhattan, NY
Agnes Chen	New York, NY
Alan Ginsberg	New York, NY
Alec Chi	Brooklyn, NY
Alecia Baucom	New York, NY
Alexa Bleustein	New York, NY

Alexandria Cox	Bronx, NY
Alicia Zheng	New York, NY
Allison Heeney	New York, NY
Alyson Sheehan	New York, NY
Amalia Yoo	New York, NY
Amanda Caputo	Bronx, NY
Amanda Chino	New York, NY
Amanda Franklin	New York, NY
Amiel Lucre	Bronx, NY
Amy Starecheski	Bronx, NY
Anamaría Flores	Bronx, NY
Anara Zhakupova	New York, NY
Angel Tobar	Bronx, NY
Angela Massey	Bronx, NY
Angela Serina	Brooklyn, NY
Anike Cherry	Bronx, NY
Ann Lee	New York, NY
Anna Fikhman	Brooklyn, NY
Anna Harsanyi	New York, NY
Annie Gomez	Bronx, NY
Aprellia Stanley	Bronx, NY
Arianna Geneson	Brooklyn, NY
Ashani Ranwala	Brooklyn, NY
Ashley Blumlein	New York, NY
Audrey Jenkins	Brooklyn, NY
Aviya Goldstein	New York, NY
Ben Medeiros	Bronx, NY
Benjamin Brigman	New York, NY
Benjamin Heim Shepard	Brooklyn, NY
Bessie Qu	New York, NY
Betsy Quan	New York, NY
Brooke Lorenzetti	Brooklyn, NY
Bryan Keller	New York, NY
Cameron Choi Loeb	New York, NY
Cameron Gregg	Bronx, NY
Carlos Rosario	Bronx, NY
Carolyn Weverbergh	Brooklyn, NY
Cayla Casciani	Bronx, NY
Chantal Phaire	Bronx, NY
Chloe Smith	Rochester, NY
Chloe Warren	New York, NY

Chrissy Word	New York, NY
Concetta Gleason	Bronx, NY
Connor Hicks	New York, NY
Crystal-Angelee Burrell	Brooklyn, NY
Dakota LeRoy	New York, NY
Dani Villacis	Brooklyn, NY
Daniel Sergile	New York, NY
Daniel Tainoe	New York, NY
Danielle King Powell	Bronx, NY
David Goldberg	New York, NY
David Schultz	New York, NY
David Soto	New York, NY
Earl Brown	Bronx, NY
Eileen Ferme	New York, NY
Eileen McCarthy	Brooklyn, NY
Eleanor Castano	New York, NY
Elena Kliss	Brooklyn, NY
Eli Sparks	Bronx, NY
Ella Breiman	New York, NY
Ellen Horan	Brooklyn, NY
Ellen Reznick	New York, NY
Emil Bundgaard Ipsen	New York, NY
Emily Compton	Long Island City, NY
Emily Klockenbrink	Brooklyn, NY
Eric Huang	New York, NY
Erica Tello	Brooklyn, NY
Erica Uhlenbeck	New York, NY
Erza Kukaj	New York, NY
Eura Chun	New York, NY
Eveline Schneider	New York, NY
Evelyn Machauf	New York, NY
Felicia Young	New York, NY
Fran McGorty	New York, NY
Francine Demeulenaere	New York, NY
Gabriela Roberts	Bronx, NY
Georgia Panitch	New York, NY
Gia Granatell	New York, NY
Gia Pechilio	Bronx, NY
Grace Amato	New York, NY
Grace Lachman	New York, NY
Grace Shannon	New York, NY

Greg Winter	New York, NY
Habiba Lam	New York, NY
Haja Worley	New York, NY
Haniyyah Usmani	Bronx, NY
Hannah Berggren	New York, NY
Heather Gaynor	New York, NY
Hugo Crespo	New York, NY
Hung Nguyen	Brooklyn, NY
Isabella Lipayon	New York, NY
Isabella Neihardt	New York, NY
Ivette Vargas	Bronx, NY
Jacob Purdue	New York, NY
Jaileen Pierre-Louis	Bronx, NY
Jane Lauterback	New York, NY
Janine Sleem	New York, NY
Jared Goldstein	New York, NY
Jasamie Nguyen	New York, NY
Jasmín Durán	New York, NY
Jasmine White	New York, NY
Jasmyn Peterson	Brooklyn, NY
Jeannette Salcedo	Bronx, NY
Jeffrey Stein	Brooklyn, NY
Jennifer Bennett	New York, NY
Jennifer Sloan	New York, NY
Jennifer Tomaiolo	Bronx, NY
Jessica Guzman	Bronx, NY
Jillian Sullivan	Bronx, NY
Joanna Weislogel	Brooklyn, NY
Johannes Familton	New York, NY
John Bargiel	New York, NY
John Summers	Bronx, NY
Jonathan Randall	New York, NY
Joseph Reiver	Manhattan, NY
Judith Canepa	New York, NY
Julia Fabiszewski	New York, NY
Julia Shteyngardt	Brooklyn, NY
Julian Rodriguez	New York, NY
Julianne Zaleta	Brooklyn, NY
Justin Barash	New York, NY
Kaitlyn Hennings	New York, NY
Kaoru Komi	New York, NY

