Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment: Testimony before the City Council by Chief Digital Officer Rachel Sterne, Committee on Technology Hearing, Intro 771
February 27th

Good morning, Councilman Garodnick and members of the City Council Committee on Technology. I am Rachel Sterne, the Chief Digital Officer for the City of New York and I am here to talk to you about Intro 771, a bill requiring that City-issued permits, licenses, notices of inspections and registrations would require to have publically posted Quick Response codes on them.

Almost every day, City agencies introduce new ideas that leverage technology to help them better serve their constituents and fulfill their goals. It is truly a thrilling time for digital innovations and there is much to celebrate across the City of New York in this regard. At NYC Digital, we coordinate the development and implementation of these innovative ideas in a strategic, conscientious manner that aligns with the City's digital roadmap unveiled by Mayor Bloomberg in May 2011. The roadmap's goal is to realize New York City digital potential and to recognize that true success is based on a approach that serves all New Yorkers across all demographics and levels of access and technical ability.

Today, I am here to talk about Quick Response codes, known as QR codes or 2D barcodes, which Introduction 771 would mandate for all permits, licenses, notices of inspection and registrations issued by an agency and required by law to be posted. Based on a review of current practices and the literature regarding QR accessibility and adoption, it is our view that there are substantially better ways to make the same information more universally available. Preferred approaches, for example, would not require that users own smartphones or have specific software applications pre-loaded on their devices. So while QR codes are a trendy development to discuss, and certainly appropriate for specific contexts, we believe that they are still in the early-adopter phase and that there are other solutions beyond QR codes that would provide more universally accessible, long-term, cost-efficient strategies for providing additional information regarding permits, licenses, notices of inspection and regisgtrations.

Deploying QR codes across permitting agencies would require additional expenses that would likely prove significant. Beyond the generation of the QR code, this process would demand the creation, deployment and hosting of a slew of new mobile websites, as well as the staffing to facilitate a new workflow and process for this requirement. While the Department of Buildings has had great success in launching their QR code program, and we applaud them for that, NYC Digital believes that there should be a more strategic, goal-oriented, inclusive approach to the important task of expanding the City's mobile presence, and crucially, one that considers issues of smartphone ownership and QR code familiarity among low income households. For example, a 2011 Comscore study found that a mobile user who scans a QR code is most likely to earn over $100,000 per year. Overall, Forrester Research reported in late 2011 that just 5% of adults use QR codes. While we expect this number to increase, the technology is not yet at point where it is adopted widely enough to justify a significant expenditure of scarce City resources to reach a fairly narrow audience.

While our office strongly supports digital experimentation and innovation, at NYC Digital we believe that as we allocate resources, we need to be ever mindful of the most effective way of

successfully reaching our public service objectives. And blanket agency requirements should always be approached strategically, weighing the needs and technical access level of constituents. At NYC Digital, in every technology consultation, we start with the brick-and-mortar mission of an agency, and work backwards from that point; we feel that the digital medium should never be the end in and of itself. Overall, we are supportive of different ways of communicating, and tailor our advice based on what the goal of each agency is. We would suggest the same approach for this particular bill. If the goal is to get more information about each permit, license, notice of inspection and registration to the widest possible audience in a mobile context, there may be better, less costly or existing ways of disseminating that same information without creating a new platform across every permitting City agency that requires substantial expenditures of time and resources to reach a fairly narrow audience.

NYC Digital is currently working with DoITT and other City agencies on rebuilding and redesigning NYC.gov, the City's website. This is a major undertaking, and expanding the City's mobile presence will be a significant part of this. And as we move forward, we welcome ideas from a variety of sources for what the City Council and other policy makers would like to see in the next version of the City's website and mobile applications.

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor   ☐ in opposition

Date: _____ 5/27/12

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chris Coffey

Address: Muni Building / Centre Street

I represent: Mayors Office Media / Entertainment

Address: 1 Centre Street, 27th floor

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor   ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RACHEL STERNE

Address: 1 CENTRE ST 27 — NY NY 10007

I represent: MAYOR'S OFFICE

Address: CITY HALL

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