

October 17, 2022

New York City Council
ATTN: Environmental Chair James F. Gennaro and Speaker Adrienne E. Adams
New York City Hall
250 Broadway, New York, NY 10007
[By Electronic Mail]

Re: Importance of Promptly Passing Councilmember Alexa Avilés's Intro 606 and Councilmember Julie Menin's Intro 684 to Combat Health Effects of Vehicle Engine Idling

Dear New York City Council,

We write to emphasize the importance of two new City Council bill introductions aimed at reducing vehicle, and particularly truck and bus, engine idling. Specifically, Councilmember Alexa Avilés's 2022 Intro 606 and Councilmember Julie Menin's 2022 Intro 684 are valuable tools for reducing air pollution and its associated adverse health effects in New York City. These health effects are most pronounced in the largely minority communities of the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn, but still pose a substantial degree of risk to all New Yorkers.

Air pollution is a public health emergency and New Yorkers are particularly impacted. New York City is densely populated and New Yorkers are exposed to pollutants from exhaust fumes from vehicular traffic no matter where in the city they live or work. Those who are outside near traffic are breathing in particularly high concentrations of pollutants. This group notably includes children playing in parks, playgrounds, and green-spaces near such traffic. Vehicular idling - that is, needlessly combusting fossil fuels while the vehicle is stationary without any legitimate engine-based work task being performed - significantly and unnecessarily adds to this pollutant exposure.

It is well-known that traffic-related air pollution is causally linked to pediatric (and adult) asthma. However, traffic-related air pollution, which is neurotoxic, has also been causally linked to strokes, heart attacks, cancers, mental health issues, and dementia. In children, it has been associated with low birth weight, intrauterine growth retardation, delays in brain maturation, behavioral problems, and learning issues.

As a society, we have a responsibility and obligation to protect the health of New Yorkers, particularly of vulnerable New Yorkers such as children, by minimizing exposure to these pollutants. While some efforts have been made, we have not lived up to our obligation. Over the

past ten years, New York City has engaged in various anti-idling enforcement and public awareness initiatives, including a two-week crackdown in 2012 and an associated distribution of literature during asthma awareness month, (https://www1.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/press_releases/12-32pr.shtml) encouraging civilians to provide evidence of commercial idling violations to the NYC DEP via various Local Laws, and even engaging rocker Billy Idol in 2020 to remind drivers that “Billy doesn’t idle, so why should you?” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7xa0ufQaVE>).

However, by all objective measures, the idling problem has not been adequately addressed, let alone solved. Far from it, this year the NYC DEP has received record volumes of idling complaints. Many large companies refuse to consistently comply with the anti-idling law, with several engaging in such extreme levels of recidivism that their fleet has been caught idling and issued NYC DEP summonses well over **one thousand** times. It is therefore evident that the current fine levels are an insufficient deterrent to idling.

It is critical that we enact measures that are actually effective at stopping, or at a minimum greatly reducing, idling as soon as possible so that the predictable and preventable adverse health effects can be averted. Intros 606 and 684 are extraordinarily well-focused measures towards achieving this goal.

Intro 606 builds on the existing, relatively stringent idling rules that protect children in school zones by applying those same rules to other locations where children are particularly vulnerable to pollutants—such as parks, playgrounds, and green-spaces where children are likely to be playing. Intro 684 overhauls, albeit for commercial trucks and buses only, the current fine structure that is clearly insufficient to deter recidivist corporate violators. The improved fines of Intro 684 – which escalate for recidivists – are positioned at a level that recidivist violators will be incentivized to take measures to avoid idling, for example engaging in driver training, installing back-up power sources for needed equipment, and/or installing auto-shutoffs on trucks and buses.

Both Intros are sorely needed to mitigate the known adverse health effects of traffic-related air pollution in children and adults. Intros 606 and 684 should be promptly heard and passed by the full Council. Doing so will also yield secondary benefits, such as a City that contributes less to climate change, is quieter, and is less full of noxious smells.

Respectfully yours,

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