

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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Monday, September 9, 2024
Start: 12:05 p.m.
Recess: 12:29 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Carlina Rivera, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

David M. Carr
Shahana K. Hanif
Kamillah M. Hanks
Crystal Hudson
Farah N. Louis
Chi A. Ossé
Sandra Ung
Nantasha M. Williams

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Brewer

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

A P P E A R A N C E S

Cheryl Fishbein,
Chair of the Jewish Community Relations Council
of New York, on Resolution

Julie Hirsch,
Senior Director of Institutional Giving at
Museum of Jewish Heritage

Arieh Lebowitz,
Executive Director of Jewish Labor Committee

Howard Teich,
Founding Chair of Manhattan Jewish Historical
Initiative

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
2 INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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3 SERGEANT WONG: Sound check for the Committee on
4 Cultural Affairs; today's date is September 9, 2024;
5 being recorded by Danny Wong in the Chambers.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Welcome to the hearing of the
7 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
8 International Intergroup Relations.

9 At this time, please silence all electronic
10 devices and do not approach the dais, I repeat, do
11 not approach the dais.

12 If you wish to submit testimony you can do so at
13 the back of the room. If you wish to submit testimony
14 online you may do so at testimony@council.nyc.gov,
15 that is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

16 If you need any assistance, please contact the
17 sergeant, thank you for your cooperation.

18 Chair, you may begin.

19 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: (GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING IN)

20 Good morning, I am Council Member Carlina Rivera,
21 Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries
22 and International Intergroup Relations.

23 Today, the Committee will vote on Resolution
24 Number 438, sponsored by Council Member Gale Brewer,
25 recognizing Landing Day in the second week of
September annually to commemorate the arrival of the

1 first in Jewish community in New Amsterdam in 1654
2 and to celebrate the continuing importance of the
3 Jewish community in the City of New York.
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5 This resolution honors the group of 23 Sephardic
6 Jews that fought for and won expanded rights from the
7 government after facing discrimination and efforts to
8 limit their civil rights. The Resolution would honor
9 them and celebrate the continuing importance of the
10 Jewish community in New York City.

11 I want to also acknowledge the council members
12 who have joined us today; I mentioned Council Member
13 Brewer, we are also joined by Council Member Ung and
14 Council Member Louis.

15 Now, I would like to ask Council Member Brewer to
16 provide remarks on her resolution.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, Chair
18 Rivera. I want to thank you; I want to thank Howard
19 Teich, who is here and who is the most innovative
20 human being I know. He's got an idea a minute, and
21 Landing Day is an excellent one.

22 I also want to thank the Chair of Jewish Caucus,
23 Council Member Dinowitz -- and all of the sponsors,
24 including Council Member Dinowitz, Chair Rivera,
25 Council Member Restler, Council Member Menin, Council

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2 Member Vernikov, Council Member Schulman, Council
3 Member Zhuang, Council Member Gennaro, Council Member
4 Brannan, Council Member Hanif, Council Member Cabán,
5 Council Member Brooks Powers, Council Member Avilas,
6 Council Member Carr, Council Member Powers -- have
7 all signed on, and I hope others do.

8 So as you heard, this calls as a Resolution on
9 the Council to recognize Landing Day every September
10 -- which is why we're trying to do it so quickly this
11 September -- to commemorate the 23 Sephardic Jews who
12 arrived in 1654, having been preceded one month prior
13 by three Ashkenazi Jews, and together founded the
14 first Jewish community in North America.

15 This week, September 7, 1654, a few days before
16 Rosh Hashanah, the group of 23 men, women, and
17 children landed near the southern tip of the Dutch
18 Colony of New Amsterdam -- where the Staten Island
19 ferry is.

20 And, 370 years later, New York City is home to
21 1.6 million Jews, more than any other city worldwide.
22 And, of course, we're one of the greatest urban
23 centers of Jewish life.

24 The landing is marked by the Jewish Tercentenary
25 Monument, and Flagstaff, where we celebrated last

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2 year. It's placed in the Peter, the Millar Plaza by
3 the state of New York and dedicated in 1955 in
4 recognition of the celebration of the arrival of the
5 first Jews in North America.

