

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION

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OCTOBER 7, 2021
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HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: CHAIR JAMES GENNARO

COUNCIL MEMBERS: JAMES GENNARO
DARMA DIAZ
STEPHEN LEVIN
DANIEL DROMM
CARLOS MENCHACA

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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CHAIR JAMES GENNARO: Are we started?

Are we good? One more time. Before I start, I'd like to indicate that we're joined by Council Members Menchaca, Levin, Diaz, and Dromm, the author of the Bill that we're talking about today. Good morning. I'm Jim Gennaro, Chair of the Committee on Environmental Protection, and today's we'll vote on Intro 455A, authored by Council Member Danny Dromm which will replace the diesel school buses currently transporting New York City school children with zero emission, all electric school buses by 2035. This committee proves they held a hearing on Intro 455 in December 2018 and received testimony from the DOE, school bus manufacturers, environmental and climate justice advocates, public health experts and interested members of the public, and Danny has been working on the Bill since then. I applaud him as I will many times in this statement. Most school busses in the U.S. still operate using diesel engines, including those operating in New York. Currently, DOE's office of people's transportation contacts with approximately 65 companies to provide bus service for about 150,000 students. In total, this school bus fleet includes about 10,700 vehicles

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2 operating 8,500 routes. Spending for people
3 transportation comprises five percent of the DOE's
4 overall budget with approximately 1.3 billion
5 allocated for fiscal 2019. New York State reimburses
6 the city for approximately 50 percent of the cost of
7 student transportation. Use of these diesel-fueled
8 school buses places unnecessary health risks on New
9 York City school children. The potential health
10 impacts from this exposure including increased asthma
11 triggers and impaired lung function are caused in
12 part by the inhalation of particular matter and
13 ground-level ozone among other pollutants which are
14 present in abundance in diesel exhausts. Children
15 exposed to even low levels of ozone are at a very
16 significant risk for respiratory symptoms and for
17 rescue medication use. Air pollution increases
18 airway oxidative stress and decreases small airway
19 function in asthmatic children. Children riding in a
20 school bus inhale, get this, 7 to 70 times more
21 exhaust than non-riding students inhale from all
22 school bus emissions in the area. In New York City,
23 some transit sectors have begin to explore or commit
24 to transitioning away from diesel powered vehicles,
25 and we all know that. According to New York City's

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2 road map to the 80 x 50 plan, the transportation
3 sector produces 28 percent of the city's greenhouse
4 gas emissions. In December 2015, Bill Di Blasio
5 announced New York City Green Fleet, an effort to,
6 "create the largest electric vehicle fleet of any
7 U.S. city" with targets to reduce municipal vehicle
8 emissions 50 percent by 2025 and 80 percent by 2035.
9 Intro 455-A would require the city to ensure that all
10 school buses in used by December 1st, 2035 are all
11 electric zero emission school buses. The replacement
12 of school buses shall be subject to the commercial
13 availability and reliability of all electric zero
14 emission buses, and the technical and physical
15 availability of related plan infrastructure
16 including, but not limited to the charging stations
17 and the bus depots for all electric emission school
18 buses. That is a fancy way of saying that the city
19 is looking for a way to kind of get out of this, but
20 I'm going to around and I'm not going to let them do
21 that, and where was I? It should be noted that the
22 technology exists right now to retrofit existing
23 diesel-powered school buses to all electric
24 operation. Council Member Dromm and I toured such a
25 bus, and the cost of conversion is less than half of

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2 the cost of purchasing a new all-electric school bus.
3 Take that. That's how we're going to get this done,
4 Danny. This Local Law would also require the DOE to
5 report to the mayor and the speaker on a variety of
6 implementation targets within three reporting
7 deadlines. You know, it talks about all the
8 reporting deadlines, yeah, yeah, yeah, you get it,
9 and so, but just the fact that there are these
10 deadlines, that there are these markers, that there
11 are these milestones that have to be met, make this
12 the good Bill that it is. This Local Law would also
13 require that each of the, uh, no, no, we did that.
14 Okay, for far too long, New York City school children
15 have been exposed to hazardous air pollution while
16 riding inside school buses on their way to school.
17 With this legislation, that exposure will end finally
18 allowing school children to breathe safely inside of
19 school buses. I'm going to say that again, finally
20 allowing school children to breathe safely inside of
21 school buses. It's 2021. What the hell? Like they
22 don't have that now? You know, but thank God we're
23 doing it now and reducing local emissions in the
24 neighborhood these buses drive through. I recommend
25 a yes vote on this vital environmental Bill. I would

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2 like to thank the excellent committee staff who have
3 done such great work over the years. Committee
4 Counsel Samara Swanson, Policy Analysis Nadia Johnson
5 and Ricky Chala (SP?), and Financial Analysis John
6 VanSelzer (SP?), and finally my Legislative Director
7 Naby Cawer (SP?) for all their hard work. I'd like
8 to thank Jeff Baker (SP?) whose on the phone with
9 Danny and with me like the night before the Bill got
10 aged. It was whole thing. So, now let us hear from
11 Council Member Dromm on his great Bill. Once again,
12 I, you know, really applaud him in a special way for
13 building in all the safeguards into the this Bill to
14 make sure that this actually happens. I'll mention
15 (inaudible) that the council that this committee pass
16 a school bus Bill in 2005 to convert from diesel to
17 alternative fuel. Not one school was ever converted.
18 That was 16 years ago, and so, this Bill is better.
19 That's why this is going to happen. It's got the
20 special force of Danny on it, and so, we're going to
21 hear from him now.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DANIEL DROMM: Thank you
23 very much, Chair Gennaro, and thank you for being
24 sure that you'll be around to ensure that this, in
25 fact, become a reality for us in New York City. With

