

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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July 31, 2018
Start: 1:10 p.m.
Recess: 2:11 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E:
BARRY S. GRODENCHIK
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
JOSEPH C. BORELLI
JUSTIN L. BRANNAN
ANDREW COHEN
COSTA G. CONSTANTINIDES
MARK GJONAJ
ANDY L. KING
PETER A. KOO
FRANCISCO P. MOYA
ERIC A. ULRICH
JAMES G. VAN BRAMER

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

Rodneyse Bichotte
Assembly Member and State Committee Woman,
District Leader for New York State 42nd Assembly
District

Serge Joseph
Life Long Resident of Brooklyn

Nicholas Constantinides
Son of Council Member Costa Constantinides

Gerard Cadet
Supporter of Jean Jacques Dessalines Legislation

2 [gavel]

3 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good afternoon
4 and welcome. I'm Barry Grodenchik, I have the honor
5 of chairing the New York City Council's Committee
6 on Parks and Recreation. Today we will be voting on
7 one piece of legislation which is sponsored by my
8 colleagues Jumaane Williams, Laurie Combo and
9 Mathieu Eugene and we do expect Councilman Eugene
10 here shortly to discuss that. We'll ceremonial,
11 ceremonially co-name a street in Brooklyn after
12 Jean Jacques Dessalines, one of the leaders of the
13 Haitian revolution and founders of Haiti. My
14 colleagues will speak more about his
15 accomplishments but needless to say as someone who
16 was born into slavery and who then led the
17 revolution against France to ultimately become the
18 leader of his country he is a historical figure and
19 of great importance to the Haitian community here
20 in New York and in Haiti and I do urge my
21 colleagues to support this co-naming. But before we
22 get to that we are lucky to have three people who
23 are going to testify, I'm really honored to have

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2 them with us. One person who no... needs no
3 introduction but I'll give her one anyway, is
4 Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte, we're also joined
5 by Serge Joseph and Gerard, I think that Cadet...

6 GERARD CADET: Cadet.

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Cadet, I don't
8 see that T crossed Mr. Cadet. Miss Rosenthal would
9 not be happy. So, I am going to ask the
10 Assemblywoman to testify first and we welcome her
11 testimony. We're also joined today of course by one
12 of my colleagues, Councilman Joseph Borelli and we
13 have two former Assembly Members here and one
14 present one so... Assemblywoman please.

