

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

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May 2, 2017  
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E:  
JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Rosie Mendez  
Ydanis A. Rodriguez  
Robert E. Cornegy, Jr.  
Rafael L. Espinal, Jr.  
Mark Levine  
Helen K. Rosenthal  
Ritchie J. Torres  
Barry S. Grodenchik  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.  
Eric A. Ulrich

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

AnnMarie Santiago  
Assistant Deputy Commissioner  
Office of Enforcement and  
Neighborhood Services  
NYC Housing Preservation and Development

Francesc Marti  
Assistant Commissioner  
Government Affairs  
NYC Housing Preservation and Development

Mario Merlino  
NYC Department of Health and Mental  
Hygiene

Michael Greeley  
Member  
Hotel Trades Council

[sound check]

[pause]

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Good morning

everyone. My name is Jumaane Williams, Chair of the Committee on Housing and Buildings; joined today by Council Member Ritchie Torres. We're here to hold a hearing on two bills.

The first bill, Intro No. 1369, sponsored by Council Member Espinal, would require the Department of Housing Preservation and Development to report annually on the bedbug-related complaints received by HPD, the violations issued by HPD, the time it takes for bedbug violations to be corrected, the steps taken HPD to remediate bedbug violations that are not corrected by property owners, and the public education conducted by the Department to inform tenants and property owners of bedbug prevention and remediation measures and responsibilities. The bill would also require the Department to publish a map on its website of all bedbug-related complaints and their status to be updated quarterly.

1                   The second bill, Intro No. 1586,  
2 sponsored by Council Member Torres, would extend  
3 until June 2, 2019 the limitations placed on the  
4 conversion of certain hotel space for purposes other  
5 than use as a hotel, as imposed by Local Law 50 for  
6 the year 2015, which restricted hotels in Manhattan  
7 having 150 units or more from converting more than  
8 20% of the floor area used for sleeping  
9 accommodations to a different use.  
10

11                   I'd like to thank my staff for the work  
12 they did to assemble this hearing, including Mike  
13 Twomey, my Legislative Director; Megan Chen and  
14 Guillermo Patino, Counsels to the Committee; Jose  
15 Conde, Policy Analyst to the Committee; and Sarah  
16 Gastelum, the Committee's Finance Analyst.

17                   I'd like to remind everyone who would  
18 like to testify today to please fill out a card with  
19 the Sergeant-at-Arms and also we have one of the bill  
20 sponsors who would like to give an opening statement,  
21 Council Member Torres.

22                   COUNCIL MEMBER TORRES: Thank you  
23 Mr. Chairman and I wanna apologize; I cannot remain  
24 at the hearing for the full duration; I have a Public  
25 Housing hearing at Red Hook Houses to chair on mold

2 remediation, but I did wanna deliver an opening  
3 statement on the condo conversion law.

4 Here in New York City we are living in a  
5 time of turmoil -- inequality is deepening, social  
6 mobility is declining, the middle class is  
7 disintegrating; the American dream, by every measure,  
8 is dying. Since the Great Recession in 2008, New  
9 York City has lost over 100,000 middle class jobs.  
10 Not only do we as a city have fewer and fewer jobs,  
11 but the jobs that we do have are paying lower and  
12 lower wages in a relentless race to the bottom. The  
13 City's affordability crisis, which has driven  
14 homelessness and housing security to a historic high,  
15 is every bit as much a consequence of stagnant and  
16 declining income as it is of rising rent. One of the  
17 trends that threaten to deepen these structural  
18 challenges for the City's long-term health is the  
19 tidal surge of hotel-to-condo conversion, which has  
20 only been abated temporarily by local law. These  
21 conversions, if left unregulated in the long run,  
22 will do irreparable damage to the social and economic  
23 life of the city.

24 The best of the hotel industry occupies a  
25 unique place in the New York City economy; luxury and

1  
2 upscale hotels, in particular, have few educational  
3 barriers to entry and decidedly middle class wages.  
4 In what other industry can a previously poor  
5 immigrant with less than a high school diploma earn  
6 enough income to build a middle class life in one of  
7 the most expensive cities in the world? The luxury  
8 and upscale hotel sectors stand as exceptional  
9 bastions of the American dream at a time when  
10 opportunities for climbing up the ladder in New York  
11 City are tragically and vanishingly rare.

12 As a city, we have a stake not only in  
13 the quantity of the jobs that we create and preserve  
14 but also the quality of those jobs. We have a vested  
15 interest in preserving the middle class jobs that the  
16 luxury and upper upscale hotels are uniquely  
17 effective at producing. Standing by passively while  
18 tens of thousands of middle class jobs are converted  
19 out of existence by luxury condos would represent a  
20 profound betrayal of the city's core commitment to  
21 broadly share prosperity.

