



**Testimony**

of

**Carolyn Olson**

**Assistant Commissioner, Environmental Surveillance and Policy  
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**

before the

**New York City Council Committee on Health**

on

**Cooling Centers**

**April 8, 2025**

**Committee Room, City Hall  
New York City**

Good morning, Chair Schulman and members of the Health Committee. I am Carolyn Olson, Assistant Commissioner for Environmental Surveillance and Policy at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. On behalf of Acting Commissioner Morse, thank you for the opportunity to join my colleague from New York City Emergency Management to testify today on this legislation concerning cooling centers.

Extreme heat events are, on average, the most dangerous type of extreme weather, killing hundreds of New Yorkers every year. As described by First Deputy Commissioner Farrell, the City activates the heat emergency plan by relying on the National Weather Service's science-based advisories, issued based on their highly specialized forecasted heat index. Advisories recommend that people most vulnerable to heat impacts use their home air conditioner if they have one, or if not, that they go to an air-conditioned place, such as a cooling center, shopping center, or the home of a friend. These advisories also urge the public and service providers to check on people who are vulnerable to heat-related health impacts, especially those without residential air conditioning, who have a chronic physical or mental health problem, or are elderly.

There are several reasons that cooling centers are an important component of the City's multi-pronged response to heat emergencies. First, health risks from extreme heat are significant. While seasonal hot weather contributes to heat stress, when the heat index reaches about 95 degrees and above, the risk of serious illness or death increases rapidly. Second, heat stress is cumulative. Consecutive days of extreme heat compound the risk as the body's temperature rises and dehydration worsens. Third, our epidemiologic research has shown that lack of air conditioning at home during extreme heat is the strongest risk factor for heat stroke death. About 90 percent of adult New Yorkers have home air conditioning and about 75 percent of vulnerable adults report using home air conditioning often during extreme heat. But about 80 percent of the victims of lethal heat stroke die at home, almost always without working residential cooling. For all these reasons, cooling centers are a key part of an extreme heat public health protection strategy.

I will turn now to the legislation's proposal to open cooling centers on days with air quality health advisories, regardless of the forecasted heat index. The Health Department concurs with NYCEM in our appreciation for the intent behind this proposal, as well as in our concerns with its implementation and potential impacts. While well-intentioned, this proposal is unlikely to reduce pollution exposure and could have the opposite effect – increasing it in some cases – while placing a heavy financial burden on the City. When there is extreme heat, cooling centers definitely lower

people's heat exposure because of air conditioning, which allows for recovery from heat stress. As little as a few hours in a cool environment can decrease a person's risk of poor health outcomes due to heat. In contrast, any indoor location during an air quality event will reduce a person's exposure to air pollution, so we tell New Yorkers to limit their time outdoors as much as possible. When the air quality is poor, a person's short-term exposure to pollution could be increased by any time spent traveling outdoors – including to visit a cooling center. In addition, it is much harder to ensure that a cooling center's air quality is any better than in a person's home. The center they visit may have poorly designed ventilation or be in a more polluted location than their home or workplace, like near a high-traffic road.

After the air quality event from wildfire smoke in 2023, the City developed a detailed emergency response protocol for any similar events. An important component of this preparation was the development of clear, evidence-based health messaging for New Yorkers based on the EPA's Air Quality Index – or AQI. The Health Department provides guidance for the general public and for child care and school settings on our website for air quality events. The primary message we want to deliver is that short-term ambient air pollution exposure is driven by two main factors – the amount of time spent outside and people's level of activity when they are outdoors. During lower-level advisories for people who are sensitive to air pollution, we do not advise changes in behavior for the general public. Once the AQI reaches 150 it can be unhealthy for anyone and our messaging focuses on staying indoors and limiting any strenuous activity outside. Opening public cooling centers as “clean air” centers would conflict with the clear, evidence-based messaging to stay home.

Lastly, the health effects from short-term air pollution exposure increase gradually, in contrast to the rapid rise in illness and death associated with extreme heat. The best way to protect vulnerable New Yorkers from air pollution will be to continue to implement programs to reduce levels of air pollution in the city and, thereby, decrease the chronic exposures that have the greatest impact on health.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. First Deputy Commissioner Farrell and I would be happy to take questions.



**New York City Department of Emergency Management  
Committee on Health Hearing  
April 8, 2025**

Good morning, Chairperson Shulman and members of the Committee on Health. I am Christina Farrell, First Deputy Commissioner at New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM). I am joined today by Carolyn Olsen from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. We are here today to discuss Introduction 998, a bill to codify the City's Cooling Center Program.

NYCEM, with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health) and other agencies, maintains plans and protocols to guide New York City's response to heat emergencies, including plans for cooling the public, messaging, and providing guidance to individuals, agencies, and the private sector on suggested actions for the public to remain safe during periods of extreme heat.

When the City's Heat Emergency Plan is activated, extensive messaging is disseminated through citywide channels, including press releases, City agency websites, Notify NYC, NYC Advance Warning System, 311, elected officials and community partners, and social media channels.

Cooling center facilities are not operated by NYCEM but are managed by public and private sector agency partners, each with their own hours of operation and level of accessibility. Cooling centers are air-conditioned spaces, such as older adult centers, community centers, public libraries, and other facilities that typically operate during daytime hours and are free and open to the public. Cooling centers that are available for public use are listed on the Cool Options Finder, a 24/7 online tool where New Yorkers can see open options during a heat emergency. New Yorkers may also call 311 for this information.

The Cooling Center program is only one of the ways Emergency Management aims to address extreme heat. In 2024, Emergency Management revised our Heat Emergency Plan to emphasize additional 'Cool Options' and updated the 'Cool Options Finder' to ensure year-round accessibility. NYCEM has expanded its partnerships to offer more cooling centers, including cultural sites and elected officials' offices. We are also focused our approach on where to tell New Yorkers to go on hot days – which can include many “options” throughout the city, such as family/friends, museum, commercial facilities, pools. And on heat emergency days – the City ensures that our partner sites are available as cooling centers, a type of cool option. We are grateful to the four City Councilmembers who have agreed to have their offices identified as a cooling center and added to the finder, and we hope that other elected officials will also do so this year.

This legislation as relates to cooling centers for heat emergencies is largely already in action. There are a few details we would like to discuss further with Council, such as updating definitions to be consistent with those we use in our plans, and discussing the survey component which comes with a significant cost, yet we believe would not yield actionable results. Further, in 2020, the New York City Council passed Local Law 85 which codified the cooling center program under NYCEM's administrative code with the requirement that the agency submit an annual report to Council detailing various components as well as publishing it on our website. This report, which we are diligently in compliance with each year, is largely duplicative to the reporting requirements detailed in this legislation.

However, we have significant concerns about the tying of air quality indexes into the cooling center program. As our colleague at NYC Health Department will testify to, pushing people to leave their homes to go to 'clean air centers' poses health challenges that may outweigh any potential benefits, as the impact

and effectiveness of clean air centers has not been tested. To provide some further context here, and as we testified to in the two 2023 air quality hearings and ask Council to reference for much more detail related to air quality emergencies, forecasting air quality indexes, especially for smoke, is incredibly difficult and complex because forecasts are issued by the State Department of Environmental Conservation on the day of. Air quality can change rapidly. Predicting if air quality will improve or worsen can be difficult because of the unpredictable behavior of wildfires and factors such as wind, weather, and terrain. The City does not get an official notification on air quality. Instead, the New York City Health Department monitors the air quality index daily and will issue a health advisory if there is a potential for New Yorkers to be affected by poor air quality. NYCEM then pushes that messaging out through Notify NYC.

As said above, the City does not operate cooling centers but rather relies on our partners; these partners commit to providing air-conditioned spaces with seating and water. Asking them to verify that their air is 'clean' is scientifically fraught and comes at a significant cost – the estimate for the legislation at hand starts at least \$260 million for initial retrofit and increases each year in perpetuity to maintain the 'clean air' standard. This cost reflects the science that most air quality alerts that NYCEM amplifies are due to high ozone levels rather than smoke. Traditional air conditioners and HVAC systems do not filter ozone and facilities would have to retrofitted. Even LEED certified buildings such as NYCEM headquarters do not fit the standards being asked. We have had conversations with our west coast partners, such as Los Angeles, Seattle, and San Francisco, who have been candid about the different models they have taken to address their air quality issues; they generally work with nonprofit and community centers and have received funding through grants and state boards, yet have not seen high demand for these centers; we will continue to speak with them and learn from their best practices. However, as Council also knows, there is a growing and concerning unreliability of federal funding. For example, recently the federal Environmental Protection Agency announced plans to cut hundreds of grants of more than \$1.7 billion. We rely on the EPA for air quality monitoring and guidance and, as a base level, are now unsure about the future of air quality monitoring in general.

Requiring partner organizations to open for high air quality indexes would entail significant changes to how the cooling center program currently operates as an effective and successful program to provide cool options to those vulnerable to heat emergencies, thereby diluting the effectiveness of our extreme heat messaging and potentially causing our critical partners to balk at continuing their partnership. Add that to the fact that cooling centers open for a very real and scientifically backed health reason related to heat exposure, but that there is no scientific backing the same measures for air quality exposure, further dilutes the effectiveness of our messaging. We ask Council not to tie clean air centers to cooling centers as they do not provide relief from air quality changes.

Air quality is something we have long monitored and built into our response procedures. We worked with our agency partners and City Hall to develop the *New York City Air Quality Emergency Guide* in late 2023 and have socialized this with training and seminars for our partners. We have masks available at police precincts. Firehouses, libraries and for electeds who request them, as Councilmember Schulman is aware, having taken us up on this offer and been provided with masks to hand out to her vulnerable constituents. Having a menu of options that can be used for a wide range of incidents and hazards is essential especially during air quality alert emergencies because of the challenges in predicting smoke concentrations. Cooling centers are a response to extreme heat; they are not a 'one size fits all' solution. Opening them during times of poor air quality provides a cool space, but not one with better air. We urge the Council to let scientific findings guide the programming that our communities require. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. I will now pass it along to my colleague from the NYC Health Department.



**Testimony of  
Kevin Jones  
AARP New York**

**NYC Council Health Committee**

**Subject: Int 998**

**4/8/25**

**Contact: Kevin Jones (646) 668-7550 | [kjones@aarp.org](mailto:kjones@aarp.org)**

Good morning, Chair Schulman and members of the Committee. My name is Kevin Jones, and I am the AARP New York Associate State Director for Advocacy. I am here today on behalf of our 750,000 members in New York City and the more than 3.5 million older adults living in the five boroughs.

AARP New York supports legislation Intro 998-2024, which would codify the City's cooling center program and require a public education campaign about the dangers of extreme heat and poor air quality. This legislation could not come at a more critical time for New York City's rapidly aging population, which is growing faster than any other age group. The 65-and-over population grew by 34 percent between 2012 and 2022, and the number of older New Yorkers living below the poverty line surged by 33.6 percent over the past decade.

