



**NYC Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management
Fiscal 2023 Preliminary Budget Hearing**

**Testimony Submitted by
Equity Advocates' Youth Food Justice Organizers Program**

Hello, our names are Joshua, Noumou, Vera, Mehdi, Julio, and Messiah, and we are New York City residents ages 14-22 who are participating in Equity Advocates' Youth Food Justice Organizers Program. Thank you to Chairperson Nurse as well as the staff and members of the NYC Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management for holding today's hearing and the opportunity to submit this testimony.

The Youth Food Justice Organizers Program is a cohort of young New York City residents learning about food policy and engaging in advocacy to advance food justice in our communities. During our 8-month program, we meet biweekly to learn about urban agriculture policy and local food governance, New York City budget cycle and food funding, how to provide testimony at a city council hearing, and best practices for meeting with policy makers. We have also completed individual research projects, where we researched a current food systems-related bill, and presented our research to our peers. Our program is run by Equity Advocates, which builds the capacity of nonprofit organizations to address the underlying causes of food inequity through policy and systems change.

As New York City youth, we believe that a citywide compost pickup service is an important solution to our growing problem of waste disposal in New York City. As young people, we have an important and unique stake in this discussion, because the issues of climate change, environmental degradation, and food waste impact the future generations the most. Noumou believes that "composting affects the youth because the actions we take now will have an impact on future generations. For instance, if we didn't compost as much then pollution would probably get worse progressively." Mehdi adds that composting "affects the youth because future generations will grow up and take care of the environment so it's good for the youth to know effective composting."

Benefits of Composting

As Teens For Food Justice student and alumni advocates, we have all also worked on NYC urban or hydroponics farms and many of us have participated in composting programs directly, so we can attest to the benefits to the community. Messiah explains that "if we compost more, it would get rid of trash on the floor in our communities, make people want to pick up other trash, and create an environment where we care for our environment and communities." Urban gardeners benefit from



the soil created in the composting process and can in turn provide fresh produce for our communities. Joshua believes that “just like we recycle our metal waste and make new things, we should do the same with compost. It’s less popular and not as well understood, but it’s important to use it to make soil. It should be done just like recycling. Waste has to go somewhere and we’d rather use it.” Moreover, waste often builds up in landfills or is incinerated near low-income communities of color, creating racialized public health disparities. Creating a robust compost program is critical to addressing issues of environmental racism in New York City.

Fund and Promote the City’s Composting Program

We urge the City to restore funding for the planned and promised expansion of the City’s Organics Curbside Composting program as well as for community composting programs. We also know that while fully funding this program is necessary, it is not enough on its own without an awareness of how to effectively compost. While Julio believes this is an important issue, he does not have a lot of personal experience with composting. He feels that “one of the issues is lack of awareness around how to compost, why it is important, and how it helps the community.” We are interested in learning more about composting and its benefits. To address this, the City must also educate communities on the benefits of composting. As Vera explains, “composting is important and relevant because we have so much waste and this is a great solution for that issue. If all the families in my community start composting, we can reduce the total waste which in exchange would benefit the earth.” Ultimately, a City-Wide composting program is important to the young people of New York City who want to live with a clean environment, racial equity, and a sustainable future.

We thank members of this committee for your valuable time and for holding this important hearing on the Mayor’s Preliminary Budget. We look forward to working with you on your budget efforts and policy solutions that will help make our food system more equitable and sustainable.

Sincerely,
Joshua, 20, Bronx
Noumou, 14, Bronx
Vera, 15, Manhattan
Mehdi, 15, Bronx
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For more information, you can reach out to Jeremy Berger, Equity Advocates’ Youth Food Justice Organizer, at jeremy@nyequityadvocates.org.