22 In order to fully appreciate what is at  
23 stake, it is worth underscoring the immense economic  
24 value that hotels add to the City of New York. The  
25 hotel industry generates \$11.8 billion in economic

1 activity; the luxury and upper upscale hotels which  
2 face the greatest risk of condo conversion are the  
3 single greatest drivers of economic growth and middle  
4 class job creation within the industry. In Manhattan  
5 alone, luxury and upper upscale hotels account for  
6 50% of the hotel rooms, 67% of the workforce and 70%  
7 of the payroll. The loss of these hotels to condo  
8 conversion would have seismic consequences to the  
9 economy of New York City; it would mean mass economic  
10 dislocation of middle class New Yorkers and the  
11 ecosystem of residents and business that surround  
12 them; it would mean the irreversible loss of a world-  
13 class hotel industry which undergirds New York City's  
14 status as a world-class tourist destination.

16 It is with these concerns in mind that I  
17 introduce Intro 592-A. The legislation takes a  
18 deliberate approach to a complex public policy  
19 challenge that requires deeper research; it imposes a  
20 two-year moratorium on hotel-to-condo conversion so  
21 that the City has additional time to study in-depth  
22 the market forces reshaping the hotel industry and  
23 the short-term and long-term impact that those forces  
24 will have on the economic health of the City. The  
25 objective is to find the long-term solution that is

1 deeply informed by a thorough analysis of the  
2 industry and an equally thorough engagement with all  
3 industry stakeholders. The moratorium is limited in  
4 scope, it would apply only to hotels containing 150  
5 units or more and it would apply to only conversions  
6 of more than 20% of the transient room space within  
7 those hotels. Owners claiming hardship would have  
8 the right to appeal to the Hotel Review Board and  
9 seek an exemption from the law to the minimum extent  
10 necessary to earning a reasonable return.  
11

12 I am hopeful that Intro 592 will lay a  
13 firm foundation for a long-term solution that will  
14 sustain economic opportunity not only for the tens of  
15 thousands of New Yorkers in the hotel industry, but  
16 also for the countless residents, tourists and  
17 businesses that depend on them. The City of New York  
18 can afford no less than our very best efforts to  
19 preserve what is left of our increasingly endangered  
20 middle class.

21 That is my statement.

22 [applause]

23 [gavel]

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So we don't clap;  
25 we do this; try to keep some noise at quorum [sic].



2 Thank you very much, Council Member, and  
3 we've also been joined by Council Member Grodenchik.  
4 And we have the Administration, Assistant  
5 Commissioner Francesc Mari; Assistant Deputy  
6 Commissioner AnnMarie Santiago from HPD; and Mario  
7 Merlino from DOHMH. Is she... [background comment]  
8 Mario, I'm sorry. Are you testifying? [background  
9 comment] Okay. So you might as well get sworn in,  
10 so if -- you can get sworn in from there if you want,  
11 it's up to you. [background comments]

12 [pause]

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you each raise  
14 your right hand, please? Do you affirm to tell the  
15 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in  
16 your testimony before this committee and to respond  
17 honestly to council member questions?

18 I just wanna note; Council Member  
19 Grodenchik is very sad that he has to leave as well;  
20 he has a BSA hearing, and I'm sure to go speak very  
21 nicely and protect his constituents. So thank you  
22 very much, and he will be back, and we've been joined  
23 by Council Member Ulrich, and you can begin when  
24 you're ready.

2 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Good morning Chair  
3 Williams and members of the Housing and Buildings  
4 Committee. My name is AnnMarie Santiago and I am the  
5 Assistant Deputy Commissioner for the Office of  
6 Enforcement and Neighborhood Services for the New  
7 York City Department of Housing Preservation and  
8 Development. I am joined by Francesc Marti,  
9 Assistant Commissioner for Government Affairs and  
10 Mario Merlino from the Department of Health. Thank  
11 you for the opportunity to testify on Intro 1369,  
12 which requires HPD to submit a report to the Mayor  
13 and City Council on bedbug-related violations in  
14 multiple dwellings.

15 HPD takes the issue of bedbugs very  
16 seriously; in the past few fiscal years HPD has  
17 received 9,100 to 9,800 bedbug complaints and we  
18 issued approximately 2,700 to 3,000 violations per  
19 year. We understand that bedbugs are a nuisance and  
20 cause undue stress for many New Yorkers; at the same  
21 time, we do not want to inflate the stigma around  
22 bedbugs, which are not a dire health hazard.