Heat is not just uncomfortable — it can be deadly, particularly for older adults. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adults over the age of 65 are significantly more vulnerable to heat-related illness and death. In fact, 36 percent of heat-related deaths in the U.S. occur in this age group. As people age, their bodies don't adjust as quickly to temperature changes, and chronic illnesses or medications can further impair their ability to cope with heat. What may seem like an inconvenience to some can be life-threatening for others.

Older adult centers often serve as official cooling centers, providing a safe, air-conditioned space where older New Yorkers can escape the dangers of extreme heat. However, the ability of these centers to meet the need is directly tied to the City's investment in aging services.

That's why AARP New York is also calling on Mayor Adams and the City Council to fully restore and baseline funding for the Department for the Aging (DFTA) in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. We commend the Council for its strong budget response, which recognizes the dangerous fiscal cliff facing DFTA. In particular, we thank Council Member Crystal Hudson for her leadership in prioritizing older New Yorkers.

However, we must go further. If the City fails to secure this funding in the final budget, the consequences will be dire: older adult centers could be forced to close, home-delivered meals could be eliminated, and vital case management services could disappear. That would leave thousands of older New Yorkers — many living on fixed incomes and without air conditioning — with nowhere to turn during dangerous heat waves.

The City must prioritize the health and safety of its growing older adult population — not just in words but in action. That means codifying and expanding the cooling center program through this legislation and locking in long-term, stable funding for aging services so that every older New Yorker has a place to stay safe, connected, and cool.

Older New Yorkers helped build our city and make it great, and they deserve to age in place in the communities they love. Thank you.



**New York City Council Committee on  
Health - April 8, 2025  
Comments in Support Intro 998**

Good day everyone, my name is Michael Zahorsky, and I'm the Director of Sales & Client Relations for AlertTek, LLC, a communications firm located at 25 Broadway, right here in New York. We are testifying in support of [Intro 998](#), sponsored by Council Member Powers.

On behalf of all of us here at AlertTek, I want to emphasize our strong support for the comprehensive approach outlined in Intro 998. Our firm's work with the New York League of Conservation Voters has given us insight into the impact this can have for many New Yorkers. More specifically, we value the bill's requirements for the strategic placement of cooling centers in vulnerable communities, it's mandated public education campaign, and the focus on accountability and improvement. These provisions align with evidence-based practices that we've found to be effective from our professional experience that goes back over 20 years.

As periods of extreme heat have become increasingly common over the last two decades, New York City and many of its citizens are uniquely vulnerable as a result of these events. This city has the greatest number of people exposed to the urban heat island effect in the United States, due to the vast amount of asphalt, buildings, and other infrastructure that absorbs and re-emits the sun's heat. Extreme heat events particularly hit disadvantaged communities the hardest due to long-standing inequities in infrastructure and resources. While mitigating extreme heat requires multiple solutions, two ways to do so are by increasing access to the city's cooling centers, and raising awareness of their whereabouts.

In designating such centers, the agencies would have to account for where vulnerable populations reside and where such populations would be likely to use these centers. In addition, we strongly support the requirement that would be put on the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene to post information about the cooling center program on its website.

Undoubtedly, this bill will strengthen the City's emergency planning and response during extreme heat and air quality emergencies. As a result, New York City's Cooling Center Program will see an increase in it's utilization, alongside an improvement of it's transparency.

**AlertTek urges the City Council to approve this bill and ensure there is long-term funding for extended operating hours at cooling center facilities.**

Thank you,  
Michael Zahorsky, Director of Sales & Client Relations, AlertTek LLC



New York City Council Committee on Health  
April 8, 2025  
Comments in Support Intro 998

My name is Allyson Martinez. I am the Founding Executive Director of Brooklyn Level Up (“BKLVLUP”). BKLVLUP is a 501c3 community development corporation focused on building community wealth through (1) supporting BIPOC-owned small businesses through our BKLVLUP Entrepreneurship Collective, (2) through our Flats Community Land Trust, working towards preserving and creating truly affordable housing, commercial, community and open spaces, and (3) through our BKLVLUP Cultivate initiative, working with community to address historical environmental harms in East Flatbush, Flatbush and Flatlands, Brooklyn. It is through our BKLVLUP Cultivate work and collaborations with institutions of higher education throughout NYC that we have uncovered and begun to help our community reckon with the challenges of climate change in our neighborhoods.

While extreme heat events are increasingly common with climate change, New York City is especially prone to these events. NYC has the greatest number of people exposed to the urban heat island effect in the United States due to the vast amount of asphalt, buildings, and other infrastructure that absorb and re-emit the sun’s heat. Extreme heat events particularly hit seniors, low income and communities of color the hardest due to structural racism. While mitigating extreme heat requires multiple solutions, one way to do so is increasing access to the City’s cooling centers. **The community of East Flatbush, Brooklyn is even more acutely vulnerable to the ravages of climate change and lack of cooling infrastructure than New York City at large.**

Due to decades of systemic underinvestment, East Flatbush now experiences climate -related issues disproportionately vs. other Brooklyn neighborhoods. As reported by NOAA, New York City experienced its warmest year on record in 2023 and is predicted to have an average of eight heat waves annually by 2050. New York City Emergency Management’s (NYCEM) website states that in 2023, over 350 New Yorkers died prematurely from heat-related illnesses. Neighborhoods like East Flatbush experience acute heat due to significantly less tree canopy and more paved surface area.

A Climate Central Report released in 2023 shows **East Flatbush an average of 10.6F warmer than the rest of New York City**, flagging the neighborhood as the most underserved by cooling infrastructure. NYC’s Department of Health uses a statistical model focusing on social and environmental factors contributing to neighborhood heat risk – it ranks East Flatbush a 5 out of 5, a neighborhood whose residents are at highest risk of dying during and immediately following extreme heat. Per their report, “black people die of heat-related illness at a disproportionately high rate therefore neighborhoods with more Black residents are more greatly impacted by extreme heat. Black New Yorkers suffer these disproportionate health impacts from heat due to social and economic disparities. These disparities stem from structural racism, which includes neighborhood disinvestment, racist housing policies, fewer job opportunities and lower pay, and less access to high-quality education and health care.”

Not only is the heat higher than average, but it also dangerously impacts air quality issues. In 2022, East Flatbush recorded less than 20% of the days falling within the safe air quality limits. The summer of 2023 saw record-breaking poor air quality numbers from wildfire smoke from Canada. East Flatbush is highly susceptible to air pollution, given inadequate tree cover and insufficient parks or green space to filter the air. This results in significant health issues, including poor cardiovascular health and respiratory conditions.

In August 2022, the **NYC Comptroller’s report, “Overheated, Underserved”, identified East Flatbush as the neighborhood most underserved by cooling infrastructure. Despite its high heat vulnerability, only two cooling centers served its 162,400 residents during the July 2022 heat wave.** This scarcity led to recommendations for increasing the number of cooling centers, extending operating hours, and ensuring accessibility for all community members.

It is for these reasons that BKLVLUP is testifying in support of Intro 998, sponsored by Council Member Powers. This bill would codify New York City’s Cooling Center Program and would grant the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), in conjunction with the NYC Office of Emergency Management (OEM), the discretion of designating the number and location of cooling centers, but would require that there be no fewer than the median number of cooling centers operated during heat-related emergencies in 2017.



BKLV LUP supports Intro 998 because it will require the city to open, maintain, and operate free cooling centers when there is a heat-related emergency or a poor air quality index in the city. This is particularly important to vulnerable residents who do not have access to air conditioning, or cannot afford high utility bills during peak summer months. These residents will opt to suffer in silence no matter the potential health and quality of life risks unless community-based interventions such as hyperlocal and accessible cooling center spaces are made available and known to them.

In designating such centers, the agencies would have to take into account where vulnerable populations reside and where such populations would be likely to use centers. In addition, DOHMH would be required to post information about the cooling center program on its website and would also have to conduct a public education campaign to increase awareness of cooling centers and the risks associated with heat-related emergencies and poor air quality.

This bill will strengthen the City's emergency planning and response during extreme heat and air quality emergencies and it will increase the utilization of and improve transparency of New York City's Cooling Center Program. It will also increase the network of community spatial assets that will undoubtedly serve the public interest in the near and long term.

BKLV LUP urges the City Council to approve this bill and ensure there is long-term funding for extended operating hours at cooling center facilities. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allyson Martinez".

Allyson Martinez  
Founding Executive Director  
Brooklyn Level Up  
allyson@bklvlup.org  
bklvlup.org



**Testimony of the Natural Resources Defense Council  
To the New York City Council Committee on Health  
Regarding Intro 998  
April 8, 2025**

Good morning, Chair Schulman and members of the Committee on Health. My name is Isabel Friedman and I am an Environmental Health Advocate at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). NRDC strongly supports Intro 998, which would codify the City's cooling center program, enabling it to better protect frontline communities.

Extreme heat kills more people than all other natural disasters combined, resulting in 350 fatalities in New York City alone, each summer. However, the burden of extreme heat falls overwhelmingly on low-income communities, communities of color, and older populations.

Cooling centers are an essential tool in combating extreme heat, especially for low-income communities and unhoused individuals who lack access to cooling devices and face higher rates of energy insecurity. Cooling center visits can reduce the risk of heat-related deaths by an estimated 66%. Although expanding cooling center coverage was prioritized in both the New York State Extreme Heat Action Plan and the City's PlaNYC, the current program lacks consistency across sites, signage to increase public usage, staff trained to identify heat-related illness, and adequate quality of cooling centers.

Intro 998 would strengthen this program by ensuring environmental justice communities are prioritized in the quantity and siting of the City's cooling centers. The bill would further empower the City to better allocate resources to improve awareness of the program and address barriers to access.

To maximize the bill's effectiveness, we propose the following additions:

First, data from the Heat Mortality Report, the Overheated Underserved Comptroller Report, and the Environmental Justice Report should be used to determine the minimum number of cooling centers in heat-vulnerable neighborhoods, and this number should be updated annually.

Second, a minimum number of cooling centers that operate outside of the 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. window should be established in each heat-vulnerable community to protect people after working hours.

Third, the responsible agencies should base the number of cooling centers on the most recent data to account for rapidly changing climate risks.

With what's likely to be another record breaking summer quickly approaching, we must act now. On behalf of NRDC, I urge the City to pass this legislation and provide adequate funding for these life-saving cool spaces. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



April 8, 2025

## New York City Environmental Justice Alliance's Testimony to the Committee on Health related to Int 0998-2024

Good morning Chair Schulman and members of the Council. My name is Shrvanthi Kanekal and I'm the Senior Resiliency Planner at the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA). Founded in 1991, NYC-EJA is a non-profit citywide membership network linking 13 grassroots organizations from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color across all the 5 boroughs in their struggle for environmental justice.

