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Planned Parenthood of New York City

**Planned Parenthood of New York City  
Testimony on Intro 304-A, the Nail Salon Health and Safety bill  
May 1, 2015**

Good afternoon. I am Julienne Verdi, Director of Government Relations at Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC). I am pleased to be here today to provide testimony in support of New York City's effort to improve health conditions in nail salons. Planned Parenthood of New York City thanks our strong supporters Public Advocate Letitia James, Chair of the Committee on Health, the Honorable Council Member Corey Johnson, and the Chair of the Committee on Consumer Affairs, the Honorable Council Member Rafael Espinal for their leadership in convening this hearing. We'd also like to thank the Committee on Health, Committee on Consumer Affairs and the entire City Council for their dedication to these issues and we welcome the opportunity to discuss ways we can boost access to care and improve health outcomes for all New Yorkers.

Planned Parenthood of New York City serves more than 50,000 patients annually in our health centers currently located in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Staten Island and the Bronx. We are also proud to announce that a new health care center in Queens is due to open later this spring. PPNYC provides sexual and reproductive health services including birth control; emergency contraception; gynecological care (including cervical and breast cancer screenings); colposcopy; male reproductive health exams; testing, counseling, and treatment for sexually transmitted infections; the HPV vaccine; HIV testing and counseling; pregnancy testing, options counseling (including adoption) and abortion. As a trusted sexual and reproductive health care provider in New York City we are concerned about the effects hazardous chemicals may have on reproductive health and understand the importance of passing supportive legislation and improving education around safe practices.

There are an estimated 5,000 nail salons in New York State, with 2,000 of them located in New York City alone.<sup>1</sup> A steadily growing body of research indicates that toxic chemicals found in nail salons may negatively affect a person's reproductive health. Nail salon workers are predominantly women of reproductive age, and persistent exposure to chemicals commonly used in the nail industry could have serious, long-term health effects, especially to the reproductive system, resulting in infertility, miscarriages and birth defects.<sup>2</sup>

Research from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) suggest that many of the chemicals used in nail salons may have harmful health effects on both staff and clientele. The "Toxic Trio" of formaldehyde, dibutyl phthalate, and toluene are commonly found in nail polish, remover, disinfectant, and straightening treatment products and at high levels can pose significant risk for miscarriage, menstrual disorders, and harm to fetal development. Dibutyl phthalate is banned in all cosmetics in the European Union. As a reproductive healthcare provider, we find these results particularly concerning and stand in support of legislation that safeguards and strengthens one's reproductive health and wellbeing.

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<sup>1</sup>Office of the Public Advocate, *Policy Report: How Safe is Your Nail Salon?* (Sept. 2014), available at [http://pubadvocate.nyc.gov/sites/advocate.nyc.gov/files/publicadvocate-annualreport-nail\\_salon-1.pdf](http://pubadvocate.nyc.gov/sites/advocate.nyc.gov/files/publicadvocate-annualreport-nail_salon-1.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>Law Students for Reproductive Justice, *Poisonous Polish: Toxic Exposure and Health Risks to Nail Salon Workers* (2013), available at [http://lsri.org/documents/factsheets/13\\_Poisonous\\_Polish.pdf](http://lsri.org/documents/factsheets/13_Poisonous_Polish.pdf).

Moreover, many of the chemicals used in nail salons are unregulated and do not have adequate warning or usage labels to alert workers of such dangers. As a healthcare provider, we support strong public health protections and clear disclosures of potential health risks of commonly used chemicals. We commend the bill's inclusion of an outreach and education component to provide employees, consumers, community members and advocates with information on potential hazards and effective safety measures.

However, while making information available is vital, it is even more important that the information be made accessible to all affected parties. Central to this is ensuring all health and safety materials are disseminated in multiple languages, and that outreach and inspectors include bilingual support to better respond to complaints. The majority of nail salon technicians and contractors are immigrant women, predominantly from Asian countries; many are non-English speakers or women who are limited English proficient. Culturally competent and culturally fluent resources are imperative to ensure the women most impacted by potential health risks are provided with effective tools to protect themselves. Without proper education and signage available in workers' preferred languages, both workers and nail salon consumers are at risk.