15 RODNEYSE BICHOTTE: Thank you so much
16 Mr. Chair. I... we really appreciate you and your
17 committee for putting this hearing of specifically
18 for the co-naming of this great hero. I first want
19 to introduce myself, my name is Assembly Member
20 Rodneyse Bichotte, I represent the 42nd assembly
21 district which is part of Flatbush, Brooklyn and it
22 holds the largest Haitian... concentration of Haitian
23 population in New York State and the largest in the
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1 U.S. outside of Haiti. So, we are certainly proud
2 to be here today to talk about a historical figure
3 who we hope to co-name in our neighborhood as we
4 have pronounced Little Haiti this year in the City
5 Council in Flatbush, Brooklyn. I do want to thank
6 the Speaker for again allowing us to, to have this
7 hearing today and I would like to thank the two co-
8 sponsors of this legislation which is the Majority
9 Leader Laurie Cumbo as well as City Council Member
10 Jumaane Williams who's been again really at the
11 forefront of fighting for... on behalf of the Haitian
12 community. By co-sponsoring this legislation, a
13 street... for a street co-naming after a world
14 leader, one should not be forgotten because he was
15 black or because he was a slave, but we should
16 recognize his strength who defeated a well-known
17 army, the French army. Jean Jacques Dessalines is
18 one of the greatest heroes of the modern world, he
19 is one of the founding fathers of Haiti having
20 taken charge of the Haitian revolution to stunning,
21 improbable and imaginary... unimaginable victory in
22 defeating the French Napoleon army in 1804. This
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1 was significant to world history; the Haitian
2 revolution is not only the first and only
3 successful slave revolution in the Americas but
4 also resulted in Haiti being the first Latin
5 American country and second in the Western
6 Hemisphere to declare its independence after the
7 United States declared independence from Britain in
8 1776. He was the first ruler of Haiti. Now the
9 independence of Haiti reshaped the Atlantic world
10 by leading to the French sell of the Louisiana to
11 the United States and encourage republican
12 revolution in Latin America and eventually Africa
13 and under one of the Generals, Petion, Haiti
14 provided direct assistance to Simon Bolivar on at
15 least two crucial occasions during the latter
16 successful efforts to secure independence for the
17 Spanish colonial territories throughout Latin
18 America and South America. As you mentioned
19 Dessalines was born into slavery in the French
20 colony of what was known as Saint Domingue. In 1791
21 he then joined the fight for freedom when thousands
22 of brutally exploited enslaved people rose up
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2 against their colonial masters and their enablers
3 in France who murdered and massacred hundreds and
4 thousands of people across the Caribbean. Can you
5 imagine that? Hundreds and thousands and probably
6 millions of people across the Caribbean, this is
7 what the French did. He joined Toussaint
8 Louverture's army who was an ex-slave, who actually
9 came to France's aid during its revolution.
10 Nonetheless as many of you may know Toussaint
11 Louverture's diplomacy and some may say his naivety
12 was then used to mislead him through trickeries of
13 France, he was then captured, he was shackled, he
14 was kidnapped out of his own country and shipped to
15 France where he died. So, Jean Jacques Dessalines,
16 a man of very strategic and smart, he witnessed
17 that he could not trust the French. Sometimes
18 victory is momentarily and for the French it was
19 with hope that Haiti's victory was momentarily.
20 With letters of proof showing that the French was
21 done so yes, after Dessalines won he ordered these
22 oppressors to leave the island. They didn't, in
23 preparation to re-enslave the natives of Haiti,
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2 with that Dessalines did order to execute the
3 oppressors who were seeking to oppress and re-
4 enslave Haiti. However, it was in the name of
5 freedom, it was in the name of reclaiming back
6 their lion and not in the name of oppression. Also,
7 you may find there's some readings in particular
8 Wikipedia that Jean Jacques Dessalines killed
9 whites, all the whites which is not true, he had
10 very close allies to the Polish who left the French
11 army and also, he had also allied with some of the
12 French Haitian loyalists. So, you know it is funny
13 how again this topic of black liberators that freed
14 black country right after the U.S. that helped the
15 U.S. expand its territory that partnered and helped
16 other countries throughout the world in the
17 Americas liberating and freeing and reforming,
18 implementing reform policies, it's funny that this
19 man was questionable not only questionable but his
20 accomplishments were diminished in some of these
21 readings so that he can be viewed as a savage and
22 animalistic going around just killing people. It
23 was one thing to kill for greed like many of the
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1 colonizers and oppressors but it's another thing to
2 kill for freedom. When we honor many of our
3 historical figures, think about Dessalines of back
4 then and not use the lens of today to criticize
5 what was war. We talk about Columbus, Christopher
6 Columbus who had his share of capturing and
7 murdering and raping and taking land, but we honor
8 him still. We talk about Thomas Jefferson who as
9 many of you know had sex with a 12-year-old slave,
10 Sally Hemmings and at that time slaves who were
11 considered property didn't have consent, but we
12 honor them. We talk about George Washington, the
13 very first president of this great, mighty state
14 who sold slaves for a keg of molasses. We, we talk
15 about our beloved, Abraham Lincoln who had
16 expressed opposition to racial equality and that
17 the white man be superior, be the superior race but
18 again we honor them in... we honor them because we
19 have to think about how we view these people back
20 then. Do we see war of yesterday as we see war of
21 today? The violence of slavery that was a plague
22 for 400 years on humankind whether it was on a
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2 small scale or large scale, we should take note of
3 that, we should take note of the many slaves that
4 were deprived of food or who's hands were chopped
5 and face and bodies were disfigures or who were
6 just killed, how about stripping women of their
7 clothes and inserting honey up in their genitals so
8 that ants can eat them alive inside. Think of what
9 was going on back then, how about stuffing dynamite
10 in men's rectum and lighting them to be blown
11 apart, think of the cruelty after cruelty. These
12 were examples of institutional and organized
13 violence, violence of whippings, starving, raping,
14 ripping children away from their families. That is
15 what we consider barbaric and animalistic not the
16 acts of Jean Jacques Dessalines who sought to stop
17 those who were evil. So, the violence that French
18 plotted against millions of blacks or just millions
19 of many should not be equated to the few thousands
20 of whites who were defeated during a revolutionary
21 war in Haiti. What the French did was nothing short
22 of genocide and it would have taken violence to
23 stop these violent acts, it's called war. And Jean

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2 Jacques Dessalines again killed to free not only
3 for Haiti but for many countries around the world.
4 The many people around the world including the
5 United States of America. He exemplified the true
6 meaning of democracy. Nelson Mandela said it well,
7 are we free, we are not yet free let alone have the
8 freedom to be free. So, Mr. Chair, the New York
9 City Council today the Haitian community, the
10 allies of the Haitian community, the greater
11 Haitian community are all supporters of the Haitian
12 community come before you to vote to honor this
13 hero. Let us pay homage today to my great, great,
14 great grandfather, Jean Jacques Dessalines. Thank
15 you.