6 That year, events were held for months across New
7 York and the US to celebrate. But, in the decades
8 since, there have only been a handful of gatherings
9 at the site, and I want to again thank Howard Teich
10 for bringing us together more recently.

11 I just also want to say that Ruth Messinger, who
12 is, of course, well known to all of us, wanted to
13 recognize this contribution and say how much she too
14 appreciates it. So, I just want to mention that she's
15 not able to be here today, but she wanted to send her
16 very best. She said, "This is a fantastic resolution
17 recognizing both the history of Jews in New York and
18 the history of New York City as a city that has
19 thrived and continues to thrive because of the
20 contribution of immigrants." She's very focused on
21 immigrants if you know Ruth. "These were among New
22 York's earliest immigrants saved by being allowed to
23 stay because the Dutch East India Company overrode
24 the anti-Semitic position of Governor Peter
25 Stuyvesant. It was an important victory for

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2 tolerance, welcome, and the building of a diverse
3 city," said Ruth Messenger.

4 And, thank you very much, also to Shula Warren
5 Puder, Chief of Staff in my office, for making this
6 possible. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you, Council Member
8 Brewer. I also want to recognize that we have been
9 joined by Council Member Carr and Council Member
10 Hanif, excellent.

11 I would also like to thank my staff as well as
12 the committee staff who worked on preparing this
13 legislation including Katie Loeb, my Chief of Staff;
14 Edward Amador, my Director of Legislation; Christina
15 Yellamaty, the Committee's counsel; Regina Paul, the
16 Committee's Policy Analyst, who also drafted the
17 resolution; and Sandra Gray, the Committee's
18 Financial Analyst.

19 I will now open the hearing for public testimony.
20 I remind members of the public that this is a
21 government proceeding and that decorum shall be
22 observed at all times. As such, members of the public
23 shall remain silent at all times.

24 The witness table is reserved for people who wish
25 to testify.

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2 No video recording or photography is allowed from
3 the witness table. Further, members of the public may
4 not present audio or video recordings as testimony,
5 but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the
6 Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

7 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please
8 fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms
9 and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will
10 have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topic:
11 *Resolution 438.*

12 If you have a written statement, or additional
13 written testimony, that you wish to submit for the
14 record, please provide a copy of that testimony to
15 the Sergeant at Arms. You may also email written
16 testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72
17 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
18 will be accepted.

19 And, with that, I will ask Christina to call the
20 first panel.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our first panel will be Cheryl
22 Fishbein, I am sorry if I mispronounce your name,
23 Aryeh Lebowitz, and Julie Hirsch.

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And, while you all are
25 getting settled, if there's anyone else that would

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2 like to submit testimony, I actually welcome you to
3 join this panel. Make sure you fill out a slip, and
4 hand it the Sergeant at Arms as soon as possible.

5 (PAUSE)

6 CHERYL FISHBEIN: Good afternoon, Chair Rivera,
7 and members of the Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
8 International Intergroup Relations Committee. I'm
9 Cheryl Fishbein, Chair of the Jewish Community
10 Relations Council of New York. On behalf of JCRC of
11 New York, which is the primary community relations
12 agency for the Jewish people in the New York
13 Metropolitan area, we thank you for the opportunity
14 to testify regarding Resolution Number 438 of 2024,
15 relating to recognizing Landing Day in the second
16 week of September annually to commemorate the arrival
17 of the first Jewish community in New Amsterdam in
18 1654, and to celebrate the continuing importance of
19 the Jewish community in the city of New York.

20 Let me begin by saying that the area comprising
21 our great city has had a Jewish presence for 370
22 years. The Jewish people are clearly no strangers to
23 New York, and this resolution, which seeks to
24 recognize and honor Landing Day is a fitting
25 recognition of the fact making the arrival of these

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2 23 Sephardic Jews in September, 1654 in New
3 Amsterdam, now Lower Manhattan, they were the first
4 group of refugees fleeing persecution from the
5 Portuguese after the Conquest of Brazil.

