Memorandum of Support
For Environmental Justice

A.1862 (Peoples Stokes)/ S.3199 (Serrano)
Environmental Justice Zones
A.2234 (Peoples Stokes)/ S.3110 (Parker)
Environmental Justice Advisory Group

Statement of Support: New York State has a proud legacy of environmental protection and our air quality, waterways and wilderness areas have made a remarkable recovery in the past 40 years under the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act and other seminal environmental protection laws and regulations. But as we have made consistent progress to improve New York’s environment, low-income areas, communities of color and traditional immigrant neighborhoods have borne the disproportionate burden of pollution that was displaced by stronger environmental standards for more affluent areas elsewhere. This inequity is largely a function of systematic, institutionalized racism and deference to corporate values over basic human needs. As the threat of climate change intensifies, low-income communities now have to contend with the greater likelihood of extreme flooding, vulnerable infrastructure, heat waves and exotic diseases on top of their already disproportionate exposure to pollution. The State of New York can no longer stand by and let this injustice persist for those that contribute the least to climate change, yet receive the worst effects of its impacts.

A.2234 will establish a permanent environmental justice advisory group – one that provides oversight to state actions ensuring that industrial, municipal and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, or local policies do not disproportionately burden minority or low income communities with pollution or other negative environmental impacts. This body will help establish model policies of agency conduct and help governmental entities comply with such policies.

A.1862 identifies criteria for mapping and publishing lists and data regarding New York State’s environmental justice zones – areas that see the intersection of poverty and pollution – and empowers the commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation to create this comprehensive assessment of environmental justices areas as a tool to combat inequity.

Both initiatives are fundamentally linked and provide the foundation for how New York State can reverse decades of inconsistent regulation of pollution – where the color of one’s skin or the contents of one’s wallet should not determine the quality of their air or the purity of their water. In the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr. it is time for New York to acknowledge that an environmental injustice anywhere is an injustice everywhere.

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Urges Your Support Of A.1862 and A.2234