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**\*\*\* NEWS RELEASE \*\*\***

**Parent/Student Advocates, Park Advocates, Environmental Justice Advocates, and Local Residents sue City over deficient consideration of environmental impacts and lack of transparency in regard to redevelopment and exclusive “pay-to-play” agreement with private schools for use of Randall’s Island.**

*Suit charges that City’s actions violated city land use and state environmental laws.*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*New York, NY, May 27, 2009* – Today the City was served with papers alleging it violated local land use law and state environmental law for one of the biggest construction projects on public parkland in New York City’s history. The District 4 President’s Council, the Citywide Council of High Schools, District 4 Community District Education Council, East Harlem Preservation, Inc., Nos Quedamos Committee, Inc., New York City Park Advocates, Inc., Marina Ortiz, and Hector Nazario by Stroock & Stroock & Lavan, LLP, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (“NYLPI”) and civil rights attorney Norman Siegel filed the lawsuit on behalf of public school children, parents and community members from East Harlem and the South Bronx in the State Supreme Court seeking to compel the City to comply with the City Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (“ULURP”) and the State Environmental Quality Review Act (“SEQRA”). The subject of the suit is the Randall’s Island Sports Field Development Project (“RISFDP”), which includes a massive development of sports facilities on Randall’s Island and a ‘pay-to-play’ concession agreement that gives wealthy private schools exclusive access to playing fields during prime after-school hours.

This is the second lawsuit filed to ensure that the City complies with the rule of law with respect to its actions on Randall’s Island. In response to an earlier suit filed by many of the same petitioners, Justice Shirley Kornreich of the New York State Supreme Court held in January, 2008 that the City’s deal with the private schools was a “major concession” and as such was required under City law to go through the ULURP process, a process which requires, among other things, that the agreement be made available for public scrutiny and comment and that the agreement be reviewed by the local Community Board, the Borough President, and the City Council. The lawsuit maintains that the City must comply with ULURP.

The lawsuit filed today also alleges that the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation’s (“DPR”) decision to engage in a truncated environmental review process for the RISFDP violated SEQRA by failing to analyze and adequately address a number of negative environmental impacts that could result from the Project. Full environmental review, which should be undertaken for this massive project, would require the preparation of a detailed environmental analysis in the form of an Environmental Impact Statement and would require that the public be afforded the opportunity to evaluate and comment upon potential impacts.

“I was born and raised in East Harlem and still call it my home,” said Marina Ortiz, an individual plaintiff and President of East Harlem Preservation, Inc. “Because I use Randall’s Island and live close to it, I have a number of concerns about the City’s plans for it, concerns that ought to be adequately addressed.”

“My family uses Randall’s Island all the time and so do other members of my community,” said Hector Nazario, a lifelong resident of East Harlem and President of the District 4 Community Education Council, which includes East Harlem. “If the City is making plans for who gets to use Randall’s Island, and in what way, we should at the very least have a meaningful say in that process.” Yolanda Gonzalez, Executive Director of the South Bronx’s Nos Quedamos Committee agreed: “New Yorkers should be concerned greatly by the increasing privatization of public parkland, particularly when it benefits the wealthy to the detriment of other New Yorkers. This is fundamentally an issue of environmental justice.”

“Access to recreational space is a fundamental need of all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status,” said David Bloomfield, an elected parent member of the Citywide Council on High Schools. “It’s inappropriate to deny this vital resource to kids because their families or their schools aren’t wealthy enough to pay extra for it.” According to Hunter Reed Manuel, President of the District 4 President’s Council, the need for recreational opportunities is particularly great in communities like East Harlem and the South Bronx: “If anything, our communities should be given greater priority for playing fields because we’re working to overcome high rates of diabetes, obesity and other health conditions that can be improved through exercise.”

Geoffrey Croft, President of New York City Parks Advocates said, “Public parks should be available to all, not just the wealthy. Our elected officials must protect the public from these types of land grabs. I find it unconscionable that the City has gone to such lengths to avoid its legal obligation to fully and openly evaluate the impacts from a project that will fundamentally alter one of the City’s great open spaces.”