6 Those 23, plus 3 Ashkenazi Jews, who arrived one
7 month earlier, with the start of the Jewish history
8 in the in North America.

9 In the centuries since, our city and its image
10 have been shaped and reshaped in no small part by its
11 Jewish citizens from Emma Lazarus, to Mayors Abe
12 Beame and Ed Koch, to Irving (TIMER CHIMES) Berlin,
13 to Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and countless others.

14 Our city and country have been indelibly
15 influenced by what the Jewish community has
16 accomplished, and how we've worked with other people
17 and other communities, what we've started, and the
18 positive differences that we have made.

19 Indeed, the story in North America, and the
20 Jewish story in North America, is the story of any
21 and every immigrant group seeking a better life, a
22 life fleeing persecution or wanting basic freedoms.

23 Resolution 438 seeks to simply recognize that the
24 Jewish community has been part of the fabric of life
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2 in this city, in our city, since its earliest
3 inception.

4 With New York City's Jewish population now
5 reaching over 1.6 million, more than any other city
6 in the world, now is the time to salute the courage,
7 tenacity, and perseverance of the earliest Jewish
8 settlers and honor the achievements of their
9 descendants.

10 The Jewish Community Relations Council of New
11 York urges this committee to pass Resolution 438 and
12 recognize Landing Day in the second week of September
13 annually to commemorate the arrival of the first
14 Jewish community in New Amsterdam in 1654, and to
15 celebrate the continuing importance and vibrancy of
16 the Jewish community in the city of New York.

17 We'd like to thank the Committee, and its chair,
18 again for convening this hearing today, and I would
19 like to express appreciation for this resolution to
20 Council Member Gail Brewer as well.

21 And, just, I have to add personally, I am a child
22 of immigrants, and have become a Jewish person inside
23 the fabric of New York City, and I have to say, I'm
24 so proud, and I'm so proud to be here to help... to
25 encourage you to vote for this resolution.

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2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you, thank you so much.

3 I just want to say that we have been joined by
4 Council Member Hudson, and I'll say online, and I
5 think that was it. And, I just want to remind
6 everybody that there is a timer. When you hear the
7 bell go off, just, you don't have to stop in the
8 middle of your sentence, but just wrap up your last
9 thought. Okay? And thank you so much for your
10 testimony.

11 JULIE HIRSCH: Good afternoon Chair Rivera,
12 members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me
13 to testify.

14 My name is Julie Hirsch, and I am the Senior
15 Director of Institutional Giving at the Museum of
16 Jewish Heritage, a living memorial to the Holocaust.

17 The Museum of Jewish Heritage wholeheartedly
18 endorses Resolution 438 recognizing Landing Day in
19 the second week of September annually to commemorate
20 the arrival of the first Jewish community in New
21 Amsterdam in 1654.

22 As an institution dedicated to remembrance and
23 education, we believe that recognizing the unique
24 history of the Jewish immigration experience is
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1
2 unequivocally important. At our museum, we strive to
3 do just that.

4 The Museum of Jewish Heritage educates diverse
5 visitors about Jewish life before, during, and after
6 the Holocaust. We are committed to the crucial
7 mission of teaching about what unchecked hate and
8 bigotry can do. We are dedicated to education,
9 remembrance, and serving the public by providing
10 Holocaust education.

11 The museum is an essential resource for combating
12 bigotry and anti-Semitism in New York City. We
13 provide free admission for New York City Public
14 Schools, CUNY students, and IDNYC cardholders.

15 Our Holocaust Curriculum, developed with support
16 from the Department of Education, is a free and
17 trustworthy resource for teachers.

18 In 2023, we opened our first ever exhibition for
19 younger students - *Courage to Act: Rescue in Denmark*.
20 This world-class exhibition has expanded our free
21 Holocaust education programs to younger students for
22 the first time.

23 Additionally, as part of our commitment to
24 removing barriers, the museum subsidizes free
25 transportation to and from our museum for schools in

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2 need so that all can access our educational resources
3 regardless of means.