I am here today to voice NYC-EJA's support for the intent behind Intro 998. An increasing number of New Yorkers are experiencing the negative impacts of our changing climate, especially the impacts of heat, which is a silent killer. We want to ensure that City government appropriately adapts its policy, management, and response to heat as a climate threat. We need to expand existing strategies and invest in new ones to reduce the urban heat island effect and protect and prepare New Yorkers from the increasing risk and dangers of heat, particularly the most vulnerable among us. Cooling strategies can no longer be regarded as a privilege, but rather must be a necessity for the safety and wellbeing of the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

The most recent update to the 2024 heat mortality report from the NYC DOHMH states that heat is estimated to cause approximately **580 excess deaths of NYC residents annually**, with the highest burdens among Black New Yorkers, who are twice as likely to die of heat related or exacerbated health impacts than White New Yorkers. The report also highlights a number of key heat concerns and recommendations to combat heat in NYC. It notes that heat-exacerbated deaths were more likely to occur **at home**, underscoring the importance of access to cooling at home." Without sufficient cooling measures, "**indoor temperatures can be much higher than outdoors, especially at night**, and can continue for days after a heat wave." "Lack of access to home air conditioning (AC) is the **most important risk factor** for heat-stress death. Among those who died from heat stress, the place of death was most often an **un-air-conditioned home**.

This report also states that since NYC summers **are** getting hotter because of climate change, emergency response to extreme heat must be coupled with equitable investments in structural

interventions and heat mitigation measures that reduce risk throughout the season. So, while we work on resolving the issue of cooling solutions being available in the home, it is critical to ensure that there are publicly available cooling options to help people in the meantime, and while they are not at home. While the City's existing Cooling Center program plays a life-saving role for many residents, it has many shortcomings. At a minimum, the current program needs dedicated funding, improved guidelines and must increase the number of accessible centers to name a few issues.

Most of the top 10 neighborhoods with the highest heat vulnerability (HVI 4 and 5) and the lowest number of cooling centers (per 100,000 people) according to a [2022 report from the NYC Comptroller's Office](#) are designated environmental justice areas according to the City's EJ map. In addition, half of all cooling centers were listed as being closed on Saturdays, and 83% were listed as being closed on Sundays—even while the weeklong July 2022 heat emergency spanned the course of a weekend, and future heat emergencies surely will, too.

The weather is not designed to operate within normal business hours, and therefore our plans to adapt to it, must take these challenges into account. We must protect people at all times. Another challenge is that nearly half of the City's activated cooling centers were senior centers, only open to people over 60 years old. Of those senior cooling centers, 56% did not offer extended hours and 22% did not have wheelchair access. This demonstrates how disjointed and limited the current cooling center program is.

In addition, from an informal survey NYC-EJA did on cooling centers in some of our member's districts, we found that some cooling centers did not have working air conditioning, or extended hours, and some staff we spoke to did not know that the location was a designated cooling center.

I say all this to emphasize the importance of clear guidelines and dedicated resources needed to ensure that cooling centers across the city are properly functioning. The language in Intro 998 is a good start but is dated. We recommend the following key additions to the current language that would improve the effectiveness of the bill:

- This bill must ensure that a minimum number of cooling centers operate across the city, particularly in neighborhoods that have a high Heat Vulnerability Index score of 4 and 5. The City should also explore allowing certain City facilities with AC to also operate as cooling centers, such as NYC Health & Hospital Corporation facilities and public schools.
- Heat can have extremely dangerous impacts at night. There should be a subset of cooling centers that operate beyond regular working hours (9am - 5pm) that would serve residents in neighborhoods that are at higher risk in heat emergencies.
- All functioning cooling centers need to have clear guidelines with minimum working standards to ensure the health, comfort, and safety of New Yorkers.
- Access to both cooling centers and heat risk information should be readily available and accessible to residents throughout the year, in the top 10 spoken languages in NYC. This should include real time updates on any limitations to functionality and closure of centers.

- The NYC Office of Emergency Management should submit an annual report that outlines key statistics, utilization, and most importantly, areas for improvement for the cooling center program to meet the rising risks of extreme heat emergencies and needs of New Yorkers.

We have also submitted detailed recommendations on how to improve the bill to CM Powers' office and will submit our full written testimony online.

In conclusion, NYC-EJA is supportive of the goals of Intro 998 and with the right amendments, we know this legislation can work better to serve all New Yorkers, especially the communities most vulnerable to heat. We look forward to working with CM Powers and the Council to ensure its passage. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



Hearing on Intro 998 - 2024

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to cooling centers

April 8th, 2025

Dear New York City Councilmembers,

We Stay/Nos Quedamos joins our partners within the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance to request that Introduction 998 be amended to incorporate the following recommendations to center the lives of community members most vulnerable to extreme heat related impacts.

- There should be a minimum number of cooling centers located across communities, especially those with high concentrations of low-income residents, a high heat vulnerability index, and in areas with poor air quality and high pollution. This includes the more vulnerable neighborhoods across New York City, where environmental burdens are highest. Centers must be easily accessible by public transit and ideally located within walking distance of each neighborhood.
- Cooling centers should operate beyond regular business hours – including evenings, weekends, overnight, and additionally when Air Quality Health Advisories are in place. Operations of these centers should be inclusive and accessible to all, and equipped to provide the public with information, and heat-related health services and resources.
- Awareness of cooling centers should be improved through proactive outreach and clear, multilingual communication efforts, in the top 10 spoken languages in NYC. The City must ensure that all residents, regardless of their backgrounds, know how and where to access these critical resources. Partnerships with community-based organizations can help to disseminate information and ensure that vulnerable groups are not left behind.
- Safeguarding funding for cooling center upgrades and services to maintain functioning air conditioning systems, backup power systems, and adequate staffing to respond to emergencies is crucial.

Cooling centers are an essential part of urban infrastructure to protect people from the risks of extreme heat days, and our organization is proud of New York City for investing in a program that is meant to ameliorate the threat of extreme weather. However, the current cooling center resources are insufficiently accessible and inadequately equitable from alleviating environmental justice areas from the increased harms of climate and infrastructural exacerbated extreme heat events. The limited availability of cooling centers both in terms of locations and hourly operations leaves our most vulnerable populations at significant risk of heat related illness and death.

Our organization represents the voices of underserved neighborhoods in the South Bronx, that are disproportionately impacted by heat-related health risks due to lack of community green spaces and access to waterfronts, proximity to pollution sources such as highways, distribution centers, peaker plants, as well as financial barriers to healthcare, and owning household cooling units. The NYC Department of Health's 2024 NYC Heat-Related Mortality Report reports that "Heat contributes to the deaths of about 580 New Yorkers, on average, each year during the warm season of May through September. Inequities by race and income persist in the people and neighborhoods most impacted."

The 580 deaths caused by extreme heat are both unacceptable and preventable. While we support the introduction of Bill 998, we acknowledge the need to prioritize justice throughout the process. We encourage the inclusion of our recommendations to ensure that cooling centers can effectively save more lives during extreme weather events.

Thank you for your time.

We Stay/Nos Quedamos



**Testimony of Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for New York City Policy  
New York League of Conservation Voters  
City Council Committee on Health  
Hearing on Intro 998 of 2024  
April 8, 2025**

My name is Alia Soomro and I am the Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV is a statewide environmental advocacy organization representing over 30,000 members in New York City. Thank you, Chairs Schulman, and members of the Committee on Health for the opportunity to comment.

NYLCV strongly supports the passage of Intro 998 of 2024, sponsored by Council Member Powers. This bill would codify the City's cooling center program and would grant the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), in conjunction with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), the discretion of designating the number and location of cooling centers, but would require that there be no fewer than the median number of cooling centers operated during heat-related emergencies in 2017. This bill was included on NYLCV's 2024 New York City Council Environmental Scorecard and we hope to see it passed this year.

Extreme heat is the [deadliest weather-related hazard](#) in the United States, and while extreme heat events are increasingly common with climate change, [New York City is especially prone](#) to these events. It has the greatest number of people exposed to the urban heat island effect in the United States due to the vast amount of asphalt, buildings, and other infrastructure that absorb and re-emit the sun's heat. Extreme heat events [particularly](#) hit seniors, low income and communities of color the hardest due to structural racism such as [residential redlining](#).

While mitigating extreme heat requires multiple solutions, one way to do so is increasing access and funding for the City's Cooling Center Program in an equitable manner. This Program helps New Yorkers who might not have access to air conditioning or cannot afford increases in their utility bills to take refuge in public places such as community centers, libraries, and senior centers during extreme heat events.

NYLCV supports Intro 998 because it will require the City to open, maintain, and operate cooling centers when there is a heat-related emergency or a poor air quality index in the city. This bill is vital because in the past, the Cooling Center Program had been found to be inequitably administered. For example, [a previous study by the NYC Comptroller](#) found that heat vulnerable neighborhoods such as central Brooklyn, central Queens, and parts of the Bronx had the fewest per capita cooling centers.

Additionally, the bill requires that in designating such centers, DOHMH and OEM would have to take into account where vulnerable populations reside and where such populations would be likely to use centers. In addition, DOHMH would be required to post information about the cooling center program on its website and would also have to conduct a public education campaign to increase awareness of cooling centers and the risks associated with heat-related emergencies and poor air quality. Finally, DOHMH would have to conduct an annual survey on utilization of the program and submit a report annually to the Mayor and City Council on the program.

While we support this bill, we also recommend that the bill language consider the following edits:

- Use the latest available data when establishing the number of cooling centers the legislation mandates, instead of a number based on 2017 data (“no fewer than the median number of cooling centers operated during heat-related emergencies in 2017”).
  - Ideally, the bill should mandate a minimum number of cooling centers operating in the city, particularly in environmental justice communities, and neighborhoods that have a high [Heat Vulnerability Index](#) score (based on existing metrics such as the City's Heat Vulnerability Index maps).
  - This minimum number should be revisited annually to ensure cooling centers are available to the most vulnerable neighborhoods.
- There should be a minimum number of cooling centers operating beyond regular working days and hours (M-F 9 am-5 pm) in neighborhoods with high Heat Vulnerability Index scores. [As the Comptroller's study found](#), hot nighttime temperatures can be just as dangerous as daytime highs, so it's vital that the Cooling Center Program have centers that are open at night and on the weekends.
- The cooling center website should be available in the top 10 spoken languages in New York City. The website should include real time updates on locations, hours, and services provided.
- Lastly and most importantly, if passed, we urge the Administration and City Council to allocate sufficient long-term funding to ensure the City's Cooling Center Program is effectively carried out. This includes, but is not limited to, funding for staffing, extended operating hours if necessary, programmatic needs, and more.

This bill will strengthen the City's emergency planning and response during extreme heat and air quality emergencies and it will increase the utilization of and improve transparency of New York City's Cooling Center Program. We look forward to working with the City Council, Administration, and advocates to ensure New York City is well prepared for climate and public health emergencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



**Testimony of Deaunte Johnson, Policy Fellow  
New York League of Conservation Voters  
City Council Committee on Health  
Hearing on Intro 998 of 2024  
April 8, 2025**

My name is Deaunte Johnson and I am the Policy Fellow at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV is a statewide environmental advocacy organization representing over 30,000 members in New York City. Thank you, Chairs Schulman, and members of the Committee on Health for the opportunity to comment.