Karen Watanabe	Sunnyside, NY
Karin Kincheloe	New York, NY
Karin Kiontke	Brooklyn, NY
Katelyn Martins	New York, NY
Katherine Kavourakis	New York, NY
Katherine Luongo	New York, NY
Katherine Walendzik	New York, NY
Kathryn Tanner	Bronx, NY
Katie Fried	New York, NY
Katie Hush	Brooklyn, NY
Kayla Hollon	Brooklyn, NY
Kazuko Aida-Scott	New York, NY
Kei Andersen	New York, NY
Kelly Morrison	Bronx, NY
Kevin Dackow	New York, NY
Kevin Maysonet	Bronx, NY
Kiara Martinez	Bronx, NY
Kingsley Taylor	Bronx, NY
Kirah Brown	New York, NY
Kiscada Hastings	New York, NY
Kitty (Kadeesha) Williams	Bronx, NY
Kristine Krieger	New York, NY
Kyra DeGroot	New York, NY
LaToya Meaders	Brooklyn, NY
Laura Babiak	Bronx, NY
Laura James	Bronx, NY
Laura Lomas	New York, NY
Lauren Ingerman	New York, NY
Layla Kluth	New York, NY
Lila Elman	Brooklyn, NY
Lila Moss	Brooklyn, NY
Lisa Miller	New York, NY
Lisvette Woodard	Bronx, NY
Livia Nieves	Bronx, NY
Liz Garfield	New York, NY
Lori Ferme	New York, NY
Lucy Johnston	New York, NY
Lucy Knaus	New York, NY
Luke Bolton	Brooklyn, NY
Lyn-Genet Recitas	Dobby Ferry, NY
Madi Duffy	New York, NY

Madison DeLaere	New York, NY
Magali Regis	New York, NY
Manuchehr Sassoonian	New York, NY
Marcela Avelina	New York, NY
Marcella Durand	New York, NY
Marcia Lawther	New York, NY
Margaret M. Breed	New York, NY
Margaret ORourke	New York, NY
Maria Lazarini	Brooklyn, NY
Maria Michael	New York, NY
Mariano Figueroa	Bronx, NY
Mark Hammer	New York, NY
Mark Harada	New York, NY
Matt Zwimpfer	New York, NY
Matthew Ritchie	New York, NY
Mattia-Miyo Colon	Bronx, NY
Maureen Chavis	Bronx, NY
Maureen O'Brien	Brooklyn, NY
Maya Bea Scott-Luib	Brooklyn, NY
Maya Bendavid	New York, NY
Maya Gordon-Guterman	New York, NY
Maya Marie	Brooklyn, NY
Maya Olson	New York, NY
Megan Maloskey	New York, NY
Megan Rutherford	Bronx, NY
Melissa Moon	Brooklyn, NY
Michael Hawley	New York, NY
Michael Hoerner	New York, NY
Michael Wang	New York, NY
Michelle Carr	Bronx, NY
Nadege Alexis	Harlem, NY
Nana Kumi	New York, NY
Nancy Ortiz-Surun	Bronx, NY
Naomi Basu	New York, NY
Natalie Ellaoune	New York, NY
Netza Moreno	Bronx, NY
Nicolas Lugo	Queens, NY
Nneka Njoku	Long Island City, NY
Noelani Kidder	Brooklyn, NY
Nola Dwyer-Hernandez	New York, NY
Oliver Yeung	New York, NY

Olivia Conley	New York, NY
Olivia Wohlgemuth	Brooklyn, NY
Omar E. Fajardo	Bronx, NY
Pamela Galvin	Brooklyn, NY
Pamela Morales	Bronx, NY
Patricia Hodges	Bronx, NY
Patrick Moynan	New York, NY
Paul Rivers	New York, NY
Paul Wasserman	Brooklyn, NY
Peter Cramer	New York, NY
Petra Zanki	Brooklyn, NY
Pratibha Nagarajan	New York, NY
Prettystar Lopez	Bronx, NY
Rachael Harrington	Bronx, NY
Racheal Tarapacki	Buffalo, NY
Ranya Perez	Bronx, NY
Raymond Figueroa, Jr.	Bronx, NY
Rebecca Perrin	New York, NY
Rebecka Jerome	New York, NY
Rene Calvo	New York, NY
Renee Keitt	New York, NY
Rhoma Mostl	New York, NY
Rich Garr	Brooklyn, NY
Richard Dryden	Brooklyn, NY
Rita Shapsis	New York, NY
Robert Guzman	Bronx, NY
Robert Kurilla	New York, NY
Rosana De Leon	New York, NY
Rudy Marrero	Bronx, NY
Rukiya Story	Bronx, NY
Saad Saadi	New York, NY
Sally Burns	New York, NY
Samantha Rosendale	Brooklyn, NY
Sara Jones	Calverton, NY
Sarah Bacio	Brooklyn, NY
Sarah Brokamp	Brooklyn, NY
Sarah Gorayeb	New York, NY
Sarah Williams	New York, NY
Sazia Patel	Bronx, NY
Scott Garrison	New York, NY
Serge Korolev	New York, NY