4 Last year, the museum launched its first ever
5 Anti-Semitism Frequently Asked Questions, a free
6 online resource for educators our team developed in
7 response to a growing need for materials they can use
8 to discuss antisemitism constructively with (TIMER
9 CHIMES) students.

10 The museum also operates an annual Interfaith
11 Living Museum in which Muslim and Jewish students
12 come together to educate one another about their
13 faith and cultural practices.

14 This month, we will open our first ever hate
15 speech focused exhibition titled: *Speaking Up!*
16 *Confronting Hate Speech*

17 This exhibition will underscore the power of
18 words that leads to discrimination, persecution, and
19 mass violence. Rooted in the museum's crucial mission
20 to fight anti-Semitism and bigotry through education,
21 this exhibition highlights the relationship between
22 hatred of Jews and identity based discrimination in
23 many forms.

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: If you could just, uh, wrap
25 up.

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2 JULIE HIRSCH: Okay.

3 We thank the Committee and the entire city
4 council for your support, and we look forward to
5 commemorating Landing Day. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you.

7 ARIEH LEBOWITZ: Good afternoon, my name is Aryeh
8 Lebowitz, and I'm the Executive Director of the
9 Jewish Labor Committee. I'll get back to that in a
10 moment.

11 I want to thank everybody who sponsored this
12 resolution, crafted it -- staff as well as members of
13 this committee, and who are supportive of it, and I
14 hope that you all are.

15 My apologies, a number of people have said over
16 the years when they're speaking, you may have heard
17 some of this before, but you haven't heard it from
18 me. So some of this will duplicate slightly what's
19 been said before, it's not the easiest thing to edit
20 on the fly.

21 But about myself, while we're talking about the
22 mid-1650s; I wasn't born here until 300 years later
23 in Manhattan in 1954, and I'm a son of Manhattan
24 parents who were also both born in New York, but
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1 they... three of their parents were immigrants from
2 other countries.
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4 As we're talking about Landing Day, and then
5 Peter Stuyvesant and so on, but we also add that I
6 grew up in Stuyvesant Town, and I am a proud graduate
7 of Stuyvesant High School, the one on 15th Street.

8 I never learned about Landing Day until recently;
9 although, the arrival of two dozen Jews from Recife
10 in Brazil into New Amsterdam is something that came
11 to my attention a few years ago during my studies at
12 Harper College in Binghamton, New York.

13 But that's why this resolution is important,
14 because a lot of people don't know about this
15 history.

16 Others have noted, and will note, that the modest
17 wave of Jews to our shores from even before it was
18 called New York, people escaping persecution and
19 trying to make better lives for themselves and their
20 children, were part of successive waves of Jewish,
21 and non-Jewish immigrants, of a wide range of
22 ethnicities, cultures, faiths, and countries of
23 origin from 1650s and before to now.

24 The prejudice and opposition of some leaders to
25 letting these Jewish refugees into Amsterdam has been

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2 repeated over the decades and centuries. (TIMER
3 CHIMES) (INAUDIBLE) to now.

4 And I could go on further, and it'll be in the,
5 what do you call it, send in testimony, but I very
6 much urge your support of this, which will be of
7 significance, not only to the Jewish New Yorkers, but
8 the all New Yorkers from now going forward. Thank
9 you.

10 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you.

11 Howard, make sure we can hear you loud and clear.

12 HOWARD TEICH: Hello? Hi, I'm Howard Teich, I'm
13 Founding Chair of in on this Manhattan Jewish
14 historical initiative.

15 And we've felt for a long time, we had a ceremony
16 there last year, we just had a tour yesterday that
17 wound up down at the monument in Flagstaff -- which
18 is in Peter Minuit Park -- And felt there's a need -
19 - that was put in for the 300th anniversary of the
20 Jewish community in in New York.

21 I want to start by actually where I usually end
22 just for perspective:

23 We consider New York probably one of the greatest
24 five Jewish civilizations in our 5,000 year history.

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2 Just so you understand the importance of what's
3 happened here.