New York City is one of the most diverse localities in the world, with experts estimating that nearly 800 languages are spoken within the 5 boroughs.<sup>3</sup> PPNYC is committed to serving communities that depend on our services the most and providing access to health care in culturally competent settings, adhering strictly to the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in all of our clinical, education and public affairs work. As such, PPNYC supports policies and legislation that increases access to health care for immigrant and low-wage communities through education and outreach in the preferred languages of those most affected by these issues.

Also, as a safety net provider, PPNYC understands the economic barriers that often impact a person's access to healthcare. On average, nail salon workers earn less than \$20,000 a year nationwide, with New York City employees earning on average only \$8.95 an hour and advocacy groups citing that many nail salon workers earn base salaries of just \$35-80 a day before tips.<sup>4</sup> Among noncitizen immigrant woman of reproductive age in New York City, approximately 40% are uninsured, compared with 15% of US-born women, and within the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community specifically, women are more likely to be uninsured than men.<sup>5</sup> Income constraints, language barriers and lack of health insurance, make it difficult for many nail salon workers to get the care they may need after long-term exposure to harmful chemicals. Resources and education on

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<sup>3</sup> Sam Roberts, *Listening to (and Saving) the World's Languages*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (Apr. 29, 2010), available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/29/nyregion/29lost.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/29/nyregion/29lost.html?_r=0); The Endangered Language Alliance (ELA) <http://elalliance.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Employment and Wages: 39-5092 Manicurists and Pedicurists*, U.S. DEP'T OF LABOR (Apr. 26, 2012), available at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/manicurists-andpedicurists.htm>; Office of the Public Advocate, *Policy Report: How Safe is Your Nail Salon?* (Sept. 2014), available at [http://pubadvocate.nyc.gov/sites/advocate.nyc.gov/files/publicadvocate-annualreport-nail\\_salon-1.pdf](http://pubadvocate.nyc.gov/sites/advocate.nyc.gov/files/publicadvocate-annualreport-nail_salon-1.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> New York Immigration Coalition, *Maximizing Health Care Reform for New York's Immigrants* (2013), available at <http://nyshealthfoundation.org/uploads/resources/maximizing-health-care-reform-new-york-immigrants-february-2013.pdf>; Asian American Federation, *Working but Poor: Asian American Poverty in New York City* (Oct. 2008), available at <http://www.aafny.org/doc/WorkingButPoor.pdf>

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protective measures could go a long way in helping mitigate potential health risks and high costs.

PPNYC applauds Council bill 304-A's healthy nail salon certification program that would both encourage nail salons to improve overall health and safety practices and also calls for concrete measures to improve salon air quality. Adequate ventilation is important for employees and customers alike in protecting one's health and financial considerations should not trump employee health and safety. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), exhaust ventilation systems have the potential to reduce chemical exposure by at least 50%.<sup>6</sup> Rewarding salons that use less toxic products incentivizes safer practices and motivates small businesses to proactively engage in creating healthier environments for both employees and customers.

We are also pleased to see the legislation's inclusion of a study to document employee health problems and track the use of personal safety equipment. Meaningful reporting tools are vital to ensuring the goals of the bill are translated into concrete, effective action. We lastly commend the bill's formation of a task force to assess gaps in health and safety procedures and consider additional department response. We would encourage the task force to include representation from immigrant rights groups, environmental justice groups, labor and health care organizations, so that organizations and community representatives best suited to speak to the various health and safety needs are informing best practices and recommendations.

Planned Parenthood of New York City encourages the New York City Council to pass Proposed Int. No. 304-A and continue to advance the health and safety of all New Yorkers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue and I would be happy to take any questions or provide additional information.

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**Since 1916, Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC) has been an advocate for and provider of reproductive health services and education for New Yorkers. Through a threefold mission of clinical services, education, and advocacy, PPNYC is bringing better health and more fulfilling lives to each new generation of New Yorkers. As a voice for sexual and reproductive health equity, PPNYC supports legislation and policies to ensure that all New Yorkers—and, in fact, people around the world—will have access to the full range of reproductive health care services and information.**

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<sup>6</sup> Occupational Safety & Health Administration, *Health Hazards in Nail Salons*, available at <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/nailsalons/chemicalhazards.html>.