NYLCV strongly supports the passage of Intro 998 of 2024, sponsored by Council Member Powers. This bill would codify the City's cooling center program and would grant the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), in conjunction with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), the discretion of designating the number and location of cooling centers, but would require that there be no fewer than the median number of cooling centers operated during heat-related emergencies in 2017. This bill was included on NYLCV's 2024 New York City Council Environmental Scorecard and we hope to see it passed this year.

Extreme heat is the [deadliest weather-related hazard](#) in the United States, and while extreme heat events are increasingly common with climate change, [New York City is especially prone](#) to these events. It has the greatest number of people exposed to the urban heat island effect in the United States due to the vast amount of asphalt, buildings, and other infrastructure that absorb and re-emit the sun's heat. Extreme heat events [particularly](#) hit seniors, low income and communities of color the hardest due to structural racism such as [residential redlining](#).

While mitigating extreme heat requires multiple solutions, one way to do so is increasing access and funding for the City's Cooling Center Program in an equitable manner. This Program helps New Yorkers who might not have access to air conditioning or cannot afford increases in their utility bills to take refuge in public places such as community centers, libraries, and senior centers during extreme heat events.

NYLCV supports Intro 998 because it will require the City to open, maintain, and operate cooling centers when there is a heat-related emergency or a poor air quality index in the city. This bill is vital because in the past, the Cooling Center Program had been found to be inequitably administered. For example, [a previous study by the NYC Comptroller](#) found that heat vulnerable neighborhoods such as central Brooklyn, central Queens, and parts of the Bronx had the fewest per capita cooling centers.



Additionally, the bill requires that in designating such centers, DOHMH and OEM would have to take into account where vulnerable populations reside and where such populations would be likely to use centers. In addition, DOHMH would be required to post information about the cooling center program on its website and would also have to conduct a public education campaign to increase awareness of cooling centers and the risks associated with heat-related emergencies and poor air quality. Finally, DOHMH would have to conduct an annual survey on utilization of the program and submit a report annually to the Mayor and City Council on the program.

While we support this bill, we also recommend that the bill language consider the following edits:

- Use the latest available data when establishing the number of cooling centers the legislation mandates, instead of a number based on 2017 data (“no fewer than the median number of cooling centers operated during heat-related emergencies in 2017”).
  - Ideally, the bill should mandate a minimum number of cooling centers operating in the city, particularly in environmental justice communities, and neighborhoods that have a high [Heat Vulnerability Index](#) score (based on existing metrics such as the City’s Heat Vulnerability Index maps).
  - This minimum number should be revisited annually to ensure cooling centers are available to the most vulnerable neighborhoods.
- There should be a minimum number of cooling centers operating beyond regular working days and hours (M-F 9 am-5 pm) in neighborhoods with high Heat Vulnerability Index scores. [As the Comptroller’s study found](#), hot nighttime temperatures can be just as dangerous as daytime highs, so it’s vital that the Cooling Center Program have centers that are open at night and on the weekends.
- The cooling center website should be available in the top 10 spoken languages in New York City. The website should include real time updates on locations, hours, and services provided.
- Lastly and most importantly, if passed, we urge the Administration and City Council to allocate sufficient long-term funding to ensure the City’s Cooling Center Program is effectively carried out. This includes, but is not limited to, funding for staffing, extended operating hours if necessary, programmatic needs, and more.

This bill will strengthen the City’s emergency planning and response during extreme heat and air quality emergencies and it will increase the utilization of and improve transparency of New York City’s Cooling Center Program. We look forward to working with the City Council, Administration, and advocates to ensure New York City is well prepared for climate and public health emergencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



Written Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on Health

April 8, 2025

**Miranda von Dornum, MD, PhD**  
*Chief Medical Officer*  
Project Renewal

My name is Miranda von Dornum, and I am the [Chief Medical Officer at Project Renewal](#). I oversee our Healthcare Department, including our Federally Qualified Health Center, which operates four clinics and two mobile medical clinics.

For over 55 years, Project Renewal has provided shelter, housing, health care, and employment services to New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. We are grateful to Speaker Adams, Chair Schulman, and the City Council for their support of our programs.

[Project Renewal's mobile medical clinics](#) play a critical part in delivering primary care to unhoused New Yorkers. We are proud to have partnered with the city on this program to lower barriers to care and enhance the well-being of thousands of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness.

Our staff earns patients' trust through compassionate care, sometimes acting as their main medical contact for decades. The mobile clinics provide physical checkups, vaccinations, HIV tests, basic medications, and treatment for common chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and asthma. Additionally, we have started to provide limited but in-demand behavioral health support alongside primary care, beginning to address serious mental illness that often goes untreated among unhoused New Yorkers.

Lack of access to affordable healthcare, compounded by high rates of mental illness and mistrust of institutions, can make it a challenge to deliver healthcare to people experiencing homelessness. The consistent care and reliable support provided by our mobile clinics are the answer to reaching people, wherever they are.

Project Renewal initially piloted this model to deliver care at our existing facilities that did not offer on-site primary care. But when we discovered how effective it was in providing medical services to New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, including those outside of our system, we redoubled our investment. Today, our mobile clinics service 13 different locations across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. Now, we are seeking to scale this program further to provide primary care to more unhoused New Yorkers.

To sustain and expand the reach of our mobile medical clinics, we rely on city investment. Securing these resources is crucial as the federal government claws back previously-allocated state funds for healthcare, and threats to Medicaid and other health programs loom large.

We thank the Council and this committee for its continued support of this program, which provides care to unhoused New Yorkers right where they are. This health outreach lowers the barrier to care and enhances the wellbeing of thousands of unhoused New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,  
Miranda von Dornum, MD, PhD

*Chief Medical Officer*

Project Renewal



Paul J Gaglio, MD, FACP, AGAF, FAASLD  
Professor of Medicine  
Director: Division of Liver Disease and Transplant Hepatology  
Medical Director: Liver Transplantation  
Rutgers New Jersey Medical School  
Medical Science Building H-536  
185 S Orange Avenue  
Newark, NJ 07103  
[REDACTED]  
(F) 973-972-3144

[Pjg47@njms.rutgers.edu](mailto:Pjg47@njms.rutgers.edu)  
[Paul.gaglioMD@rutgers.edu](mailto:Paul.gaglioMD@rutgers.edu)

Date: March 19, 2025

New York City Council  
Re: The Empire Liver Foundaion

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for this opportunity to voice my strongest support to continue funding for the Empire Liver Foundation (ELF) as part of the Viral Hepatitis Initiative for NYC. ELF and its educational programs have been an incredible resource to NYC Health Care Providers via Education, Clinical Training Series, Preceptorship and Mentorship regarding viral hepatitis education. The elimination of viral hepatitis in NYC and NY State requires education of not only health care providers, but advocacy for communities effected by viral hepatitis; without these initiatives, eradication of viral hepatitis cannot be achieved. I have personally witnessed the benefit of these educational programs sponsored by ELF related to greater understanding of viral hepatitis amongst health care providers which has translated into increased surveillance and treatment of viral hepatitis in affected communitis.

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or if you require any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul J Gaglio".

Paul J Gaglio, MD, FACP, AGAF, FAASLD  
Professor of Medicine  
Director: Division of Hepatology and Liver Transplantation  
Medical Director: Liver Transplantation  
Program Director: Hepatology and Transplant Hepatology Fellowship  
Rutgers: New Jersey Medical School



Good morning Chair Schulman and members of the Council. My name is Aryanna Osorio and I am the Resiliency Coordinator at The POINT CDC. Founded in 1994, THE POINT is dedicated to youth development and the cultural and economic revitalization of Hunts Point in the South Bronx. Our approach through the lens of arts and education is what enables our community to understand what it means to live in an Environmental Justice neighborhood. Aside from being an Environmental Justice community, Hunts Point is home to the largest food distribution center in the western hemisphere. This makes living conditions massive infrastructure with

I am here today to voice THE POINT's support for the intent of Intro 998. We want to ensure that City government appropriately adapts its policy, management, and response to heat as a climate threat. We need to expand existing strategies and invest in new ones to reduce the urban heat island effect and protect and prepare New Yorkers from the increasing risk and dangers of heat, particularly the most vulnerable among us. Cooling strategies must not be mistaken as a privilege, but rather a human right and necessity for the health, safety and welfare of the public.

Since before the pandemic, THE POINT has participated in extensive research and collection of air quality and temperature data for the purpose of understanding the impact that rising climate has on our quality of life. However, as shared in the [NYC Heat Related Mortality Report](#), summers are only getting hotter and our preparedness for such climate emergencies cannot keep pace that safety demands.

One strong case is represented by a project we led in Sumer of 2023 called CAMP EJ. Where our organization led community members in an air quality and temperature study in efforts to understand our neighborhood climate landscape. While the results of our efforts are shown in NYCEJA's [Heat-Related Risks, Air Pollution, and Social Vulnerability in New York City](#) Report, what you do not see is the physical impact the site monitoring had on our members who were outside during those extreme heat conditions. Young people from ages 16, and Staff members ranging from 30-50 years old were physically and mentally affected by the extreme levels of PM 2.5 trapped in the air, as well as temperatures that were often 4-5 degrees higher than what was reported city and borough-wide. To paint a clearer picture, 'healthy' individuals were crouched on sidewalk corners after just 20-30 minutes of walking around the neighborhood, with side effects like heat exhaustion, nausea, and headaches lasting for up to 8 hours post exposure. Health impacts of this extreme heat were so desperate, that we were forced to split the monitoring between staff, volunteers and partnering organizations to complete the work.

Over the last 10 years we have seen climate emergencies grow more frequent, presenting unprecedented challenges for our neighborhoods and our city.

The following are areas of concern that we feel must be addressed and funded wiith Intro 998 to be properly supported with *funding* in order to function at minimum:

- Transportation - many of our residents, especially our seniors, are unable to access cooling centers due to distance, lack of accessible infrastructure, and traffic. Routes to current cooling facilities aren't accessible, and having shuttles to provide transportation for heat-vulnerable residents would improve the participation
- Education for public health/impacts of extreme heat
- Require staff to be properly trained and equipped to receive community members and share appropriate resources
- Communications & Media - Funding and Strategic Collaboration
  - At bare minimum cooling stations require cross collaboration among governmental organizations such as
    - DOHMH
    - Mayors Office
    - LINK NYC
    - MTA (Advertising)
    - LOCATION BASED ADVERTISING
      - Local TV networks
      - Social Media Platforms - Local Sponsorships / Advertisement
        - INSTAGRAM
        - YOUTUBE
        - TIKTOK
        - DISCORD
    - Local Community Organizations/ Cooling Stations
- New Challenges
  - Wild fires & Extreme Heat
    - What to do when you can't use your AC?
    - How to stay cool with clean air
    - Air Purifiers and Purification Centers
- **Minimum number of cooling centers operating in the city, particularly in environmental justice communities, and neighborhoods that have a high Heat Vulnerability Index score (based on the City's [Heat Vulnerability Index maps](#)).**
- **Operate beyond regular working hours (9am - 5pm)** serve residents in high risk neighborhoods during heat emergencies.
- The NYC Office of Emergency Management **offer guidelines and minimum working standards** for the functioning of cooling centers to ensure the health, comfort, and safety of New Yorkers.
- **Access to cooling centers and heat risk information** should be readily available and accessible to residents throughout the year, in the top 10 spoken languages in NYC. *This should include real time updates on any limitations to functionality and closure of centers.*
- The NYC Office of Emergency Management should submit an **annual report that outlines key statistics, utilization, and most importantly, areas of improvement** for the cooling center program to meet the rising risks of extreme heat emergencies and needs of New Yorkers.
- **Dedicated funding for the program** to support spaces that are designated cooling centers

We hope that you consider our proposal and look forward to working with the city to ensure the ongoing health, safety, and welfare of our communities.