16 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very
17 much Assemblywoman. We have been joined by Council
18 Members Francisco Moya of Queens, Eric Ulrich of
19 Queens and Mathieu Eugene of the great borough of
20 Brooklyn and I understand Councilman Eugene you'd
21 like to make a... some remarks at this time.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Thank you very
23 much Mr. Chair, good afternoon. As you know I'm
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1 Mathieu Eugene, the New York City Council Member
2 who lives in district 40 and I would like to thank
3 Chair Grodenchik for providing me this opportunity
4 to speak about this legislation to re-name Rogers
5 Avenue between Farragut Road and Eastern Parkway
6 Jean Jacques Dessalines Boulevard. I would like
7 also to thank Council Member Williams for this
8 legislation for which I am the co-sponsor. Jean
9 Jacques Dessalines had an enormous impact on the
10 nation of Haiti, he was in fact one of the nation's
11 founders. In 1791, Dessalines joined the slavery
12 rebellion that was ignited by the French
13 revolution. Serving as a lieutenant under Toussaint
14 Louverture, Dessalines's leadership and military
15 skills was critical to Toussaint Louverture being
16 able to capture and the Spanish control Eastern
17 parts or half of the... Governor of the southern part
18 of the island. Toussaint Louverture established
19 himself as Governor General of Saint Domingue until
20 1802. The following year Dessalines and other black
21 leaders rose up against the French and expelled
22 them from Saint Domingue when they attempted to re-

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2 introduce the slavery. On January 1st, 1804,
3 Dessalines had the Governor General declare that
4 the entire island of Spain was an independent
5 country named Haiti and was governor until his
6 death in 1806. I ask my colleagues and the
7 committee to vote on this, this legislation that
8 allows Jean Jacques Dessalines whose leadership and
9 good military skill were essential in abolishing
10 the slavery and making Haiti the first black
11 independent nation in the world. And I want to take
12 the opportunity also to thank all my colleagues in
13 the City Council, the City Council for their
14 continued support to me and to the Haitian
15 community and I remember in 2008 when we voted the
16 Resolution 1995 to allow the city government to
17 grant the TPS to Haitian people, the council was
18 supportive and we voted overwhelmingly and also
19 during all the advocacy going back and forth to
20 Washington, the city council has been always with
21 me, with the Haitian community to ensure that
22 Haiti, Haiti was granted the TPS. And I want also
23 to take the opportunity to thank the other council
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1 for their legislation on the family reunification.
2 when I introduced this legislation also the council
3 was with me with the Haitian community and we voted
4 to ask the federal government to grant to Haitian
5 people or to Haiti the opportunity for Haitian to
6 come to wait green card or for their legal status
7 in the United States the same way they did for the
8 Cuban. And I remember vividly also the support of
9 the entire council when we voted the legislation to
10 declare October 9th Haitian day in New York City
11 because October 9th was the date when the Haitian
12 people, my... and sisters came to Savannah, Georgia
13 to fight for the independence of United States of
14 America, they gave their lives for this, for the
15 independence of the United States of America and
16 then the legislation was voted by the city council
17 and now officially because of the support of the
18 entire City Council October 9th, the date of the
19 battle of Savannah, Georgia, historic battle for
20 United States and for Haiti also is officially
21 Haitian day in New York City, we're going to
22 celebrate it very soon and I want to thank all, all
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2 of you and I urge you my colleagues to vote yes for
3 this legislation. Thank you very much.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you
5 Council Member Eugene. We will now hear from Mr.
6 Joseph. Thank you.

7 SERGE JOSEPH: Good afternoon. Thank
8 you... thank you very much. Thank you Chair
9 Grodenchik and thank you Council Member Eugene.
10 Good afternoon. My name is Serge Joseph, I'm a
11 lifelong resident of Brooklyn and for the last 14
12 years my wife, daughter and I have resided in
13 Ditmas Park Flatbush on East 19th Street and before
14 then we lived in Crown Heights also in Brooklyn. I
15 urge the Committee on Parks and Recreation to adopt
16 the legislation at issue and co-name Rogers Avenue
17 as indicated Jean Jacques Dessalines Boulevard.
18 Jean Jacques Dessalines is a true hero to all of
19 those who cherish liberty and freedom not simply
20 black or white but the principle of liberty and
21 freedom. I say this not only because I'm of Haitian
22 descent and have an interest in advocating for one
23 of my own but because in words and deeds Dessalines

