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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Congressman Jerrold Nadler, Congressman Joseph Crowley, Congressman José Serrano, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, New York State Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., Chair of the Education Committee Council Member Robert Jackson, City Council Assistant Deputy Majority Leader Inez E. Dickens, Council Member Vincent Ignizio, Council Member Jumanne Williams, Council Member James Sanders, Council Member Stephen Levin, the United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew; representatives for Council Member Charles Barron, Council Member Mark- Viverito, Council Member Margaret Chin, LIUNA Local 78, SEIU 32BJ, and New York Committee for Occupational Safety & Health, Joined New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, New York Communities for Change and Parents at City Hall this morning to Launch Right to Know Campaign Demanding Parental Notification of School Contamination**

New York, NY, September 7, 2011- This morning, the day before the first day of school, elected officials, parents, and advocates gathered on the steps of City Hall to stand up for every parent's right to know if their children's schools are contaminated with toxins. This call for transparency comes after several failures on the part of the Department of Education (DOE) and School Construction Authority (SCA) to promptly test and release results regarding school contamination.

Toxic levels of PCBs – chemicals that pose serious risks to children's nervous and immune systems and brain development – have been found in NYC schools. As many as 1200 schools across the City may be contaminated. Yet the DOE and SCA continue to keep parents in the dark concerning the potential toxicity of their children's school. Not only has the City continued to withhold the results of pilot study testing conducted this summer, it also refuses to provide a reasonable timeline for the removal of these known toxins. New York Lawyers for the Public Interest released a list today which details the degree of potential and confirmed contamination in all NYC schools:  
<http://tinyurl.com/nylpipcbsschoolslist>.

In January 2011, the City found another highly toxic compound, TCE, at the Bronx New School (PS 51). Yet, the city failed to take any action or notify parents for an entire seven months, allowing children attending PS 51 to be exposed to these toxic chemicals until August. The City continues to withhold test results of the 65 additional schools across New York City that could be contaminated with TCE, and - 31 leased schools have yet to be tested.

Press conference attendees believe parents have the right to know and are demanding that the city conduct appropriate environmental testing and release all findings immediately.

"Tomorrow is the first day back at school for New York's public schoolchildren, and the City has failed to inform thousands of parents that their kids may be attending schools that are contaminated with PCBs – chemicals that can produce serious and preventable health problems in children and pregnant women," said **Congressman Jerry Nadler**. "The City's lack of transparency underscores its unacceptably slow 10-year timeline to remediate PCBs from hundred of schools. But cost and logistics must never trump public health and safety, or the public's right to know. The City must promptly and comprehensively remediate our schools and, in the meantime, inform parents about health risks."

"As our children go back to school, we must ensure their complete health and safety," said Congressman **José E. Serrano**. "Parents must be assured that their children's learning takes place in a safe environment. To that end, there can be no delays or cost-saving in cleaning out all sources of PCBs – both in lighting fixtures and in caulk. This is our children's health that we are talking about—there is no cost too high for keeping them safe and healthy."

"New York public school students need to be learning their ABCs – not worrying about PCBs," said **Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney**. "I thank my colleagues and the many advocates leading the fight on this issue, which is so vital to the health of our city's kids."

"It is time for the City to stop dragging its feet, especially when the health and safety of both students and school staff hang in the balance. PCBs are dangerous chemicals with considerable health effects, and parents and school employees have an absolute right to know what levels of contamination either they or their children face simply by showing up to school every day. It is time for the City to test all schools that may be at risk of PCB contamination, and for those test results to be made public," said **Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.**

"Parents have the right to know if their kids are at risk of exposure to harmful toxins like PCBs and TCE. The Department of Education needs to immediately publish all information about these chemicals in our schools online. It's time to end the uncertainty and be transparent with school communities," said **Public Advocate Bill de Blasio**

"Every parent has a right to know if dangerous PCBs are leaking into their child's classroom--and if there is a reasonable timetable for the removal of these deadly substances. It is unconscionable that the DOE and SCA cannot provide such assurances to New York families, as a new school year begins, and that's why I am proud to stand with elected officials, parents and advocates today in demanding that our City eliminate these noxious chemicals from our schools once and for all. No student should ever have to face a daily environmental threat just by showing up for class," said **Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer**.

"Do parents have a right to know if PCB's are in schools? The obvious answer is yes. Do they have a right to know immediately? Not 5 months, not 10 months from now, but immediately? The obvious answer is yes. Those who believe that they do not have a right to know, stand up and say that to the 1.1 million school children and their parents, I don't believe anyone will stand up and say that they don't have a right to know immediately," said **Chair of the Education Committee, Council Member Robert Jackson**.