23 Bedbugs often appear in a building due to  
24 an unsuspecting tenant carrying the small bug into  
25 the residence; this is not due to the poor or

2 unsanitary condition of the building. Bedbugs are  
3 extremely hard to detect and eradicate; the  
4 eradication process is expensive and time-consuming;  
5 it often involves dog-sniffing inspections and  
6 chemical sprays. To ensure bedbugs do not reappear,  
7 tenants and property owners must stay very vigilant.  
8 At HPD we are vigilant and proactive with regard to  
9 bedbugs. We have two beagles on the job -- Mickey  
10 and Nemo -- that may be deployed to inspect apartment  
11 units when we receive 311 bedbug complaints. When  
12 bedbug violations are issue, HPD includes with the  
13 Notice of Violation a one-page guide from the  
14 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene which states  
15 how to identify and treat bedbugs. In addition, we  
16 collaborate with DOHMH on various initiatives such as  
17 enhanced enforcement and educational training about  
18 how to treat bedbugs.

19 New Yorkers can utilize the DOHMH's  
20 bedbug portal or HPD's website or HPD Online to  
21 receive notifications about bedbug violations and  
22 educational information about how to address bedbug  
23 conditions. Also, HPD's Neighborhood Education  
24 Outreach Division has taught 18 sessions of our  
25 bedbug infestation identification and management

2 classes in 2016 and 2017 to date. In addition, in  
3 approximately six months tenants will receive  
4 information from property owners regarding bedbug  
5 conditions and eradication measures taken pursuant to  
6 Intro 648, which was just passed by the City Council  
7 last week and which we are pleased to have worked  
8 with the Council on.

9 HPD also supports the Council's intent in  
10 Intro 1369, the bill being discussed today, though  
11 there are parts of the bill we would like to discuss  
12 further with the Council.

13 Intro 1369 would require HPD to annually  
14 report to the Mayor and City Council about bedbug-  
15 related violations in multiple dwellings. HPD would  
16 be required to report the following data points: 1.  
17 the number of bedbug violations issued; 2. the number  
18 of dwellings such notices were issued for; 3. the  
19 number of violations corrected by the owner and the  
20 average number of days between the Notice of  
21 Violation and correction; 4. the number of bedbug-  
22 related violations that HPD ordered corrected by  
23 owner pursuant to Section 272125 of the Housing  
24 Maintenance Code; and finally, the number of bedbug-

1 related violations that HPD corrected pursuant to  
2 Section 272125 of the HMC.  
3

4 In addition, the bill would require HPD  
5 to report on the nature and frequency of our  
6 educational outreach to tenants and landlords  
7 regarding bedbug remediation measures. HPD supports  
8 these reporting provisions and believes they would  
9 provide useful information to tenants.

10 Lastly, Intro 1369 requires HPD to create  
11 a publicly available online map that would be updated  
12 quarterly, which would display bedbug complaints and  
13 violations. Currently HPD does not map complaints or  
14 violations; however, complaints and violations are  
15 both publicly available on HPD Online.

16 Mapping complaints and violations will  
17 likely depict higher complaints and violations in  
18 high-density neighborhoods; this would be the same  
19 neighborhoods that HPD generally receives a large  
20 volume of various complaints in general. In  
21 addition, HPD is concerned about the accuracy of the  
22 bedbug map; this map may not in fact reflect the  
23 actual incidences of bedbug infestations citywide.  
24 This map would not likely reflect bedbug incidences  
25 in private dwellings or affluent multiple dwellings.

2 In these housing environments, it is unlikely that  
3 private homeowners or affluent tenants would call 311  
4 to report such conditions. Given the stigma often  
5 associated with bedbugs, the issue is also likely  
6 underreported in general. We want to ensure that the  
7 bill does not unintentionally stigmatize certain  
8 buildings and communities in an unfair and  
9 potentially inaccurate fashion. For these reasons,  
10 we would request that the Council reconsider the  
11 mapping requirement section of the bill. Lastly, HPD  
12 would like to request 180 days to implement the bill  
13 in its current format.

14 We thank you once again for the  
15 opportunity to discuss Intro 1369; we would be happy  
16 to answer any questions that you may have.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

18 [pause] Thank you very much. Just for the record,  
19 HPD has submitted testimony on 1586.. [background  
20 comment] the Mayor's Office submitted testimony for  
21 1586 in general support.

22 On average, how long does it take  
23 property owners to correct bedbug-related violations?  
24  
25

2 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: That's the one number  
3 that we couldn't get today, but we are working on  
4 that for you, sir.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: How many times has  
6 HPD stepped in to remediate bedbug-related violations  
7 that were not addressed by a property in 2016 and so  
8 far this year?

9 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: HPD does not take  
10 emergency repair action on bedbug violations, they  
11 are pest violations; they require significant  
12 investment of time over time; you can't do one  
13 treatment just to remediate the bedbugs, and they're  
14 not an emergency condition; we reserve our emergency  
15 condition operation for immediately hazardous  
16 conditions, such as no heat, no hot water; no  
17 electricity, those types of conditions which are an  
18 immediate health danger to the public.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So what happens if  
20 there's a -- I don't know if you've encountered it  
21 [sic], but a property owner who refuses to do bedbug  
22 remediation, HPD doesn't step in at all?