4 My family came over in the 1880s, some were in
5 Brownsville, others in Lower Eastside. So, there's
6 been a long history here, and it's not just the few
7 things we've been involved in, whether it be
8 Broadway, Tin Pan Alley, culture, whether it be
9 business, whether it be hospitals and healthcare --
10 it just expands out and out in terms of other groups
11 that we've been involved in. We've participated in
12 part because of what we've gone through. And, it's
13 been thousands of years of both celebration of being
14 in positions where we controlled our own lives, uh,
15 other times where we were persecuted, that's part of
16 the story of them coming up from Recife, when they
17 were living a great life until they weren't, and they
18 had to move very quickly.

19 And, one of the important things for now, I would
20 think, is in terms of, uh, we were refugees, we came
21 here because we had no other place to go, basically.
22 And, we had other choices, but not really. And, so,
23 what we celebrate, and what this is all about, is we
24 celebrate (TIMER CHIMES) freedom, and we celebrate

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2 what New York City and America has given to us
3 throughout these 370 years.

4 I want to end just by thanking the Council, after
5 15 years, because they contributed to this. This is
6 still the first and only Jewish Heritage and History
7 map of the city. It has the whole story on the back,
8 and City Council provided money for that this year.

9 And, speaking to the Chancellor, we got this
10 introduced in the curriculum, in the in the school
11 system, that they're now using it. And it was the
12 first time that they really are talking about the
13 current history. So, the significance now of this
14 resolution, at a time that it's very, very important,
15 it brings forth the positive nature of who the Jewish
16 community is, what we want to contribute, how we
17 should be discussed, and I'll put it in as the last
18 thing that I I've been wishing for 15 years, that we
19 have a cultural tourism program in New York for the
20 Jewish community. It's in every city in the world,
21 where they don't even have Jews, and here we have
22 more than any place else, it would create an enormous
23 economic boon to New York, and I would hope the
24 Council at some point would take it up. So this also

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2 would have that added feature in terms of your
3 passage.

4 We thank you, Gale. You've been unbelievable in
5 putting this forward, and Carlina, thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you!

7 Well, I want to thank you all for your testimony
8 and for your contributions to the City, what you're
9 doing in terms of awareness and education, for people
10 of all ages. And, of course, for taking the time to
11 come to City Hall to provide your testimony. Thank
12 you very much.

13 HOWARD TEICH: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Any questions from the...
15 Okay, thank you.

16 If there is anyone else who would like to provide
17 testimony who has not, please submit a paper... No?
18 Okay.

19 All right, well, thanks again, thank you, thank
20 you so much.

21 PANEL: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Is Billy close by?

23 COMMITTEE CLERK: Right here.

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Oh, hey...

25 COMMITTEE CLERK: I snuck in.

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2 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I think we are now ready for
3 the vote, Billy.

4 COMMITTEE CLERK: Okay, good afternoon, William
5 Martin, Committee Clerk, rollcall vote the Committee
6 on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International
7 Intergroup Relations on Resolution 438

8 Chair Rivera?

9 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I vote aye.

10 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Louis?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: I vote aye,
12 congratulations, Council Member Brewer and to all the
13 advocates, and I would like to be added on to the
14 bill, thank you.

15 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you.

16 Council Member Hanif?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I vote aye.

18 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Hanks?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: (ABSENT)

20 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Hudson?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Aye. And I would also like
22 to be added on to the bill, thank you.

23 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Ossé?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Aye, and I would also like to
25 be added on to the bill.

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COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you.

Council Member Ung?

COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: I vote aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Williams?

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: (ABSENT)

COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Carr?

COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: With congratulations to
Council Member Brewer, I vote aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of 7 in the
affirmative, 0 in the negative, and no abstentions
the Resolution had been adopted by the Committee.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Well, I also want to
congratulate Gale Brewer. And, I of course want to
thank the advocates again for being here and for
taking the time to make this happen.

I want to thank my fellow Committee members for
showing up and for just being great, great, great to
work with.

Okay, and, with that, we adjourn the hearing.
Thank you to Committee staff and my team as well. I
appreciate you very much.

(GAVEL SOUND) (GAVELING OUT)

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 September 15, 2024