"The safety of our children is of paramount importance. I am pleased that we now have an informed and committed coalition that will keep parents informed about the safety conditions in their children's schools through the timely release of DOE reports and will advocate for an improved time table for PCB cleanup. I find the current 10 year plan unacceptable and I hope that this coalition will continue to

closely monitor the City's progress in eliminating the danger of PCB's in our public schools," said **Inez E. Dickens, Assistant Deputy Majority Leader, New York City Council.**

"Our children deserve a safe place to learn and grow, nothing less than that. The Department of Education is failing a basic test here when there is no transparency as to whether or not toxic chemicals are in classrooms for children to breathe in and potentially suffer serious medical consequences. Parents deserve answers immediately as to whether their school has been tested, when it will be tested and when, if applicable, it will be safe for their children again," said **Council Member Jumaane D. Williams.**

"We send our children to school to learn the ABCs," said **Councilman James Sanders Jr.** "We don't want them to come back with PCBs. Parents have the right to know if their children are in a dangerous situation. In fact, we hold parent responsible if they don't protect their children."

**New York City Councilmember Letitia James**, said "The Department of Education owes parents real answers regarding PCBs in our schools. The asthma rate in Brooklyn has been alarmingly high for years, and it is imperative that elected officials, advocates, and parents understand any connection between student illness and school facilities. We call on the department to be forthcoming and transparent concerning the health of our kids."

"It is unacceptable to withhold critical information and jeopardize the health of children across New York City," said **Council Member Ruben Wills** (D-Jamaica). "The DOE and SCA must act swiftly and release the names of contaminated schools, and sites that may have elevated toxin levels. Every parent should begin this new school year knowing that their child is safe."

"Having worked with the parents and staff at PS 199 for several years on how to rid the school of PCBs, I know firsthand how difficult the process is. The toxic substances reside in the school and in the earth around the school. The Department of Education should ensure that every school is toxin free, and should spend the money on the best professionals to provide the needed expertise to make our schools safe," said **Council Member Gale A. Brewer**

"School maintenance workers are the canaries for the school community. The best way to protect our kids and our teachers is to ensure that school maintenance workers have the safest possible working conditions and the best training in occupational & environmental safety and health." said **New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health Industrial Hygienist, Dave Newman.**

"As a parent we need to know what our children are exposed to," said **NY Communities for Change parent leader Michelle Chapman.** "I found out that the school my child had been going to has high levels of PCBs in the caulk because NY Communities for Change tested the school and told me. And what did the city tell us? Absolutely nothing! We send our kids to school thinking we are sending them to a safe environment when we really don't know. I am outraged that the city would keep this information away from us when it affects our most precious commodities – our children."

"Parents and school employees have the right to know about dangerous toxins in their schools. It is that simple," said **Legal Director of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Miranda Massie.**

Today's rally attendees included:

Congressman Jerrold Nadler  
Congressman Joseph Crowley  
Congressman José Serrano  
Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney  
New York State Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal  
Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr.  
Chair of the Education Committee Council Member Robert Jackson  
City Council Assistant Deputy Majority Leader Inez E. Dickens  
Council Member Vincent Ignizio  
Council Member Jumanne Williams  
Council Member James Sanders  
Council Member Stephen Levin  
The United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew  
Representative for Council Member Charles Barron  
Representative for Council Member Mark- Viverito  
Representative for Council Member Margaret Chin  
LIUNA Local 78  
SEIU 32BJ  
New York Committee for Occupational Safety & Health  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest  
New York Communities for Change

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### **About New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**

New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) advances equality and civil rights, with a focus on health justice, disability rights and environmental justice, through the power of community lawyering and partnerships with the private bar. Through community lawyering, NYLPI puts its legal, policy and community organizing expertise at the service of New York City communities and individuals. NYLPI's partnership with the private bar strengthens its advocacy and connects community groups and non-profits with critical legal assistance. NYLPI is the recipient of the 2010 New York Times Awards for Nonprofit Excellence.

### **About New York Communities for Change**

New York Communities for Change is a coalition of working families in low and moderate income communities fighting for social and economic justice throughout New York State. By using direct action, legislative advocacy and community organizing, NY Communities' members work to impact the political and economic policies that directly affect us. Through neighborhood chapters and issue-based committees, we are working to ensure that every family throughout New York has access to quality schools, affordable housing, and good jobs.