23 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: We don't, but there  
24 is a significant enforcement process, so when we  
25 issue our violations, we also issue a preliminary

1 coda from the Department of Health; they receive all  
2 of our violations and then they take enhanced action  
3 to seek compliance with owners where we find  
4 buildings with repeat bedbug conditions or where an  
5 owner has falsely certified a condition.  
6

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What's the  
8 enhanced actions they take?

9 [background comment]

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: **[inaudible]**. You  
11 don't do any pest remediation at all?

12 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: No, sir.

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Couldn't you, in  
14 the same way you fix the emergency repair and charge  
15 the owner; couldn't you hire a remediation service  
16 and charge the owner...? [crosstalk]

17 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: We... Emergency  
18 conditions are really conditions which we've defined  
19 as immediately dangerous to health or safety and  
20 pests don't fall under that definition.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I think a rat  
22 infestation or something could be... [interpose]

23 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Department of Health  
24 does address rat conditions; that's not HPD...

25 [crosstalk]



2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Good. Okay.  
3 Okay. So I'd like to hear about the enhanced...

4 MARIO MERLINO: So the enhanced  
5 enforcement process -- and again, everything we do is  
6 to try to encourage the landlord to fix the problem  
7 and the Health Code charges the landlord with the  
8 responsibility for correcting any kind of pest-  
9 related problem. So what we do is; when we get the  
10 referral from HPD, we issue a Commissioner's Order  
11 and the order specifies that the landlord has to fill  
12 out something called a Pest Management Plan; the Pest  
13 Management Plan has them look at apartments that  
14 surround the original apartment where bedbugs were  
15 found and, if necessary, treat those apartments. So  
16 the idea is; if bedbugs are not just in the place  
17 where the bedbugs were found originally, if they're  
18 spreading throughout the building **[inaudible]** that  
19 spread, and continue treatment until the bedbugs are  
20 gone. If they don't comply with the Commissioner's  
21 Order, the fines are \$1,000, if they ignore the fine;  
22 it's \$2,000. So in other words, if they default on  
23 the fine; it's \$2,000.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Can you state your  
25 name for the record, please?

2 MARIO MERLINO: Mario Merlino. Sorry.

3 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Just so I'm clear,  
4 so at no point does the City step in?

5 MARIO MERLINO: Sorry; in terms of...

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Of actually  
7 remediating it themselves?

8 MARIO MERLINO: The City does not do  
9 bedbug control itself and there's a reason for that.  
10 Bedbug control requires repeat treatment at the  
11 apartment; it requires working with the tenants; the  
12 tenant has to treat their clothing; the tenant has to  
13 do a lot of things with their own belongings and  
14 things like that. Those are things that it's  
15 difficult for the City to gain access a lot of times;  
16 it's really something that -- it really is something  
17 that it's better if a landlord does that job. The  
18 landlord has to work with the other tenants in the  
19 building; if people find bedbugs -- you might have an  
20 apartment here that has bedbugs and then an apartment  
21 on that floor two doors down has bedbugs six months  
22 later and that has to be treated. So it's really not  
23 something that the City is really good at tackling.  
24 And again, I think what the City can do is educate  
25 and make it clear to landlords that they're gonna pay

1  
2 pretty hefty fines if they don't follow a  
3 comprehensive process for taking care of the problem.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: We've been joined  
5 by Council Members Espinal and Mendez.

6 So what about for other pests and vermin,  
7 so does the City ever step in for roach infestation  
8 or a rat infestation?

9 MARIO MERLINO: Well interior pest  
10 control, again, that's HPD's area; I know the Health  
11 Department, that's my area, so we do for severe  
12 infestations, for rats, we do exterior rat control,  
13 but even there... [interpose]

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Sorry; you do  
15 what?

16 MARIO MERLINO: Excuse me? I'm sorry.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I'm sorry, for  
18 rats -- I missed what you said.

19 MARIO MERLINO: For exterior rats..

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

21 MARIO MERLINO: and interior rats, we  
22 step in and we have an abatement program, so we will  
23 treat for rats, but we treat for rats when all else  
24 fails. And the thing about rats is; there is a  
25 health component with rats, so we come in and we

1  
2 treat in emergency, you know, when we need to knock  
3 those rats down. But even there, everything we do is  
4 to really work with the property owners to have them  
5 correct the problem. It really works better -- you  
6 know, all these pest things are a property  
7 maintenance issue and everything works better when  
8 landlords correct it on their property. So we could  
9 do a certain amount, but bedbugs in particular are  
10 something... [crosstalk]

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Alright.