Shankar Kumar	New York, NY
Shanta Moosai	Manhattan, NY
Sheila McDevitt	Brooklyn, NY
Sophia Powers	New York, NY
Sophie anderson	New York, NY
Sra Feigelman	Brooklyn, NY
Stacey Dolchin	New York, NY
Stefanie Callender	New York, NY
Stella Brown	New York, NY
Stephanie Harrison	Brooklyn, NY
Susan Howard	New York, NY
Susan Kirschbaum	New York, NY
Suzanne Moss	New York, NY
Suzette Shih	Port Washington, NY
Sylvain Leroux	New York, NY
Taina Traverso	New York, NY
Tata Sato	New York, NY
Taziah Taveras	Bronx, NY
Temperance Downing	New York, NY
Thomas Spada	New York, NY
Timothy Chen	Buffalo, NY
Timothy Mendenhall	New York, NY
Tracy Fitz	Brooklyn, NY
Tucker Smith	Brooklyn, NY
Vianca Lugo	Brooklyn, NY
Victoria Shvydchenko	New York, NY
Vincent Fiore	New York, NY
W Annette Ervin	Arverne, NY
Wadiyyah Salaam	New York, NY
Walkania Santos	Uniondale, NY
Wendy Brawer	New York, NY
Will Thomson	New York, NY
Yamelli Hernandez	Bronx, NY
Yasmin Schwartz	Brooklyn, NY
Yessica Estrella	Bronx, NY
Yvonne Brooks	Brooklyn, NY
Zoe Arcidiacono	Bronx, NY
Zoe Louis	New York, NY

¹ See New York State Governor Kathy Hochul, State of the State: Achieving the New York Dream 185 (2023), <https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/2023SOTSBook.pdf>.

² See City of N.Y., Cool Neighborhoods NYC 11 (2017), https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/orr/pdf/Cool_Neighborhoods_NYC_Report.pdf.

³ Interview by Sorangel Liriano & Kara Goad with Gary DiPasquale, Garden Treasurer, Oasis Community Garden, in New York, N.Y. (July 16, 2021).

⁴ See John Leland, *Why an East Harlem Street is 31 Degrees Hotter Than Central Park West*, N.Y. Times (Aug. 20, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/20/nyregion/climate-inequality-nyc.html>; Winnie Hu, *Extreme Weather Is Soaking New York City. Community Gardens Can Help*, N.Y. Times (July 27, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/27/nyregion/community-gardens-nyc.html>; Christopher Flavelle, Anne Barnard, Brad Plumer, & Michael Kimmelman, *Overlapping Disasters Expose Harsh Climate Reality: The U.S. Is Not Ready*, N.Y. Times (Sept. 2, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/02/climate/new-york-rain-floods-climate-change.html>.

⁵ See David Brand, *Community Gardens Could Play Key Role in NYC's Outdoor Learning Plan—If the City Lets Them*, Queens Daily Eagle (Aug. 26, 2020), <https://queenseagle.com/all/community-gardens-could-play-key-role-in-nycs-outdoor-learning-plan-if-the-city-lets-them>.

⁶ See Samuel S. T. Pressman & Raymond Figueroa, Jr., *Money Does Grow on Trees: An Equitable Perspective for Increasing Urban Well-Being via Greening Land Valuation and Scaling Ecosystem Services in Communities*, Graduate Ctr. for Planning & The Env't (2019), https://commons.pratt.edu/sesresearch/wp-content/uploads/sites/157/2020/02/2019_Fall_Samuel_Pressman_Report.pdf.

⁷ Sorangel Liriano, *Meet Community Gardeners of New York City*, Earthjustice (2020), <https://earthjustice.org/features/community-gardeners-new-york-city>.

⁸ See Hiroko Tabuchi & Nadja Popovich, *People of Color Breathe More Hazardous Air. The Sources Are Everywhere*, N.Y. Times (Sept. 7, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/28/climate/air-pollution-minorities.html>.