With gratitude,

Aryanna Osorio, Resiliency Coordinator  
And THE POINT CDC



**UNITED  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
HOUSES**

45 Broadway, 22<sup>nd</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10006  
212-967-0322 | [www.unhny.org](http://www.unhny.org)

**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Health  
Council Member Lynn Schulman, Chair**

**Intro 0998 - Cooling Centers**

**Submitted by Anita Kwok, Policy Analyst  
April 8, 2025**

Thank you Chair Schulman and Council Members for convening for today's Committee of Health hearing on Council Member Powers' Introduction 998 to codify the City's cooling center program. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach over 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

Settlement houses and other community based organizations provide a wide variety of services to support their neighborhoods, including operating senior centers, NYCHA Cornerstones, and other community centers. The vast majority of these spaces typically also serve as official cooling centers during the summer and are a key part of our city's response during a heatwave. These sites can serve anywhere from a few people to hundreds of people a day. As climate change worsens, increasing the likelihood of more frequent, longer, and intense heat waves in the summertime, the City must have a plan to keep people cool, especially those New Yorkers who are at risk of medical complications due to heat, including older adults and individuals with underlying medical conditions.

UNH and our members appreciate that the City understands the needs of people vulnerable to health complications during a heatwave and makes these critical cooling centers available each year. UNH supports Intro 998, as it ensures the availability and accessibility of cooling centers for vulnerable populations, including older adults, during heat-related emergencies and poor air

quality days. Additionally, the bill mandates public education, outreach, and reporting on cooling center effectiveness.

However, the Council must acknowledge the reality that settlement houses and other community-based organizations are expected to operate as cooling centers without receiving dedicated funding from the City. As one of our members bluntly puts it, "Cooling centers are critical, but we do not like being a cooling center."

### **Challenge: Poor Interagency Communication**

UNH member sites that serve as designated cooling centers frequently work with multiple city agencies but often find interagency communication to be frustrating and unclear, with their questions going unanswered. There are too many city agencies with oversight of the initiative, making program management difficult for contractors. NYC Aging, the Department of Youth and Community Development, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, NYC Emergency Management, and NYCHA are all involved and are communicating different expectations to nonprofit program staff. For example, older adult centers located in NYCHA developments are designated as city cooling centers, yet city agencies frequently pass responsibility back and forth. NYC Aging tells community-based organizations that HVAC repairs fall under the landlord's responsibility—meaning NYCHA—while NYCHA insists it is NYC Aging's responsibility. NYC Emergency Management also plays a role in communicating information on cooling spaces to the public, but does not communicate directly with providers who manage the space. There is no one person or agency who has final say, making it difficult for anyone to get clear information in an emergency situation. This lack of clear accountability and interagency communication leaves providers and older adults stuck in the middle, struggling to ensure cooling centers remain functional and accessible during extreme heat.

### **Recommendation #1: Designate a Cooling Czar**

Given these challenges, UNH recommends the City designate a "Cooling Czar," a person at DOHMH or NYCEM who will coordinate all cooling center operations while ensuring these operations remain compliant with contemporary health guidelines. This czar should control messaging and the flow of information to City agencies and community-based organizations, particularly when there is a heat emergency. That person must be empowered to have final say when there is conflicting information in the leadup to or during an emergency, and they should be charged with centralizing information and ensuring that all the agencies involved - DFTA, DOHMH, DYCD, NYCHA, and more - are coordinating. NYCEM should also have a dedicated team on hand to handle specific challenges or errors that may arise during an emergency, both at the city agency level and directly with individual programs.

During the spring, the Czar should ensure that cooling centers are prepared for when weather emergencies strikes while issuing clear, consistent directives to agencies and their contracted programs about what to do when there is a heat emergency, including information on the hours programs are expected to be open, what expenses are reimbursable, how to secure other types

of support, and contact information for the staff members who will serve as dedicated problem solvers during the emergency. This type of coordination is crucial for community-based organizations like settlement houses who operate programs that span several City agencies, as directives sometimes differ from agency to agency.

### **Challenge: Staffing Concerns**

UNH members strongly agree that cooling centers are critical and must be accessible to New Yorkers of all walks of life. But as an already underpaid, understaffed, and overworked workforce, there are questions about how staffing and payment would work with the program codified under Intro 998. When community center sites become cooling centers, it requires additional hours for non-exempt staff. With cooling centers mandated to open seven days a week and during nights, staff are experiencing increased burnout and exhaustion from working extended hours without relief. The City has not provided additional staff support to ease this burden. CBOs do not have the financial means to pay exempt staff, and DYCD and NYC Aging refuses to pay for overtime. Staff at these sites are salaried employees who are not eligible for overtime pay and are unable to take time off other days to make up for it.

Settlement house staff question whether DOHMH could mandate them to open. UNH is seeking clarification on whether staff at community-based organizations designated as cooling centers will receive overtime pay and whether the City will provide additional staff to support the increased responsibilities these sites take on. While the city reimburses nonprofits for their additional time, they only do so at the standard hourly rate, and as a result, UNH members struggle to keep centers staffed during extended hours.

### **Recommendation #2: Fair Compensation**

Paying cooling center staff fairly would mean offering time-and-a-half (or stipends for salaried staff) for those who are working outside of their usual hours to keep the doors open and the community cool. In addition, the City should offer staffing support through a pool of city workers who can fill in at cooling centers when they are activated. This will ensure nonprofit staff are not effectively forced to work overtime.

### **Challenge: Lack of Funding for Programming**

Another major concern is the lack of adequate funding and reimbursements for community-based organizations that operate cooling centers. DYCD and NYC Aging does not provide its cooling centers sites with funds to provide food or snacks. Instead, sites are told to use their regular budget and only if the sites go over the budget, then NYC Aging will discuss with them, which CBOs find to be unfair.

Further, due to lack of investment, the overall experience at a cooling center may be underwhelming. When New Yorkers show up to a cooling center, depending on the time of day, there may be nothing for them to do and nothing for them to eat. Computers, TVs, and similar devices aren't standard amenities, though they may be available at select sites. Because the

City reimburses nonprofits for water but not for programming or food, community members who arrive during a heat emergency outside of normal program hours often show up only to quickly become bored or hungry and leave.

Many sites are under-utilized as a direct result of this oversight. UNH has found that settlement house cooling centers experience the most traffic, as much as 200 visitors, on weekdays when food and programming are available as part of regular program operations. In contrast, centers can see as few as two to three people visit on a Saturday or Sunday when none of these resources are available.

**Recommendation #3: Investment**

The City should have a policy of providing reimbursement to nonprofits for meals and activities at their cooling centers. By providing funding, the City would ensure that the people who show up stay long enough to keep cool and avoid the dangers of heat exposure. In addition, we urge the City to invest more in capital funds to repair aging and broken HVAC systems in designated cooling centers, as there are limited funds available and many centers cannot open due to aging infrastructure.

These recommendations will not only increase the utility of cooling centers, but save lives. We urge the Council to work with the Administration to advance these recommendations as it advances Intro 998.

Thank you for your time. To follow up, please contact me at [akwok@unhny.org](mailto:akwok@unhny.org).



**New York City Council Committee on Health Written Testimony**  
**Int 00998-2024 - Cooling Center Bill**  
Tuesday, April 8th, 2025

My name is Shelby Luster, and I am the Resiliency Planner at UPROSE. UPROSE is Brooklyn's oldest Latino community-based organization, serving Sunset Park since 1966. We are an intergenerational, multiracial, and matriarchal organization that works at the intersection of racial and climate justice to bring about a Just Transition through community organizing, education, youth leadership development, and cultural artistic expression.

The Sunset Park neighborhood in Brooklyn is a frontline, working class, environmental justice community of over 130,000, with a population of about 80% people of color. Sunset Park's industrial infrastructure and limited green spaces contribute to heat retention in the neighborhood, making it particularly susceptible to high ambient heat levels. Waterfront districts like ours often experience temperatures that are 6 to 8 degrees higher than the citywide average because the abundance of concrete and building materials absorbs and retains heat.

Extreme heat is the deadliest natural disaster worldwide, claiming the lives of around 580 New Yorkers each year and disproportionately impacting the health of environmental justice communities. According to the New York City Panel on Climate Change, the frequency and intensity of heat waves in New York City will only continue to rise as climate change worsens, making cooling centers a critical lifeline.

In my work at UPROSE, my primary focus has been filling the gaps in the city's current cooling center program by establishing our own safe havens in community spaces across our neighborhood. Our community has made it clear that the city's current cooling center program is inadequate to address the immediate threat of extreme heat. The program does not actively engage with the communities it serves, leading to a lack of awareness and trust. The city's cooling centers remain inaccessible, sparse, and underutilized.

We recommend that this bill establish a minimum number of cooling centers in the city, with clear operational standards, particularly focused on environmental justice communities that experience high Heat Index Scores. Cooling centers in environmental justice communities should be hyper-accessible and operate beyond the typical 9-to-5 hours. They should provide real-time information about heat-related health impacts and cooling center operations in the ten most spoken languages in the city throughout the year. Additionally, The NYC Office of Emergency Management should publish an annual report detailing utilization rates, and other key statistics as well as outline potential for improvements.

We urge the City Council to pass legislation that addresses the lethal outcomes of our city's most devastating natural disaster. In the face of climate change, it is vital, now more than ever, to prioritize the health and safety of our communities, especially those that are disproportionately burdened by extreme heat and climate injustice.



## **PUBLIC TESTIMONY OF WATERFRONT ALLIANCE**

**April 8, 2025**

**New York City Council Committee on Health  
RE: Testimony in Support of Intro 998**

**Submitted by: Furhana Husani, Director of Programs and Climate Initiatives,  
Waterfront Alliance**

My name is Furhana Husani, and I am the director of programs and climate initiatives at the Waterfront Alliance.

The Waterfront Alliance is committed to sustainability and to mitigating the effects of climate change across the region's hundreds of miles of waterfront. We spearhead the Rise to Resilience Coalition of 100+ groups advocating for policy related to climate resilience, we bring education focused on climate resilience to students in NYC DOE schools through our Estuary Explorers program, and we run the national Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines (WEDG®) program for promoting innovation in climate design.

We recognize that New York City has witnessed, firsthand, the risks and impacts that climate change poses to our residents. We can see the dire projections that experts at the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and our own New York Panel on Climate Change (NPCC), have laid out for us.