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2 exemplifies this love and freedom for all. His
3 words are found in Haiti's declaration of
4 independence where Dessalines stated in part as
5 follows, "remember that I sacrificed everything to
6 rally to your defense; family, children, fortune
7 and now I am rich only with your liberty, my name
8 has become a horror to all of those who want
9 slavery. Despots and tyrants curse the day that I
10 was born. Therefore, vow before me to live free and
11 independent and prefer death to anything that will
12 try to place you back in chains. Swear, finally, to
13 pursue forever the traitors and enemies of your
14 independence". His deeds are self-evident from the
15 1780's to December 31, 1804 and beyond he fought a
16 war of attrition against all the then superpowers
17 of the world; Spain, England and of course France.
18 In conclusion, I would like to say that history
19 does not belong only to its narrators, professional
20 or amateurs. While some of us may debate what
21 history is or was, others take history into their
22 hands. Dessalines and the heroes of the Haitian
23 independence have been silenced and ridiculed long

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2 enough, we have an opportunity to take history and
3 rewrite history into our hands. Honor Jean Jacques
4 Dessalines would be an incredible step, thank you
5 again and... City Council Members Eugene, Williams
6 and Cumbo for introducing the legislation... this
7 legislation to the council.

8 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very
9 much Mr. Joseph for your testimony, we have one
10 more person to testify that's Mr. Gerard Cadet, Mr.
11 Cadet please.

12 GERARD CADET: Good afternoon Mr., Mr.
13 Chair.

14 SERGE JOSEPH: Grodenchik...

15 GERARD CADET: And Councilman Ulrich and
16 Councilman Eugene and Councilman Moya and Borelli...
17 [cross-talk]

18 SERGE JOSEPH: And Borelli, okay...
19 [cross-talk]

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: And Borelli
21 became a father, so you have to be... [cross-talk]

22 GERARD CADET: Okay... so, today is a
23 privilege that I have to come in front of you to
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1 speak about somebody that is of great meaning to
2 every color of people in the world and I'm speaking
3 about General Jean Jacques Dessalines. Jean Jacques
4 Dessalines... 14 days after the Haitian independence
5 following the declaration of independence of Haiti
6 from France, General Jean Jacques Dessalines sent a
7 letter to the U.S. Congress and the merchant
8 Marian. In this letter as it is reported in
9 missionary journal of 1823, Dessalines offered to
10 pay the going rate for a slave at that time, that
11 was 40 dollars a head for each slave that would be
12 sent to Haiti, so they could be free. Jean Jacques
13 Dessalines refused to accept the norm of it is
14 time.. of his time. He did not want it to be the
15 expected outcome of what 200 years of indenture
16 servitude will do to a man. He believed that all
17 men were created equal and he not only believed
18 that, but he practiced it as well. So, today we
19 assemble here to not talk about how beautiful it is
20 to be Haitian, not how brave it is to be Haitian,
21 how brave our nation can be but to glorify and
22 moralize a citizen of the world, a man for all
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2 generations, someone to whom any descent peace
3 loving human being who believed in equality and
4 justice for all, we stand firm to honor. Before
5 there was Ghandi, before there was Marcus Garvey,
6 before there was Doctor King, there was Jean
7 Jacques Dessalines. Dessalines achievement can
8 still be felt today... his fight against white
9 supremacists, his stand for racial equality a thing
10 that many of us should take a, a lesson from what's
11 happening in our country today. So, we are... it's a
12 challenging time in this country so it is time that
13 we stand there and honor people who stood for
14 freedom, people that stand to bring people on equal
15 levels. It... the freedom what Doctor King fought
16 for, what Ghandi fought for many years before, what
17 Nelson Mandela fought for in South Africa, all of
18 it began in Haiti, that's where the black man stood
19 up and said I'm a man and I shouldn't be enslaved,
20 I should be free. So, with that we will be asking
21 the, the... this, this committee to really support
22 this end of year of honoring such a great leader,
23 somebody who really, really stood up and say that