12 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: And I... I think, as we  
13 said, bedbugs are not as much of a housing  
14 maintenance issue as the other vermin you referred  
15 to; right? Generally, tenants bring it in unwanted;  
16 landlords, it's not the condition of the building  
17 that is exacerbating the situation, so we really,  
18 especially about bedbugs, feel that education and  
19 prevention are the main ways to put our resources...  
20 [interpose]

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I feel like at  
22 some point, you know, the City might just pay for  
23 Roscoe [sic] or somebody just to come in and at least  
24 take a first hit at it, but I guess it makes some  
25 sense what you're saying; I wanna think about it a

1 little more. I wanna ask one more question and then  
2 go to my colleagues; I'm gonna start first with the  
3 bill sponsor, Council Member Espinal; everybody will  
4 have five minutes. [background comments]

5  
6 The HPD's Education Outreach Division;  
7 how do you decide where you do the education, do the  
8 classes...? [crosstalk]

9 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: So more often than  
10 not, people request it from us, so available on our  
11 website is the contact information about if you'd  
12 like to have us come out to your community and do a  
13 seminar or if you would like us to have it at Gold  
14 Street. We do do regular seminars at Gold Street,  
15 but we're willing and able to go to communities, as  
16 requested.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Do you do any kind  
18 of data... looking at the data and find out if there's  
19 a certain place that might benefit and you reach out  
20 to the Community Board to the area?

21 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: We can certainly do  
22 that; I don't believe that we have done that in the  
23 past.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you.  
25 Council Member Espinal.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: Thank you Chair  
3 Williams and thank you, HPD for your testimony.  
4 Sorry I was a bit late, but I was able to catch up  
5 and read your concerns and what you support of the  
6 bill.

7 I guess my question is; what does HPD  
8 currently do for one or two homeowner-occupied or  
9 homeowner owned homes?

10 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: We haven't pulled the  
11 data for those homes specifically, but I would  
12 suggest that generally we do not receive complaints  
13 from those buildings. Most often it's multiple  
14 dwellings that we're receiving complaints. Property  
15 owners don't generally call us about their property;  
16 I'm sure there are renters and that's probably what  
17 our data will show, but homeowners don't call us.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: So the reason I  
19 introduced this bill is because there's a huge  
20 problem brewing in these one- or two-family row  
21 homes, especially in Cypress Hills and East New York  
22 and Bushwick, where bedbugs are able to travel  
23 through the walls, from one homeowner's home to the  
24 other, and homeowners don't know that their neighbors  
25 have a problem, you know, right; currently in these

1 multiple-dwelling units you'll know whether your  
2 building, now with this new law that just passed a  
3 few weeks ago, that the building was treated for  
4 bedbugs or you know, you'll know whether your  
5 neighbor had bedbugs, but if you're a homeowner  
6 living in these row homes, you don't know who has  
7 bedbugs and you don't know whether or not you should  
8 take preventive measures to protect yourself from  
9 allowing these bedbugs to come into your home. So if  
10 these homeowners are not educated and don't know,  
11 then how are they supposed to take proactive  
12 measures...

14 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Right.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: to make sure  
16 that they're not affected by an infestation? And I  
17 can tell you a personal story, you know, just on my  
18 block alone. There's a row home in the middle of the  
19 block and two of the homes attached to that home are  
20 actually infested by bugs as well and HPD has come in  
21 and treated the middle home and the homeowners took  
22 care of their problems, but again, because of the  
23 tenants living in the middle home, the infestation  
24 kind of resurfaced and is again entering into the  
25 homes of the homeowners.

1  
2 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Again, we can come  
3 out to communities and provide as much education as  
4 is requested and certainly we'll provide that  
5 information directly to the Council. Again,  
6 generally homeowners don't call on their own  
7 property; if this was a tenant, they may have called  
8 and that information would be available on our  
9 website now, you know the problem is; who's gonna  
10 know to look for that information? I hear the  
11 concern that you're raising; I'm not exactly sure,  
12 besides more education and more outreach, how we get  
13 people to be aware of the fact that there could be a  
14 problem and how you look for it, how you catch it  
15 early if it is gonna happen. I think that's the key.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: Yeah, I think  
17 that this mapping tool will be very helpful in that,  
18 and that a homeowner will be able to sign on online  
19 and know whether or not there's an infestation on  
20 their block, on their street or you know, around the  
21 corner from where they live and that way they can  
22 take the preventive measures they need to take in  
23 order to protect themselves and also be able to  
24 educate their neighbors about what's going on in the  
25 neighborhood... [interpose]



ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: You know again, this is a huge problem and it's really spreading and it's spreading very rapidly and it's become difficult to figure out a best way to tackle this problem, so... [interpose]

ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Right. I think you have to be always vigilant though, because unknown to you, you could be the person bringing it into your own home and then spreading it to people and you don't know. So not just the people around, but every person needs to kind of be aware that they need to check for it; what the signs are that there potentially are bedbugs and how to address it as soon as they notice that there's a problem.

COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: I also think that this would also be a helpful tool for HPD to be able to map out where all the issues are happening and kinda be able to plan internally on measures they can take to eradicate the problem citywide.

ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: And we can certainly run the data and see what Community Boards, what Council Districts have higher than usual or higher than the average, but the mapping tool involves a

1 whole online component that really is a big jump for  
2 us, technologically speaking at this point, and we  
3 are concerned about our budget right now.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: Well you stated  
5 in your testimony that complaints and violations are  
6 publicly available on HPDOnline.. [interpose]

7 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Uhm-hm. Yeah.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: How is that  
9 available; do you have to.. [interpose]

10 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: So..

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: type in an  
12 address or?

13 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Yes, you can type in  
14 an address to see what has been issued and what has  
15 not been issued.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: So someone can  
17 diligently sit at their computer at home and just  
18 type in every single address on their block and kinda  
19 see whether or not... [crosstalk]

20 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Well it's mo.. it's.. I  
21 mean if it's spreading to you, it's probably the two  
22 properties on either side..

23 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: Uhm-hm.  
24  
25

2 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: so... but I think it's  
3 the same thing when you would have to go to a map, is  
4 you would drill down to your block, right? But  
5 again, the concern we have is about -- for everyone  
6 who has bedbugs, the stigma that might be associated  
7 to them of being identified [bell] in a building that  
8 has bedbugs.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: I think this  
10 will help alleviate that stigma and it will also  
11 better inform neighbors and property owners and also  
12 give the City a tool they need in order to figure out  
13 what's the broader plan of action to take care of the  
14 issue. So again, you know I really believe that the  
15 online mapping portion is very important; I think  
16 other agencies have created maps for complaints that  
17 were made and especially when they've done  
18 enforcement in other issues. So you know, again, I  
19 think it's very important that we look at how we can  
20 implement this in a way where building owners and  
21 tenants can know, you know if there really is a  
22 problem in their current block or community.

23 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Uhm-hm. And again,  
24 the bill that was just passed will go a long way  
25 towards that, the bill for a multiple dwelling.

1  
2 Again, our concern is private dwellings, for the most  
3 part, owner-occupied, are not gonna use our system  
4 and really won't get to the issue that you're raising  
5 today.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: I have to like  
7 strongly disagree with that, 'cause again, I would  
8 love to know, you know, who on my block has an  
9 infestation or where so that I can take the  
10 prerogative, do what I need to take to protect my  
11 home... [crosstalk]

12 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Right.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: and..

14 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: And some people might  
15 use that to stigmatize those households or those  
16 homes. So it's just a concern.

17 [background comments][music]

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: That's a nice  
19 melody. I do wanna just ask a little bit about -- I  
20 guess the point that he's trying to make, and I  
21 understand the stigma portion, but how would somebody  
22 know now; I mean what's the alternative to help  
23 someone figure out -- if they own a row house, I  
24 guess -- whether the person next to them has bedbugs;  
25 what **[inaudible]**... [crosstalk]

2 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Right. And I think  
3 the point is that we should just always be vigilant,  
4 whether the person next to you has it or not, is  
5 really what we're suggesting. Because again, you can  
6 bring it in; it doesn't necessarily have to come from  
7 one of your neighbors and your neighbor might have  
8 bedbugs and now call in a complaint. So it's not  
9 potentially giving you -- maybe it's giving you a  
10 false sense of security about whether there are  
11 bedbugs... [interpose]

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: What about --  
13 there was some information mapped that was maybe not  
14 specific to the house, but to the block of to the...  
15 [interpose]

16 ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: And we're open to  
17 having that conversation further with the Council.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Well I  
19 don't have... Did you have any other... Alright. We  
20 don't have anyone signed up for any other questions  
21 on this bill or the one that is submitted for the  
22 record -- 1586 or 1369 -- so I just wanna say thank  
23 you very much for the testimony; I look forward to  
24 working with you on this bill, and both bills,  
25 actually.

1                   ANNMARIE SANTIAGO: Thank you.

2                   CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you very  
3  
4 much.

5                   Alright, well out of the multitude of HTC  
6 stickers that I see in the audience, we have one  
7 person testifying; his name is Michael Greeley; if  
8 you're here, can you please come up, get ready to  
9 give your testimony? Mr. Greeley will be testifying  
10 on Intro 1586. If there is anyone else who would  
11 like to testify, please make sure that you fill out  
12 the form with the Sergeant-at-Arms. [background  
13 comment] Since Mr. Greeley is the only one who has  
14 listed as testifying, I'm gonna give the unusual rule  
15 of allowing you four minutes to give your testimony,  
16 so you may have prepared for two, but you're the only  
17 one, so we gave you double time. [pause] Actually,  
18 let's just give him five; you can give him five  
19 minutes. Can you please raise your right hand? Do  
20 you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and  
21 nothing but the truth in your testimony before this  
22 committee and to respond honestly to council member  
23 questions?