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2 the passage of Intro 455, New York parents, teachers,
3 students, bus drivers, and really all of us can
4 breathe a lot easier. Thanks to the tireless work of
5 advocates and this city council, dirty school buses
6 choking our streets and our lungs will soon be a
7 thing of the past. Earlier this year, Mayor Di
8 Blasio announced that the city had finally recognized
9 the urgency of a cleaner, greener school bus fleet.
10 Intro 455 and the intense advocacy around it helped
11 guide his decision and its codification will ensure
12 that the city stays on track, or should I say on
13 route as the entire fleet is electrified by 2035.
14 There are undoubtedly global benefits to converting
15 the country's biggest school bus fleet, but I would
16 like to focus on the more immediate impacts.
17 Environmental justice communities such as the one
18 that represent have had to deal with a host of
19 economic and health disparities. Dirty buses and the
20 obnoxious fumes they spew most impact the individuals
21 who spend the longest time on them. Drivers and
22 special education and homeless students. In fact,
23 parents concerned about their children's health were
24 the ones who first brought to my attention the need
25 to electrify our school buses. As a former teacher

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2 who experienced, albeit briefly, trouble breathing
3 inside and around buses, I had to agree, and as I
4 talked to more and more people, I realized that the
5 impact extended even further. Residents near schools
6 and bus stopped have long suffered from the air and
7 noise pollution of our now antiquated fleet. Thanks
8 to the people who fought to make this happen,
9 including Justin Wood and the New York lawyers for
10 the public interest, Carlos Castell Croke and the New
11 York Legal Conservation voters, Kevin Grant,
12 Committee Counsel Samara Swanson, and my former
13 colleague, Costa Constantinides, my Legislative
14 Director Sabastian McGuire, and this Bill was first
15 heard in Costa Constantinides' committee and of
16 course, our current Chairperson, James Gennaro who I
17 have to say as soon as he became Chair of this
18 committee, made this Bill move forward. Without your
19 help and your support, Council Member Gennaro, Chair
20 Gennaro, this would not have happened, and you have
21 an environmental champion for years. I admire you
22 and thank you from the bottom of my heart for making
23 sure that this legislation passed.

24 CHAIR JAMES GENNARO: Thank you, Danny.
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2 COUNCIL MEMBER DANIEL DROMM: But our
3 work here inspired the rest of the country. If New
4 York City can do this, every municipality can and
5 should. Our children's future depends on it. Again,
6 thank you.

7 CHAIR JAMES GENNARO: Thank you, council
8 member. Once again, I'll end where I begin and you
9 know, applauding you for your tenacity and you know,
10 putting this up there, getting it heard, working with
11 the advocates, making sure that we got to this good
12 day. So, this is really, I'm happy to be part of it,
13 and is there anyone else that wishes to be heard?
14 Seeing none, I guess, it's my turn to ask Bill to
15 call the roll.

16 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN: William
17 Martin, Committee Clerk, roll call vote, Committee on
18 Environmental Protection, proposed Introduction 455-
19 A. Chair Gennaro.

20 CHAIR JAMES GENNARO: I vote yes.

21 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN: Levin.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER STEPHEN LEVIN: I vote I
23 on all.

24 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN:
25 Menchaca.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER CARLOS MENCHACA: I want
3 to just underscore the importance of this Bill, but
4 really the incredible work by Council Member Dromm
5 and Chair Gennaro making this happen. These are our
6 last weeks in the council, for at least Council
7 Member Dromm and I, and some other, and you, okay,
8 it's for a lot of us, it's for a lot of us.

9 CHAIR JAMES GENNARO: I'm going to start
10 crying now.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CARLOS MENCHACA: Well,
12 that's how I'm feeling. There's a lot of mourning in
13 my heart, but we're still working, and I'm just
14 listening to you both talk about how much you put in
15 these last few efforts to make something beautiful
16 happen that needs to happen, and I love the energy
17 that your brought to your opening statement in terms
18 of just like what the hell is happening right now
19 where kids can't; that's the energy that we bring.
20 So, thank you for that, and I vote I.

21 CHAIR JAMES GENNARO: Thank you, council
22 member, and I wish to be associated with Council
23 Member Menchaca's remarks.

24 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN: Darma
25 Diaz.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER DARMA DIAZ: I vote a
3 proud I as a former PTA parent and new grandma, I
4 thank you for your efforts and for pushing it
5 through. It's a sign of the times, so again, thank
6 you all. I vote I.

7 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN: By a
8 vote of four in the affirmative, zero in the
9 negative, and no abstentions, item has been adopted
10 by the committee.

11 CHAIR JAMES GENNARO: Thank you. Are we
12 leaving the record open for Eric? I don't think we
13 have the ability to, right? Okay, so with that, this
14 hearing is adjourned. This vote is adjourned.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date October 27, 2021