Climate risks and impacts are no longer abstract or projections of the future. They are tangible, measurable, and while not avoidable anymore, we know there are critical policies, plans, and funds that can reduce the burden of impact on New Yorkers.

The city has experienced over 40 extreme heat events in the last 10 years. Extreme heat poses a significant threat to public health and safety in New York City<sup>1</sup>. In fact, extreme heat is the leading cause of weather-related fatalities in the United States, and New York City sees an average of 350 heat-related deaths annually<sup>2</sup>. Vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, individuals with pre-existing health conditions, and those living in poorly ventilated housing, are particularly at risk. Furthermore,

---

<sup>1</sup> NYC Emergency Management. *Hazard History & Consequences Tool*.

<https://nychazardhistory.com/PublicSearch.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Mayor's Office of Climate & Environmental Justice – Extreme Heat Adaptation, Extreme Heat - NYC Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice



approximately 40% of New York City neighborhoods face a higher risk of heat-related illness or death, often due to systemic disinvestment.

Therefore, **Waterfront Alliance strongly supports Intro 998, sponsored by Council Member Powers, which would codify New York City's Cooling Center Program.** This bill is a vital step in ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to safe, air-conditioned spaces during extreme weather events.

We understand that Intro 998 would grant the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), in conjunction with the NYC Office of Emergency Management (OEM), the discretion of designating the number and location of cooling centers, while requiring that there be no fewer than the median number of cooling centers operated during heat-related emergencies in 2017.

The bill also mandates that these agencies take into account where vulnerable populations reside and would likely use such centers. Furthermore, DOHMH would be required to post information about the program on its website and conduct a public education campaign to increase awareness of cooling centers and the risks associated with heat-related emergencies and poor air quality. The annual survey on the utilization of the program and the subsequent report to the Mayor and City Council are also crucial components for ensuring the program's effectiveness and transparency.

The cooling center program is an essential safety net for communities bearing the burden of extremely hot days, especially for households lacking air conditioning or the ability to afford its utility costs. Codifying this program will allow the City to better allocate resources to improve awareness and address barriers to access.

While we strongly support Intro 998, we also want to emphasize the critical need for dedicated and long-term funding to ensure the City's Cooling Center Program is effectively carried out. This includes funding for staffing, potentially extended operating hours, and support for volunteer-operated locations, including HVAC repair, replacement, and summer energy bills. Cooling centers, like any emergency program, must be well-resourced enough to meet the gravity of the problem they are designed to address.

**Waterfront Alliance urges the City Council to pass Intro 998 and to ensure that the necessary financial resources are allocated for its successful implementation and long-term sustainability.**

This legislation is a crucial step towards protecting the health and well-being of all New Yorkers in the face of increasingly frequent and intense extreme heat events driven by climate change.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

**Furhana Husani**

Director of Programs and Climate Initiatives

T: 212.935.9831 x 107 | [fhusani@waterfrontalliance.org](mailto:fhusani@waterfrontalliance.org)



April 8, 2025

**Founders**

Vernice Miller-Travis  
Peggy M. Shepard  
Chuck Sutton

**Board of Directors**

*Chair*

Jeff Jones

*Secretary*

Nancy E. Anderson, Ph.D.

*Treasurer*

Ken P. Mak

*Members*

Lakeisha M. Aquino  
Peter Bokor  
Dennis Derryck, Ph.D.  
David Evans, Ph.D.  
Abiola Fasehun, Esq.  
Eric A Goldstein, Esq.  
Neetin Gulati  
Christy Loper  
Sarangi Iyengar  
Marielle Villar Martiney  
Crystal Romeo Upperman  
Vernice Miller-Travis  
Phillip Morrow  
Dart Westphal

*Executive Director*

Peggy M. Shepard

**Testimony of Caleb Smith, Resiliency Coordinator at WE ACT for Environmental Justice to the New York City Council Committee on Health regarding Introduction 998-2024**

Dear Committee Chair Lynn Schulman, and Committee on Health:

My name is Caleb Smith, Resiliency Coordinator at WE ACT for Environmental Justice (WE ACT). WE ACT is a membership-based organization headquartered in Harlem and serving all of Northern Manhattan. Our mission is to build healthy communities by empowering residents to engage in the creation of sound and fair environmental policy. I am here alongside our members to uplift this critical emergency program to better support safety and health equity in the face of deadly heat events.

Approximately 40% of New York City neighborhoods face higher risk of heat related illness or death, due in large part to systemic disinvestment from redlining and other racist practices. As a result, Black New Yorkers are the most vulnerable, and die at more twice the rate of their white counterparts. Every year, an estimated [570 people die from heat-exacerbated illness](#). The cooling center program is an essential safety net for communities who bear the burden of extremely hot days, especially for households that do not have an air conditioner or cannot afford the utility costs associated with running an AC.

However, the program is in many ways ad hoc. It has no budget, little consistency, and some neighborhoods lack a location within a 5 minute walking distance. The program is functioning well below its potential, as residents cite little to no wayfinding, signage, or advertisements. [Community members have told us how to remedy these issues](#) in WE ACT's Climate Justice Working Group Report released in 2020. These solutions require thoughtful investment. Introduction 998-2024 charges the Office of Emergency Management and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to center equity in the quantity and siting of cooling center locations.

Further, the codification of the program will allow the City to better allocate resources to improve awareness of the program and [address barriers to access](#). Other cities, like Phoenix, AZ, are leading the way in implementing best practices for the program, such as extending hours of operation well into the evening at select locations, coordinating outreach with local transit authorities, and establishing feedback mechanisms for Cooling Center patrons. Cooling Center visits result in an [estimated 66% reduction in the risk of heat-attributable deaths](#). While the always-accessible Cool Options map allows residents to better

**New York, NY Office: 1854 Amsterdam Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor | New York, NY 10031 | Phone: (212) 961-1000 | Fax: (212) 961-1015**

**Washington, DC Office: 50 F Street, NW, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor | Washington, DC 20001 | Phone: (202) 495-3036 | Fax: (202) 547-6009**

[www.weact.org](http://www.weact.org)



plan for heat emergencies, it is in no way a replacement for the comprehensive community outreach, staff training, program reporting and community feedback mechanisms Int. 998-2024 would facilitate.

With that in mind, there are additional steps that can be taken to strengthen the bill for long-term climate adaptation and accessibility for all New Yorkers:

- The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the Office of Emergency Management (NYCEM) should use the latest available data when establishing the number of cooling centers the legislation mandates. Climate risk is being reassessed all the time. Last year was the first 12-month period in which global temperatures were [more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels](#). This marks a new realm of more devastating possibilities for which we must prepare.
- As the bill sets minimum standards for the number of cooling centers, DOHMH and NYCEM should also leverage data from the Heat Mortality Report, the Overheated, Underserved Comptroller Report, and the Environmental Justice report to set a minimum number of operating cooling centers for high [Heat Vulnerability Index](#) score. This minimum number should be revisited annually to ensure cooling centers are available to the most vulnerable neighborhoods.
- There should be a minimum number of cooling centers operating beyond regular working hours (9 am-5 pm) in neighborhoods with high Heat Vulnerability Index scores. The hottest hours of the day are typically between 4-6pm. However, since New York City has one of the [most intense Urban Heat Island Effects in the country](#), heat accumulates in building materials and radiates it slowly as ambient temperature changes in the evening. Cooling Center locations that close during this window drastically limit their protective capacity as people without access to cooling at home are recommended to spend [1-3 hours in air conditioned spaces](#).
- The annual survey of the Cooling Center program should also disclose multilingual outreach efforts in New York City's 10 most popular languages.
- The website should include real time updates on locations, hours, and services provided.
- NYC 311 and in-person surveys should be utilized to collect data on Cooling Center patron experience to guide program improvements based on community-specific needs.

Lastly and most importantly, if passed, we urge the administration and City Council to allocate sufficient long-term funding to ensure the City's Cooling Center Program is effectively carried out. This includes, but is not limited to, funding for staffing, staff heat health training, community-specific programming, extended operating hours, and support for volunteer-operated Cooling Center



locations with HVAC repair, replacement, and summer energy bills. Cooling Centers, like any emergency program, must be well-resourced enough to meet the gravity of the problem they are designed to address. Take this opportunity to close the vast holes in our frontline defense against [the deadliest climate hazard](#).

**WE ACT for Environmental Justice strongly urges the New York City Council to enact Int 998-2024.**

**Caleb Smith**

Resiliency Coordinator

WE ACT for Environmental Justice

646-983-87288 |

[caleb.smith@weact.org](mailto:caleb.smith@weact.org)

## **Intro 998 Testimony - Elizabeth McMillan**

Hello, my name is Elizabeth McMillan. I am a member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice, and I live in City Council District 9.

I want to thank Committee Chair Schulman for hearing my testimony in support of equitable climate policy. The Cooling Center program is a critical safety net for low-income New Yorkers during extreme heat events. The last two years recorded the hottest global temperatures in history. Extreme heat events are becoming hotter, longer, and more frequent. And with so many New Yorkers struggling to pay their utility bills, the Cooling Center program is an essential part of the solution for our most vulnerable populations.

In my neighborhood, the Cooling Center program needs more support because extreme heat events are increasing in frequency, severity, and duration in New York City. Cities such as New York are seeing more severe extreme heat events than surrounding areas not only due to climate change, but because of the contribution of the urban heat island effect, in which cities experience much higher temperatures than surrounding suburban and rural areas due to the prominence of closely placed buildings that radiate heat, high vehicle traffic, concentrated building emissions, and less heat-absorbing vegetation. The New York City Panel on Climate Change (NPCC) 2019 Report found that the number of hot days has, and will continue to increase in frequency, duration, and severity.

Introduction 998 would significantly improve the accessibility and use of Cooling Centers in my neighborhood, providing a much-needed refuge for those who are most at risk from extreme heat. That is why I strongly urge the City Council to pass this legislation.

We also hope that the City Council will prioritize the Cooling Center program with adequate funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can only be realized if the City reinforces its climate disaster response goals with financial support.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Elizabeth McMillan

My name is Jess and I am testifying in support of Intro 998, sponsored by Council Member Powers. This bill would codify New York City's Cooling Center Program and would grant the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), in conjunction with the NYC Office of Emergency Management (OEM), the discretion of designating the number and location of cooling centers, but would require that there be no fewer than the median number of cooling centers operated during heat-related emergencies in 2017. While extreme heat events are increasingly common with climate change, New York City is especially prone to these events. It has the greatest number of people exposed to the urban heat island effect in the United States due to the vast amount of asphalt, buildings, and other infrastructure that absorb and re-emit the sun's heat. Extreme heat events particularly hit seniors, low income and communities of color the hardest due to structural racism. While mitigating extreme heat requires multiple solutions, one way to do so is increasing access to the City's cooling centers.

