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***Advocates Call on Food Lobby to End Opposition to the GreenCart Bill That Would Reduce Childhood Obesity and Improve Health Outcomes in Neighborhoods Across New York City***

New York – New York City's leading children's and anti-hunger advocates, health and social service providers, and religious organizations came together today to call on the food industry to end its campaign to thwart legislation vital to bringing fresh fruits and vegetables to neighborhoods across the five boroughs.

Advocates are pushing back on the intense lobbying campaign that aims to block Green Cart legislation (665-A) that would bring healthy food to poor neighborhoods by allowing vendors, for the first time, to sell produce in these areas.

“For decades, the food industry has controlled what is or is not sold in low-income neighborhoods. Across New York City too many families have limited access to healthy food choices. In these communities, healthy eating is not simply a matter of personal responsibility; it is a matter of making healthy food choices accessible and affordable. Even with the increasing prevalence of green markets and responsible grocers, affordable fresh food is hard to find in many neighborhoods,” stated Jennifer March-Joly, Executive Director for Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, “The Green Carts legislation would finally provide healthy options in the neighborhoods that have been underserved for too long.”

According to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), those who eat fruits and vegetables 3 times or more a day are 42% less likely to die of stroke and 24% less likely to die of heart disease than those who eat them less than once a day. Yet 14 % of all New Yorkers eat no fruits and vegetables at all on a daily basis. In neighborhoods where fruit and vegetable consumption is low, DOHMH also found escalated rates of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

“Over half of New York City's children are overweight – one in five kindergartners is obese. We know that a diet lacking fresh fruits and vegetables is a major contributor to poor health outcomes. In fact, life expectancy in poorer communities is eight years shorter than in wealthier communities. If neighborhoods had real choices, where fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables were as available as malt liquors, beers, sugared drinks,

and processed foods, there would be no need for Green Cart Legislation. Sadly, that is not the city that we live in. We're calling on the City Council to stand up for their constituents' health – passage of Green Cart legislation is a must," stated Emma Jordan-Simpson, Executive Director of the Children's Defense Fund NY.

The bill, known as Green Carts Legislation, would create 1500 new permits for vendors to sell only fresh produce in neighborhoods determined by DOHMH to have high rates of obesity and heart disease and low consumption of fruits and vegetables. The carts will be targeted to areas that have few options for purchasing fresh produce and would be phased in over two years. The bill was introduced in December by Mayor Bloomberg and Speaker Quinn, with co-sponsorship of Council Members Rivera and Comrie.

Green Cart opponents have been waging a fierce campaign to stop Green Carts legislation from being enacted. They argue that the presence of vendors will result in unfair competition for existing business owners. However, vendor permits are targeted to low-income communities that currently lack fresh food outlets. Additionally, bodega owners will be allowed to own a Green Cart permit and have a cart outside their store. Opponents also claim that existing food retailers do not provide healthy food choices because of low demand; yet, families have told social service, health care providers and advocates that they want but cannot buy fruits and vegetables in their neighborhoods.

"From Washington Heights to the South Bronx to the North Shore of Staten Island, we are seeing children and families suffering from the dearth of food outlets that offer healthy options," said C. Warren Moses CEO of the Children's Aid Society. "Across these communities, children and their parents are saying the same thing: we want access to healthy food that we can afford."

"We all know that eating more fruits and vegetables every day can improve our health," said Ulysse Kilgore President of the Bedford Stuyvesant Family Health Center. "And while this may seem like a straight-forward prescription, many of us simply cannot do that because we lack fresh fruits and vegetables in our neighborhoods. People want to be healthy – but we can't eat what we don't have access to. Green Carts will make it possible for every New Yorker to have a healthier diet."

"Our research shows us that hundreds of thousands of New York City families are living in 'food deserts' without access to healthy affordable food," said Joel Berg, Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger. "While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problem of food access, Green Carts are a critical part of the solution as they provide fresh produce to neighborhoods with few retail options. Long term, it is clear that the city indeed needs more supermarkets, grocery stores and greenmarkets in these communities as well. But New York's children and families cannot wait for this infrastructure to be built – Green Carts are needed today."

Advocates are calling on the City Council to pass the Green Cart Legislation as it was originally introduced to create 1500 new produce vendors, for maximum reach throughout the five boroughs. The bill is scheduled to be voted out of Consumer Affairs Committee on Wednesday, February 27.

