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Gray Foundation and Council Members Menin & Krishnan Announce New Program to Fund Free Swim Lessons for NYC Second Graders

Asphalt Green will help launch Wave Makers, an innovative and life-saving public-private partnership

NEW YORK-- **The Gray Foundation, New York City Council Member Julie Menin and Council Member Shekar Krishnan** today announced \$1.5 million in funding to help teach second graders across New York City to swim for free.

The new grant will fund Wave Makers, an innovative partnership between the Council Members and **Asphalt Green's** Safe Swim NYC initiative. The program will provide free, comprehensive swimming lessons for up to 2,000 second graders across New York City, regardless of their socio-economic background. This project becomes even more impactful given recent fiscal challenges facing the City's youth swim programs.

Wave Makers comes after a suite of legislation passed by the New York City Council earlier this year. Speaker Adrienne Adams prioritized swim equity in her State of the City address this year. In September, the City Council passed Council Member Menin's bill requiring the Department of Education and Department of Parks and Recreation that requires New York City to provide free swim instruction to all second graders. In addition, at that time, the Council passed Council Member Shekar Krishnan's bill requiring additional information on staffing and training of lifeguards at pools and beaches and Council Member Brooks-Powers' bill to survey additional locations to build new public pools.

Asphalt Green will operate the program, as an extension of its Waterproofing initiative that brings free swim and water safety instruction to New York City public school students. The Wave Makers pilot program will demonstrate the most effective pathways to large-scale free swim instruction across the five boroughs and will include pools located in every single borough.

"We're proud to partner with the City Council and Asphalt Green on this important program," said **Mindy and Jon Gray**. "Learning to swim is a vital life skill and safety initiative that should be available to all children, regardless of where they grow up. Plus, swimming is fun!"

"Expanding equitable access to public pools and swimming programs is a priority for the Council," said **Speaker Adrienne Adams**. "When one out of three Black and Asian students, and

one out of four Hispanic students cannot swim, we must consider free swimming programming as a matter of justice. I was proud to propose free swimming lessons to New Yorkers in my State of the City this year. Giving young people access to this life-saving skill is a vital step towards advancing water safety. I'm grateful to the Gray Foundation for contributing the necessary funding to bring Wave Makers and these measures into reality, and I thank Council Members Menin and Krishnan for their leadership on swim equity."

"In recent years, drownings have skyrocketed throughout New York, which is why the Council has taken so many steps to help curb this trend," said **Majority Whip Selvena N. Brooks-Powers**. "Wave Makers is another incredible effort in a long line of bills and initiatives required to help end unnecessary water deaths in NYC. Serving District 31 within the Council, I have a unique understanding of the importance of swim safety in NYC. This initiative will empower thousands of families in the city to enjoy our beaches and pools more fully without fearing unnecessary tragedy."

"Launching Wave Makers is a monumental step toward ensuring second graders across our city have comprehensive swimming instruction. With the devastating budget cuts to the Parks Department that affect swimming programs, it is more critical than ever to ensure students across our city have equal access to learn to swim. I am incredibly proud of this initiative that takes a long overdue step toward making swim equity a reality and thank the Gray Foundation, Asphalt Green and my fellow Council Member Shekar Krishnan for joining me in spearheading this vital collaboration," said **City Council Member Julie Menin**.

"Every New Yorker should know how to swim," said **City Council Member Shekar Krishnan**. "Unfortunately, long-term disinvestment in aquatics and recent cuts to the Parks budget have led to a crisis where public pools are scarce, where one out of four kids cannot swim, and where there are tragic drownings every year. That is why, alongside Council Member Menin, the Gray Foundation, and Asphalt Green, I'm proud to launch Wave Makers. This program is a big step towards making sure every child in New York City is safe in the water."

"Through our Safe Swim NYC initiative, Asphalt Green cultivates partnerships across the public, private, and non-profit sectors to keep all New Yorkers safe in the water and we have found committed partners in the Gray Foundation and City Council Members Menin and Krishnan," added **Jordan Brackett, Asphalt Green's CEO**. "We've taught over 100,000 people to swim and look forward to bringing our expertise in swim instruction to even more New Yorkers."

New York City's extensive coastline and numerous bodies of water offer residents plenty of opportunities to enjoy aquatic activities. However, access to pools and swim education is often limited, particularly in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. This is especially concerning when considering that swimming not only promotes physical fitness and confidence, it is also a life-saving skill.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children aged 1-4, and a significant portion

of these tragedies can be attributed to a lack of swimming skills. Furthermore, the American Red Cross reports that 79% of children from low-income families have little to no swimming ability. A study by the USA Swimming Foundation found that 64% of Black/African American children and 45% of Latino children have no or low swimming ability, compared to 40% of white children.

Wave Makers will address many of these structural inequities while providing thousands of children life-saving skills.