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2 slavery no more and because of the... his achievement
3 that was either continued later on by Alexandre
4 Petion, we freed the whole continent of South
5 America. Bolivar, Simon Bolivar came to Haiti to
6 talk to one of the Sergeant Lieutenant long after
7 Dessalines died to ask for support from Haiti and
8 Haiti was there, we stood there, we helped
9 everybody we needed to help and when Simon Bolivar
10 asked Alexandre Petion what is it that we should do
11 for you after we free Bolivia and South America,
12 the response was just what Dessalines would have
13 responded, just free the slaves. So, with that
14 we're asking you to honor this man, this hero.
15 Anybody who believes in justice who believe in
16 equality should stand with us and honor General
17 Jean Jacques Dessalines. So, with that we say thank
18 you for your support and we know that from your
19 heart you will do us right. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very
21 much Mr. Cadet, again thank you especially of
22 course Assemblywoman Bichotte and all of you for
23 coming to testify on this very, very important
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2 matter, certainly of great importance not only to
3 the Haitian community but to all New Yorkers. So,
4 we are going to take a, what I hope will be a very
5 short break, we are expecting one of our colleagues
6 momentarily, we all have a different definition of
7 what that means but hopefully momentarily means a
8 few minutes so if I could ask the indulgence of the
9 members of the committee not to stray too far as in
10 don't leave the room, where's the Sergeant at Arms,
11 we will... we will hold a, a vote on this resolution
12 very, very shortly.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: I'm on?

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Izzy whenever
15 you're ready.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We will now
18 resume our hearing, we have been joined at this
19 time by Councilman Jumaane Williams of Brooklyn and
20 he'd like to make a brief statement on the bill.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you so
22 much Mr. Chair and thank you for granting me this
23 opportunity. I do have to get back to court,
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1 probably the only elected in court for a very good
2 reason actually. But I'm, I'm very proud to be
3 sponsoring the bill for re-naming of Jean Jacques
4 Dessalines and I want to thank Assembly Member
5 Rodneyse Bichotte who has actually been the driving
6 force behind this and Little Haiti. I think it's
7 very important for people to see themselves in New
8 York City and their history. I always talk about
9 the Haitian revolution as a black man how much it
10 means to me that they were the first free slaved
11 nation and as an American how much it means to me
12 because without Haiti we would not be the America
13 we have now and doubling the size of the country.
14 Most of the world owes a debt to Haiti that has
15 never been repaid and in fact it's unfortunate that
16 Haiti had to repay France for their own freedom,
17 they had to pay back money that was owed because
18 they treated slaves as objects to be bought and
19 sold and so I think it's important to celebrate the
20 people of this revolution that hopefully inspired
21 others at that time and continue to inspire people
22 now and especially at the time when we have an
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2 orange bigot in the White House specifying
3 communities in specificity like Haiti and Africa
4 calling them S-hole countries. I think this is the
5 least that the council can do so I just want to say
6 thank you to the Assembly Member, thank you to
7 Laurie Cumbo, thank you to Speaker Johnson and a
8 special shout out to Jason Goldman and of course
9 the Chair Barry Grodenchik for allowing us to get
10 this through in a... such an easy fashion. So, thank
11 you.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you
13 Council Member Williams. We're going to... we're
14 going to take a brief hiatus now and we'll be back
15 for a vote very shortly. Alright, we are... we are
16 back for a vote now. We've been joined by Council
17 Member Costa Constantinides and I think we have a
18 junior Councilman with us, would you please
19 identify yourself for the record young man? No...

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Nickolas
21 Constantinides.

22 NICHOLAS CONSTANTINIDES: Nickolas
23 Constantinides.

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COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Nikos?

NICHOLAS CONSTANTINIDES: Uh-huh.

CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Welcome Nikos,
we're happy to have you with us. I'm now going to
call on the Clerk Billy Martin for a roll call
vote.

COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: William Martin,
roll call vote, Committee on Parks and Recreation,
Pre-Considered Introduction, Chair Grodenchik?

CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: Ulrich?

COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: I vote aye and I
want to congratulate the Haitian American community
in New York City.

COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: Constantinides?

COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: I vote
aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: Brannan?

COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: [off mic] Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: Moya?

COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: I vote aye and I
also want to take the opportunity to thank my

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2 sister from the assembly, Assemblywoman Rodneyse
3 for her great work that she's done for the Haitian
4 community and thank you to the Chair.

5 COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: Borelli?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: [off mic] Aye.

7 COMMITTEE CLERK MARTIN: By a vote of
8 six in the affirmative, zero in the negative and no
9 abstentions the item has been adopted by the
10 committee.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you Mr.
12 Martin, thank you all for being here today, thank
13 you to those who came to testify, and I look
14 forward to seeing this on the agenda for the next
15 stated meeting. With that we are adjourned.

16 [gavel]

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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 August 1, 2018