24                   MICHAEL GREELEY: I do.

2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And you will have  
3 five minutes to give your testimony.

4 MICHAEL GREELEY: Thank you. Good  
5 morning Chair Williams and Committee members for this  
6 opportunity to speak to you today. My name is  
7 Michael Greeley; I live in Inwood, Manhattan and I  
8 worked at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel as a banquet  
9 clerk for 16 years until it closed on March 1st.

10 At the Waldorf I was a very involved team  
11 member and I continue to have a deep love and respect  
12 for the hotel and all my former co-workers and we  
13 were all shocked when we first found out that our  
14 hotel, which is iconic, historic, a genuine landmark,  
15 and was highly profitable, would turn into  
16 condominiums. The Waldorf was special to each of us,  
17 our jobs were dignified; we had good wages and  
18 benefits and it was a place where we could use our  
19 voice with management without fear.

20 Even though I am very thankful to our  
21 union, the Hotel Trades Council, for negotiating  
22 compensation for our sudden and traumatic loss of  
23 employment, the Waldorf converting into condos has  
24 completely uprooted my life and the lives of my 1,400  
25 former co-workers.

1  
2 Can you imagine having no say in the  
3 sudden loss of your job that you worked for many  
4 years because your boss thought he found a better way  
5 to cash in on New York real estate? What would you  
6 do?

7 I am here today to make sure that what  
8 happened to us at the Waldorf-Astoria does not happen  
9 at any more hotels in New York City. To me, stable  
10 middle class jobs that support tens of thousands of  
11 New York families are much more important than adding  
12 even more luxury condos for the world's elite to hide  
13 their money and drive up the price of our housing.

14 I strongly urge the Committee to take  
15 meaningful action to preserve and support our  
16 critical sector of New York's economy by extending  
17 the moratorium for another two years or until hotel  
18 owners stop wanting to become condo developers.

19 Thank you again for this opportunity,  
20 your time and your consideration.

21 [applause, cheers] [gavel]

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Remember, those  
23 who are here, this is how we express our gratitude.

24 Thank you Mr. Greeley for your testimony;  
25 I think you did yourself and fellow hotel workers



1 well. I know there are some that push back on what  
2 we're trying to do, but I do believe at City  
3 government we do have a duty to try to make sure that  
4 people don't make every single dollar they possibly  
5 can on the backs of people, so I think it is within  
6 our realm to not say that you can't do it, but to  
7 perhaps slow the pace in which it is being done so  
8 that people can have some opportunity to find some  
9 ways to make a living and what we're seeing, and  
10 whether it's in place of housing that people actually  
11 need or jobs, we're finding that people are putting  
12 up luxury, whatever it is; it's not even housing I  
13 think that's appropriate for people who are looking  
14 for housing; it's just luxury and I understand it's  
15 people's property, but we have a duty I think as  
16 government to try to find a measure to approach this  
17 and I think that this bill is doing that.

19 Thank you so much for your testimony and  
20 we have some questions from Council Member Ulrich --  
21 five minutes... [crosstalk]

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Thank you  
23 Mr. Chairman; I appreciate just a few minutes.

24 I too wanna commend Mr. Greeley for  
25 having the courage to come here and testify today, it

1 takes a lot for average citizens like yourself to  
2 prepare a statement like this and get up in front of  
3 a large audience and say the things that you have  
4 said so eloquently. And you know I have several  
5 friends who also worked at the Waldorf, one of whom  
6 recently, because he lost his job, had to relocate,  
7 he and his family; they had to move to Louisiana and  
8 he had to take a job down south because he just  
9 couldn't find another good-paying job and he worked  
10 at the Waldorf for many, many years in the catering  
11 division, and I miss him; he was a great guy and we  
12 still keep in touch.

14 But I'm curious; what happened to the  
15 majority of workers who lost their jobs at the  
16 Waldorf; did the union help them find other jobs; was  
17 there a buyout or compensation from the management or  
18 the new owners of the Waldorf? What was the final  
19 outcome for many of the workers?

20 MICHAEL GREELEY: Well there was three  
21 options. The first option was to take an enhanced  
22 severance package and leave right away; that was two  
23 years ago. The second option was to finish out the  
24 hotel's life and take another enhanced severance  
25 package and never return to the Waldorf again. And a

1  
2 third option was to take a small amount of money and  
3 hopefully, when the hotel reopens, you will get your  
4 job back.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: But there was no  
6 guarantee that those individuals would be offered a  
7 job?