I support Intro 998 because it will require the city to open, maintain, and operate free cooling centers when there is a heat-related emergency or a poor air quality index in the city. This is particularly important to vulnerable residents who do not have access to air conditioning, or cannot afford high utility bills during peak summer months. In designating such centers, the agencies would have to take into account where vulnerable populations reside and where such populations would be likely to use centers. In addition, DOHMH would be required to post information about the cooling center program on its website and would also have to conduct a public education campaign to increase awareness of cooling centers and the risks associated with heat-related emergencies and poor air quality. This bill will strengthen the City's emergency planning and response during extreme heat and air quality emergencies and it will increase the utilization of and improve transparency of New York City's Cooling Center Program. I urge the City Council to approve this bill and ensure there is long-term funding for extended operating hours at cooling center facilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
[Jess DePasquale](#)

New York City Council Committee on Health

April 8, 2025

Comments in Support Intro 998

My name is Juanita Lewis, and I am writing in support of Intro 998, sponsored by Council Member Powers. This bill would codify New York City's Cooling Center Program and would grant the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), in conjunction with the NYC Office of Emergency Management (OEM), the discretion of designating the number and location of cooling centers but would require that there be no fewer than the median number of cooling centers operated during heat-related emergencies in 2017.

While extreme heat events are increasingly common with climate change, New York City is especially prone to these events. It has the greatest number of people exposed to the urban heat island effect in the United States due to the vast amount of asphalt, buildings, and other infrastructure that absorb and re-emit the sun's heat. Extreme heat events particularly hit seniors, low income and communities of color the hardest due to structural racism. While mitigating extreme heat requires multiple solutions, one way to do so is increasing access to the City's cooling centers.

I support Intro 998 because it will require the city to open, maintain, and operate free cooling centers when there is a heat-related emergency or a poor air quality index in the city. This is particularly important to vulnerable residents who do not have access to air conditioning or cannot afford high utility bills during peak summer months.

In designating such centers, the agencies would have to consider where vulnerable populations reside and where such populations would be likely to use centers. In addition, DOHMH would be required to post information about the cooling center program on its website and would also have to conduct a public education campaign to increase awareness of cooling centers and the risks associated with heat-related emergencies and poor air quality.

This bill will strengthen the City's emergency planning and response during extreme heat and air quality emergencies, and it will increase the utilization of and improve transparency of New York City's Cooling Center Program.

**I urge the City Council to approve this bill and ensure there is long-term funding for extended operating hours at the cooling center facilities.**

Thank you,

Juanita Lewis

, Brooklyn, NY 11233

**Date:** April 7, 2025

**Subject:** Proposed bill for cooling center program: Int 998

Dear Chairperson Schulman,

My name is Melissa Blum, and I am a medical student currently living in City Council District 8. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide input on Introduction 998, which aims to codify New York City's Cooling Center program. The Cooling Center program is a critical safety net for low-income New Yorkers during extreme heat events. The last two years recorded the hottest global temperatures in history. Extreme heat events are becoming hotter, longer, and more frequent. And with so many New Yorkers struggling to pay their utility bills, the Cooling Center program is an essential part of the solution for our most vulnerable populations.

My research in medical school has focused on the harms that heat exposure during pregnancy can have on the health of pregnant women and their children. We know that when women are exposed to extreme heat during pregnancy, it can increase the risk of complications such as preterm birth, lower than normal birth weight, and even stillbirth (Chersich, et al., 2020). There is increasing evidence that it can also contribute to higher rates of common pregnancy complications like gestational diabetes and elevated blood pressure during pregnancy (Cil and Cameron, 2017).

Complications during pregnancy can cause a cascade of events that alters a child's developmental trajectory (Huang, et al., 2020). Due to the city's legacy of redlining and systemic racism, these impacts disproportionately affect families living in underserved communities. The city has developed the New York City Heat Vulnerability Index to represent these disparities (Matte, et al., 2024). In order to protect our pregnant mothers and the next generation of New Yorkers, we need to do a better job of responding to extreme heat events, especially in high vulnerability areas.

In East Harlem, the Cooling Center program needs more support. The neighborhood is lucky to have 9 cooling centers (WE ACT for Environmental Justice, 2021), but public awareness of the program is limited. East Harlem has a high heat vulnerability index score, a lower rate of access to air conditioning, and lower per capita income compared to the average for New York City, emphasizing the need for extra support in this neighborhood (Interactive Heat Vulnerability Index, 2022). Introduction 998 would significantly improve the accessibility and use of Cooling Centers in East Harlem, providing a much-needed refuge for those who are most at risk from extreme heat. That is why I strongly urge the City Council to pass this legislation.

I also hope that the City Council will prioritize the Cooling Center program with adequate funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can only be realized if the City reinforces its climate disaster response goals with financial support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Blum', written in a cursive style.

**Melissa Blum**

Medical Student, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai  
Melissa.blum@icahn.mssm.edu

**References:**

"A Call for NYC Cooling Center Improvements: Results from WE ACT for Environmental Justice's Cooling Center Audit Project." WE ACT for Environmental Justice. 2021. [chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://weact.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/WE-ACT-2021-Cooling-Center-Report.pdf](https://weact.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/WE-ACT-2021-Cooling-Center-Report.pdf)

Chersich MF, Pham MD, Areal A, Haghghi MM, Manyuchi A, Swift CP, et al. Associations between high temperatures in pregnancy and risk of preterm birth, low birth weight, and stillbirths: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Bmj*. 2020;371:m3811.

Cil G, Cameron TA. Potential Climate Change Health Risks from Increases in Heat Waves: Abnormal Birth Outcomes and Adverse Maternal Health Conditions. *Risk Anal*. 2017;37(11):2066-79.

Huang Y, Zhang W, Go K, Tsuchiya KJ, Hu J, Skupski DW, et al. Altered growth trajectory in children born to mothers with gestational diabetes mellitus and preeclampsia. *Arch Gynecol Obstet*. 2020;301(1):151-9.

"Interactive Heat Vulnerability Index." Environmental Health Data Portal. 2022. <https://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/data-features/hvi/>

Matte T, Lane K, Tipaldo JF, Barnes J, Knowlton K, Torem E, et al. NPCC4: Climate change and New York City's health risk. *Ann N Y Acad Sci.* 2024;1539(1):185-240.

My name is Nan Faessler and I live in CD 9 in the Lenox Terrace complex in Central Harlem and I am a volunteer member with WE ACT for Environmental Justice.

Additionally I was involved with the Cooling Center Audits that we did pre and post Covid. I was absolutely dismayed at the conditions of the NYC Cooling Centers: lack of knowledge that individual sites knew they were official "Cooling Centers", to the inhospitable conditions offered to folks who sought refuge in them, to the lack of caring on the part of management for of those who might be harmed by high heat and not have access to an air-conditioned space as a way to cool down. With all of that said I do want to thank the Chair, Ms. Schulman for taking time to hold a hearing on Intro 988.

The last ten years recorded the hottest global temperatures in history. Extreme heat events are becoming hotter, longer, and more frequent. And with so many New Yorkers struggling to pay their utility bills, the Cooling Center program is an essential part of the solution for our most vulnerable populations.

Introduction 998 would significantly improve the accessibility and use of Cooling Centers in my neighborhood, providing a much-needed refuge for those who are most at risk from extreme heat. That is why I strongly urge the City Council to pass this legislation.

We also hope that the City Council will prioritize the Cooling Center program with adequate funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can only be realized if the City reinforces its climate disaster response goals with financial support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Nan Faessler



NYC NY 10037  
CD9

Hello, my name is Shail Pandya. I am a member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice, and I live in City Council District 9.

I want to thank Committee Chair Schulman for hearing my testimony in support of equitable climate policy. The Cooling Center program is a critical safety net for low-income New Yorkers during extreme heat events. The last two years recorded the hottest global temperatures in history. Extreme heat events are becoming hotter, longer, and more frequent. And with so many New Yorkers struggling to pay their utility bills, the Cooling Center program is an essential part of the solution for our most vulnerable populations.

In my neighborhood, the Cooling Center program needs more support because [include a personal anecdote about gaps in service/quality or findings from [Cooling Center Report](#) if you live in Northern Manhattan].

Introduction 998 would significantly improve the accessibility and use of Cooling Centers in my neighborhood, providing a much-needed refuge for those who are most at risk from extreme heat. That is why I strongly urge the City Council to pass this legislation.

We also hope that the City Council will prioritize the Cooling Center program with adequate funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can only be realized if the City reinforces its climate disaster response goals with financial support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Shail Pandya

[REDACTED]  
NYC, NY 10027  
[REDACTED]

Date: April 6, 2025

Subject: Testimony in support of NYC Council Intro 998 to expand access to cooling centers

Hello, my name is Sophia Milazzo. I am here with WE ACT for Environmental Justice, and I live in City Council District 39. I work in pediatric environmental health research at Mount Sinai which is located in City Council District 8 and serves New Yorkers from all districts.

I want to thank Committee Chair Schulman for hearing my testimony in support of equitable climate policy. The Cooling Center program is a critical safety net for low-income New Yorkers during extreme heat events.

The last two years recorded the hottest global temperatures in history, and extreme heat events are increasing in our city. New York's Climate Impact Assessment's climate projections for New York City show some of the state's largest increases in extreme heat. New York City has historically experienced an average of four days per year over 95°F; this number is projected to increase as high as 32 days per year (that's over a month each year of dangerously hot days) by mid-century and to almost 2 full months per year by the end of the century. Cooling Centers are a vital community resource on these extreme heat days.

Extreme heat causes direct and indirect health effects that span acute illness to chronic health issues. These health effects are more likely to affect our most vulnerable community members. Children are a particularly high-risk group due to their immature temperature regulation mechanisms, a greater body-surface-to-area ratio and less sweat production, developmental immaturity, caregiver dependence, and a higher overall exposure to extreme heat events compared to previous generations.

Many New Yorkers, especially in low-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color, face higher risks from extreme heat and greater barriers to cooling access in extreme heat scenarios. For example, AC ownership is highly variable across the city, and even if community members have an AC unit, they may not be able to afford to run it due to electricity costs. Existing state programs like the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) are inadequately funded and resources often run out in the early to mid-summer. We must have a free, equitable, and accessible emergency response to protect the health of all New Yorkers from extreme heat.

As someone who works with a team of pediatricians, I cannot overstate how important it is for families with children and low income families of color to have options for cool, safe, convenient spaces if they don't have adequate AC where they stay. It's a life-saving health measure.

Intro 998 would significantly improve the accessibility and use of Cooling Centers across the city, providing a much-needed refuge for those who are most at risk from extreme heat. That is why I strongly urge the City Council to pass this legislation.

We also hope that the City Council will prioritize the Cooling Center program with adequate funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can only be realized if the City reinforces its climate disaster response goals with financial support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Date: April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Subject: Proposed bill in relation to cooling centers: Int 0998-2024

Dear Chairperson Schulman and Council Member Powers,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the proposed bill (#0998) on common sense extreme heat public health policy regarding New York City Cooling Centers.

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Chapter 2 of the New York State American Academy of Pediatrics, which encompass the 2 New York City Boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn, and New York Clinicians for Climate Action, a statewide clinician's environmental organization that works to create healthier environments for all New Yorkers.

