



**New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Oversight – The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture**

Intro. 1059-2018

January 27, 2021

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Good afternoon. My name is Jessica Saab, and I am the Advocacy and Communications Project Manager at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). I want to thank the Committee on Parks and Recreation for hosting today's hearing.

Community gardens play a critical and often overlooked role in our city's open space network. With over 550 community gardens citywide, these spaces, which are created and maintained by dedicated volunteers, drive grassroots neighborhood development, create space for our vibrant multicultural communities, and help address food insecurity on a local scale. Many gardens are the site of food production directly, but others also act as sites for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) distribution as well as composting. Community gardens also provide a means for young New Yorkers to directly interact with land in ways that are often not available to residents in our dense built-out city. During the pandemic, some community garden groups stepped up even more, establishing community fridges, connecting networks of mutual aid, and growing additional food for neighbors.

In 2019, New Yorkers for Parks launched the Play Fair Coalition and Campaign, which sought to increase the expense budget for NYC Parks. One of the key pieces of our budget platform was an \$8M investment into our community garden network. We were thrilled when the City Council secured this funding, which marked the first-ever system-wide investment for community gardens. This funding allowed NYC Parks to hire 15 additional Outreach Coordinators for the GreenThumb division, provide fencing and sidewalks improvements to gardens in the GreenThumb network, and provide materials for gardens citywide. While this funding was not renewed in the FY21 budget, we hope that the City Council and Mayor's office will continue to value and invest in our community garden network and the incredible network of dedicated volunteers.

We are also testifying today in support of Intro. 1059, which would require NYC Parks to undertake a report to aggregate community gardens citywide that are engaged in urban agriculture. Having a detailed accounting of where there are additional opportunities for green spaces and urban food production in the City will provide useful data for decision-makers and communities citywide. We

also believe the data gathered in this report would help the City better allocate resources to gardens in need of additional material support. The City Council previously released a report called “Growing Food Equity in New York City” which proposed multiple policy initiatives that would help garden groups respond more effectively to issues in their communities. We recommend that the Council implement those policies as well to better protect community gardens and enhance their ability to thrive.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I’m happy to answer any questions the Council might have.

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*For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks](http://www.ny4p.org) (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods.
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