8 MICHAEL GREELEY: Only the option three  
9 people, because of our union contract, says that they  
10 will have to offer it to us first.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: And I guess this  
12 is more of a question for the union; I should speak  
13 to Mr. Ward or some of the other folks over there,  
14 but when the Waldorf announced that they were gonna  
15 be closing the hotel, were they in the middle of a  
16 contract; had a contract expired, or did they just  
17 announce -- hey, we're closing on this particular  
18 date and we know that we negotiated through  
19 collective bargaining this agreement with HTC, but  
20 and the workers, but you know we're not gonna honor  
21 that because we're closing?

22 MICHAEL GREELEY: There was already a  
23 contract negotiation and that contract in effect  
24 until 2026 and then the owners announced that they're  
25 closing the hotel.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: What about the  
3 health care, I'm very concerned about the health care  
4 for the workers and their families; what happened to  
5 their health care plan...? [crosstalk]

6 MICHAEL GREELEY: We each got 120 days'  
7 health care after the hotel is closed.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Only 120 days.  
9 So after 120 days you had no guarantee of a job, you  
10 got a small cash stipend and you only had health  
11 insurance for 120 days?

12 MICHAEL GREELEY: The union also helped  
13 us find jobs at other hotels, through a hiring  
14 office, but again, that depends on what's going on in  
15 other hotels.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Like so many New  
17 Yorkers, I was so disappointed to see the Waldorf  
18 close; it is such an iconic part of the city and I  
19 wish that the new owners would have approached the  
20 City and the union in good faith to see if there was  
21 something that could've been worked out. There are a  
22 lot of people who talk about creating good-paying  
23 jobs, everybody wants to create jobs, but I've always  
24 been a very strong proponent of keeping the good-  
25 paying jobs that we already have, and when we lose

1  
2 those jobs they are never replaced with the same  
3 amount of jobs or more jobs, it's always less jobs  
4 and in many cases they're not union jobs or  
5 prevailing wage jobs, and so for people who have  
6 worked and given their whole lives to a company or to  
7 an institution, thinking that one day they're gonna  
8 retire with dignity and have retirement security and  
9 have health care and be able to care for their  
10 families; to lose that job, especially for people who  
11 are middle-aged or approaching retirement age, is  
12 absolutely devastating and people should be outraged  
13 by that. And we already have an abundance of luxury  
14 condos in this city; I just... I don't know that  
15 there's a shortage of apartments for millionaires who  
16 wanna live in New York City, but there is a shortage  
17 of good-paying jobs that has health care for workers  
18 and their families and I hope that you've found a new  
19 job; I don't know if you... Have you found a new job  
20 yourself?

21 MICHAEL GREELEY: No, not yet.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Yeah. Well if I  
23 could be of any help and you've applied to any place,  
24 I'm more than happy to help you; I don't care that  
25 you don't live in my district, I just... I wanna

2 support working people and people who wanna work and  
3 who wanna support their families and I think that the  
4 jobs at the Waldorf-Astoria [bell] were the middle  
5 class jobs and we should've fought harder to keep  
6 those jobs in New York City and not just let them go  
7 away. That's all I wanna say.

8 MICHAEL GREELEY: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

10 Sometimes... [applause] again, [gavel] we've gotta...  
11 [background comments] Sometimes I gotta check your  
12 registration card, figure out which... [background  
13 comments] But again, thank you so much and I double  
14 down on what Council Member Ulrich said. And again,  
15 this is just purely about greed, in my opinion, and  
16 so it's not as if... I don't want companies to go under  
17 either, so if there's a company losing money, we  
18 should discuss that, but this isn't about companies  
19 who's losing money; this is about companies who wanna  
20 make as much money as humanly possible without any  
21 care of who gets hurt in the process, and I think  
22 that's where government has to try to step in. So  
23 thank you so much for your testimony; I appreciate  
24 it.

25 MICHAEL GREELEY: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: And thank you all  
3 who came out today; we see your blue; we see your  
4 white; we know you're there. We have for the record,  
5 REBNY, who submitted testimony as well; I don't see  
6 any other people signed up to testify, nor do I see  
7 colleagues who have questions, so with that, the  
8 hearing is now closed.

9 [gavel]

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Oh, also I wanna  
11 thank the Sergeant-at-Arms and I wanna thank the  
12 Sergeant-at-Arms for the last hearing we had; I  
13 forgot to mention the great that they did in that  
14 marathon session with a lot of people, so I just  
15 wanna put that on the record; hopefully we can get  
16 that, even though I closed the hearing.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date May 3, 2017