**Extreme heat events are increasing in frequency, severity, and duration in New York City.** The annual number of heat waves are already twice what they were in the 1980s and the heat wave season is more than 3 times as long as it was in the 1960s. The New York City Panel on Climate Change estimates NYC will experience up to six times as many days above 90 °F and more than 5 times as many heatwaves by the 2080s with an average summer daily temperature increase of 7.6 °F by 2100 [1,2]. These are likely underestimates given that the last two years recorded the hottest global temperatures in history, with 2024 being the first year to exceed the Paris Climate Agreement's limit to 1.5 °C and global fossil fuel usage continues to rise. Extreme heat, along with other climate hazards, are already being experienced by city residents and communities, and much worse is yet to come. We must invest in improved public health infrastructure that will be able to support citizens during these dangerous events. This will require a free, equitable, and accessible emergency response system to protect New Yorkers from extreme heat. An essential component of that response will be community Cooling Centers.

**Extreme heat causes a cascade of direct and indirect health effects that span acute illness to chronic health issues.** Health impacts for the general population include increased risk of cardiovascular events, respiratory conditions, kidney disease, adverse pregnancy outcomes, increased incidence of mental health disorders including suicidality, aggressive behavior, and violence [3]. Children in particular are a high-risk vulnerable group during extreme heat events due to their immature temperature homeostatic mechanisms compared to adults, a greater body-surface-to-area ratio and less sweat production, developmental immaturity coupled with caregiver dependence, and a higher overall exposure to extreme heat events compared to previous generations. Research has shown that during the warm season, all-cause Emergency Department visits to U.S. Children's Hospitals significantly increase, with higher rates of heat-related illness, bacterial gastrointestinal, ear, and skin infections, in addition to increased rates of injuries and poisonings [4]. The best way to prevent health related impacts from extreme heat events (outside of a rapid transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy) will involve simple yet powerful preventative health guidance to families: stay cool, stay hydrated, and stay indoors.

**Many New Yorkers, especially in low-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color, face higher risks from extreme heat and greater barriers to cooling access in extreme heat scenarios.** Due to historic environmentally racist policies, often experienced in New York City neighborhoods as heat islands that suffer from lack of green space, poor quality housing stock, poor air conditioning access, energy insecurity and more, these communities are found to have the highest vulnerabilities to extreme

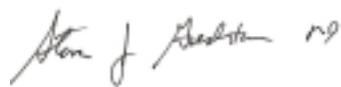
heat using the City's Heat Vulnerability Index [5]. Existing state programs like the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) that residents may qualify for to help with energy assistance in these scenarios are inadequately funded and resources often run out in the early to mid-summer. These communities remain at high risk from heat-related illness, morbidity, and mortality. More must be done to support their health.

**The Cooling Center Program implemented by New York City government is an essential resource for communities during extreme heat events, but major improvements and investments must be made to create a truly exceptional resource for our communities in these situations.** WE ACT for Environmental Justice conducted Cooling Center focus groups in 2020 and found that Cooling Centers often lacked adequate signage advertising specific buildings or facilities as Community Cooling Centers, specific criteria that sites must meet to be designated a Cooling Center for city residents, a lack of staff member training on heat-related illness responses and resources, and a wide spectrum of site quality and conditions [6]. Cooling Centers may be designated specifically for older populations, or just for families, or may not allow you to bring a pet with you if you need access to a cool environment. Cooling Centers may also be opened in specific neighborhoods where there is a less acute need, or within areas of environmental justice communities that are not easily accessible due to distance, language barriers, or lack of access for people with disabilities. Further barriers may be identified in larger focus groups around the City that could further information solutions to ensure that Cooling Centers are effectively serving communities where they are needed.

**Passing NYC Council Introduction 0998-2024 to codify the NYC Cooling Center Program would be a major step forward in protecting New Yorker's health in extreme heat scenarios.** Granting the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Office of Emergency Management discretion in designating the number and location of cooling centers in neighborhoods while considering vulnerable population needs will help make Cooling Centers more effective for the communities they serve. Public awareness and education campaigns, as well as a yearly reporting mechanism for the Cooling Centers would also improve accountability and help continue a culture of improving quality services that our communities will increasingly need in the hotter years to come.

We urge the NYC Council to pass this legislation and take up further bills to address extreme heat during this legislative session. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback on this policy proposal.

Thank you,



**Steven J Goldstein, MD FAAP**

Chair, NYS AAP Chapter 2 Committee on Environmental Health and Climate Change

Past President, NY Chapter 2 of the American Academy of Pediatrics

NYS AAP Chapter 2 Climate Change Advocate

Past Climate Health Organizing Fellow, Cambridge Health

Founding Member, NY Clinicians for Climate Action

[SJG34@Cornell.edu](mailto:SJG34@Cornell.edu)

[NewYorkCCA@Gmail.com](mailto:NewYorkCCA@Gmail.com)

Twitter: @SteveGoldstei10 @ClimateHealth

Cell: (516) 972-8319

#ClimateChangesNYHealth



**Charles E. Moon III, MD FAAP**

Environmental Health & Climate Change Policy Coordinator for NYS American Academy of Pediatrics

Chair, NYS AAP Chapter 3 Committee on Environmental Health & Climate Change

Executive Committee Member, New York Clinicians for Climate Action

[Charles.moon@mssm.edu](mailto:Charles.moon@mssm.edu)

[1] [Extreme Heat - NYC Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice](#)

[2] [Shifting U.S. Cities | Climate Central](#)

[3] Bell ML, Gasparrini A, Benjamin GC. Climate Change, Extreme Heat, and Health. N Engl J Med. 2024 May 16;390(19):1793-1801. doi: 10.1056/NEJMra2210769. PMID: 38749034. [Climate Change, Extreme Heat, and Health | New England Journal of Medicine](#)

[4] Bernstein AS, Sun S, Weinberger KR, Spangler KR, Sheffield PE, Wellenius GA. Warm Season and Emergency Department Visits to U.S. Children's Hospitals. Environ Health Perspect. 2022 Jan;130(1):17001. doi: 10.1289/EHP8083. Epub 2022 Jan 19. Erratum in: Environ Health Perspect. 2022 Apr;130(4):49002. PMID: 35044241; PMCID: PMC8767980.

[5] [Interactive heat vulnerability index.](#)

[6] A Call for NYC Cooling Center Improvements: Results from WE ACT for Environmental Justice's Cooling Center Audit Project. [Cooling Center Short Report](#)

Hello, my name is Suzanne Simmons. I am a member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice, and I live in City Council District 9.

I want to thank Committee Chair Schulman for hearing my testimony in support of equitable climate policy. The Cooling Center program is a critical safety net for low-income New Yorkers during extreme heat events. The last two years recorded the hottest global temperatures in history. Extreme heat events are becoming hotter, longer, and more frequent. And with so many New Yorkers struggling to pay their utility bills, the Cooling Center program is an essential part of the solution for our most vulnerable populations.

In my neighborhood, the Cooling Center program needs more support because I see so many neighbors in need of cooling, and having trouble finding one. The hill from Bradhurst Avenue, where I live, to the Hamilton Grange Library is too steep for many of our elderly neighbors with mobility difficulties. It is also a lifeline for families when air conditioning becomes too expensive, as it likely will be this summer. For this reason, more cooling centers are needed in this neighborhood.

Introduction 998 would significantly improve the accessibility and use of Cooling Centers in my neighborhood, providing a much-needed refuge for those who are most at risk from extreme heat. That is why I strongly urge the City Council to pass this legislation.

We also hope that the City Council will prioritize the Cooling Center program with adequate funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can only be realized if the City reinforces its climate disaster response goals with financial support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Hello, my name is Temi. I am a member of WE ACT for Environmental Justice, and I live in City Council District 9.

I want to thank Committee Chair Schulman for hearing my testimony in support of an equitable climate policy. The Cooling Center program is a critical safety net for low-income New Yorkers during extreme heat events. The last two years recorded the hottest global temperatures in history. Extreme heat events are becoming hotter, longer, and more frequent. And with so many New Yorkers struggling to pay their utility bills, the Cooling Center program is an essential part of the solution for our most vulnerable populations.

In my neighborhood, the Cooling Center program needs more support because as climate change worsens, we must adapt to a warmer world, and those in my neighborhood are at higher risk of heat-related morbidities. Traveling throughout New York, it is very evident how different the temperatures feel on hot days in East Harlem, often feeling unbearable. Having only 9 cooling centers near me, which are not working at full capacity or easily accessible, is incredibly harmful to the community. Especially considering the high number of people dying and being hospitalized due to high heat exposure. Currently, an average of 130 New Yorkers die heat-related deaths. This number is estimated to increase to 3,300 deaths annually by 2080. As evidenced, these situations will only continue to worsen, and more needs to be done to help. Please do not leave your fellow New Yorkers out in the heat.

Introduction 998 would significantly improve the accessibility and use of Cooling Centers in my neighborhood, providing a much-needed refuge for those who are most at risk from extreme heat. That is why I strongly urge the City Council to pass this legislation.

We also hope that the City Council will prioritize the Cooling Center program with adequate funding. The objectives laid out in this bill can only be realized if the City reinforces its climate disaster response goals with financial support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christina Farrell  
Address: First Deputy Commissioner  
I represent: NYCEM  
Address: NYC

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chr. Carolyn Olson  
Address: Assistant Commissioner, Environmental  
I represent: Surveillance and Policy  
Address: NYC DOHMH

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 998 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Raise Gordon-Lirema  
Address: [Redacted] NY 11249  
I represent: El Puente  
Address: 211 S 4th St BK NY 11211

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

4

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 998 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 3/4/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deante Johnson

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NLCV

Address: 30 Broad

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 988 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: China Copeland

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Brooklyn, NY

I represent: We Stay In Our Quarters

Address: 754 Melrose Ave Bronx, NY

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 998 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/18/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shelby Luster

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Brooklyn, NY 11213

I represent: UPROSE

Address: 462 36th St Brooklyn NY 11232

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

13

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0998 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/8/75

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Arganna Joseph

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: THE POINT INC.

Address: 940 4<sup>th</sup> AVENUE

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

12

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. X Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jorge Andres Ramirez

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ N.Y., N.Y.

I represent: The Brotherhood Sister Sol

Address: 140 Hamilton St 10037 N.Y., N.Y.

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anita Kwok

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: United Neighborhood House

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Liz McMillan

Address: [Redacted] NYC 10028

I represent: WE ACT

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 998-2024 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Calvin Smith

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn

I represent: WE ACT

Address: 1854 Amsterdam Ave #2nd floor Manhattan

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 998 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 8 Apr 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rex Tai

Address: [Redacted]

I represent: WE ACT

Address: 1854 Amsterdam Ave

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 998 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sophia Milazzo

Address: [REDACTED] 11215

I represent: WE ACT

Address: 1854 Amsterdam Ave

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Misha Sharp

Address: [REDACTED] NJ 07030

I represent: 32BJ Health Fund

Address: 25 W 18<sup>th</sup> St, New York, NY 10011

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 998-2024 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/8/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shravanthi Kanekal

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY 11225

I represent: NYC Environmental Justice Alliance

Address: 462 36th St Brooklyn NY 11232

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms