

**TESTIMONY**

**BY**

**CHIEF OF STAFF TIAN WEINBERG**

**NYC**

**DEPARTMENT OF SMALL BUSINESS SERVICES**

**BEFORE**

**THE COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS**

**OF THE**

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL**

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2024**

Good morning, **Chair Feliz** and members of the Committee on Small Business. My name is Tian Weinberg, and I am the **Chief of Staff of the Department of Small Business Services (“SBS”)**. I am joined by our **Deputy Commissioner for Neighborhood Development Calvin Brown**. We are pleased to be here today to discuss how SBS improves neighborhood conditions for businesses and local communities.

SBS’s mission is to unlock NYC’s economic potential and create economic security for all New Yorkers by connecting them to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building thriving, vibrant neighborhoods.

We do this through a wide variety of services: from online education at our NYC Business Solutions Centers, to pro-bono legal assistance for businesses signing or renewing a commercial lease, to convening small business thought leaders from across the nation to explore creative approaches to commercial revitalization. In the previous year, we made history by launching the NYC Small Business Opportunity Fund and distributing \$85M in low-interest loans to over 1,000 small businesses, with a

significant 80% of the loans benefiting minority- or women-owned businesses.

Across all our SBS divisions, our teams work every day to make New York City the most desirable place to start, operate, and grow a small business. Under this Administration, we have made serious inroads and hit major milestones in our commercial recovery.

## **A Record-Breaking Economic Recovery**

As Mayor Adams often says, public safety is a pre-requisite for prosperity. Today, our streets are safer, our sidewalks are cleaner, and we have more jobs than at any time in our city's history. One-in-six businesses in NYC today opened their doors under the Adams administration, according to the NYC Economic Development Corporation.

These businesses are driving job creation, tourism, and subway ridership as well. Since 2022, small businesses with fewer than **50** employees have accounted for **45 percent** of New York City's overall employment growth,

despite only representing about a quarter of the overall workforce. These businesses have also contributed more than **\$3.2 billion in direct economic output to the city**. Meanwhile, 62 million visitors brought in more than \$74 billion in economic activity last year, and NYC hit a new post-COVID high of 4 million subway riders in one day.

SBS is proud of the part we have played in supporting this incredible recovery.

Last November, SBS launched our **Live NYC Map**, a real-time database of more than **150,000** storefronts and public places across the city's landscape and the engine behind our **Shop Your City** website, where New Yorkers can discover and support their local small businesses.

This database is refreshed every 90 days. It informs SBS outreach and program-design, and enables the agency to meet our reporting obligations per **Local Law 152 of 2019**. According to our databases, citywide vacancy rates are declining, particularly in outer boroughs, reflecting the success of the Mayor's Blueprint for Economic Recovery.

Vacancies are being filled by a variety of industries, including e-commerce-resistant businesses such as juice bars, sport stores, and coffee shops. Grocery stores are up **11 percent**, and our nightlife industry is up an impressive **17 percent**. These insights inform our work with community-based organizations and allow us to be more intentional about the services we provide.

## **SBS Investments in Commercial Corridors**

Our **Neighborhood Development Division (“NDD”)** oversees NYC’s network of **75 Business Improvement Districts (“BIDs”)** which themselves serve nearly **300** miles of commercial corridors and invest more than **\$187 million** into local economies. During the Adams administration, we have allocated approximately **\$27 million** in grants to over **100** community-based organizations and BIDs, spurring commercial revitalization efforts across the city.

Our **Avenue NYC Grant** enables community-based development organizations to hire dedicated, full-time program managers and complete **Commercial District**

**Needs Assessments (“CDNA”).** Our **Neighborhood 360° Grant** provides organizations with the means to turn CDNAs into impactful commercial revitalization interventions.

Neighborhood organizations are using these grant programs in several creative and innovative ways. For example, **Brownsville’s Pitkin Avenue BID**, a Neighborhood 360° grantee, transformed a vacant storefront into a two week-long Halloween destination called the **Haunted Villie**. The event exceeded expectations, transforming local perceptions by offering a fun and safe activity in an area that lacks many family-oriented community spaces. Haunted Villie closed on Halloween day with a free event welcoming more than 300 children and their families. Since this event, six new businesses have opened along the corridor.

The **Brooklyn Chinese American Association** used their Neighborhood 360° support to connect local entrepreneurs to property owners with available commercial space using relationships they developed

while working on their CDNA, leading to three new businesses opening in Sunset Park.

Coupled with a beautification blitz by **Central Astoria LDC** to remove graffiti and clean up litter, Neighborhood 360° grantee **Queens Economic Development Corporation** will soon convene local property owners, real estate brokers, and prospective business owners for a guided walking tour of Astoria Boulevard. Our grantee aims to fill approximately 20 vacant storefront locations through these strategies.

This year, we continued our historic investments in the city's BID network, with over **\$500,000** in **BID Exploration and Formation** in 10 neighborhoods and over **\$2.5 million** to **39** existing smaller BIDs to enhance their programming and service delivery.

Knowing that not every commercial corridor has the capacity to begin BID formation, SBS and the Mayor's Office of Equity launched our first-ever **Merchant Organizing** grants, awarding over **\$2.4 million** to **14** organizations in **FY23** and **\$915,000** to **11** organizations

**in FY24.** This investment helped to either form or revitalize merchant organizations in **more than 20 neighborhoods**, planting the seeds for future BID formation.

We tackled storefront vacancies by lighting up commercial corridors too. This year, SBS launched our first-of-its-kind **Commercial District Lighting Grant** with **\$1.5 million** awarded to **17** organizations. This grant provides organizations with the money they need to design, produce, and install customized and creative community lighting projects, addressing neighborhood concerns of insufficient lighting, improving public safety, and attracting businesses and shoppers.

## **Call to Action**

These are some of the tools we are using currently to reinvigorate our commercial corridors, but district investments must also be coupled with streamlining measures for entrepreneurs who want to open up new shops.



That is why in the first days of his administration, Mayor Adams called on the city's enforcement agencies to review business regulations and identify rules holding our economy back. Through "Small Business Forward," and in partnership with the City Council, over 90 reforms have been implemented, saving small businesses millions in deferred fines and violations.

Additionally, through SBS's NYC Business Express Service Team, we provide new storefronts with one-on-one assistance to get permits and licenses needed to open, faster. We also provide free consultations at their place of business, and in multiple languages, to educate businesses on regulations and ensure they are operating in compliance.

This Administration's "**City of Yes for Economic Opportunity**" will similarly do away with outdated zoning rules preventing businesses from filling many vacant storefronts. It puts forward **18** sensible policy changes that would expand options for businesses to locate closer to their customers, support growing industries and

sectors, foster vibrant neighborhoods and commercial corridors, and provide businesses with simpler zoning rules for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We look forward to working with the Council and the Department of City Planning to see these reforms effectuated.

SBS remains committed to ensuring that small businesses thrive in every commercial corridor. Our historic programming over the past two years has supported thousands of businesses and we will continue to work with this committee to make New York City the best place to open, operate, and grow a storefront business.

Thank you and we look forward to answering any questions you may have for us.



Testimony of the NYC BID Association  
Before the Committee on Small Business  
Oversight - Vital Corridors: Storefront Vacancy Rates and Trends  
April 17, 2024

Good morning, Chair Feliz, and members of the NYC Council Committee on Small Business. I am presenting to you this morning on behalf of the NYC BID Association, which represents all 76 of the city's Business Improvement Districts. The constituents of the BIDs annually invest \$145 million in private assessment funds to create the tableau necessary for our retail corridors to thrive. On a daily basis, BIDs are your frontline workers dedicated to combating commercial vacancies in our neighborhoods by providing a clean and safe shopping environment with our supplemental security and sanitation programs. Our streetscape improvements, including plantings and street furniture provide ongoing and highly visible stewardship in our areas. Our marketing, special event and publicity programs help build the customer bases of our member businesses, all with the direct purpose of helping our members' cash registers ring. Moreover, our work with social service providers and city agencies aid the many in need who are part of our communities.

We deeply appreciate the guidance, camaraderie and meaningful support provided by the wonderful team at SBS. Their Neighborhood Development staff are here with us every step of the way, and we constantly utilize their business support staff to aid our businesses in navigating licenses, permits and understanding city regulations.

Many members of our Association convened to develop our testimony before you today, We appreciate the positive steps that have already been taken by City government to better understand and address the concerns of brick & mortar businesses, including creating the vacancy database, the One-Stop Shop NYC Business Portal; E.O. 2 which curbs burdensome fines, and creation of the Small Business Advisory Commission and the Mayor's Retail Theft Task Force, both of which I have the honor of serving on.

We are pleased that many of our commercial corridors, both in the CBD and throughout the boroughs, are filling up again, and pedestrian numbers and sales figures are rising. Indeed, the research department of JLL has noted in their Q1 2024 report that Madison Avenue, the neighborhood I represent, has the lowest storefront availability rate on record. Credit for the resiliency of shopping corridors throughout the city can be attributed to a host of factors, depending upon the neighborhood, including: efforts of the NYPD to combat retail theft; the sale of building and the consequent release of some property owners from their mortgagors' requirements regarding minimum rents; re-engagement by retailers that temporarily suspended their investment in bricks & mortar during the heart of the pandemic; and, without being immodest, the concerted effort by the BIDs to support our communities.

We recognize how important thriving retail corridors are for the quality of life of all New Yorkers. Our Main Streets and the stores, restaurants and salons that populate them are the true town squares of our communities, and it is one of the joys of city living to go out and shop. Our retail corridors provide

critical jobs to New Yorkers of all backgrounds and skill levels, and the sales and real estate taxes that are generated by businesses and property owners of our districts fund every program and service provided by City government. Indeed, even when a store is empty, the City's Department of Finance estimates what the property owner would generate if the store were occupied so that the city can still count on property taxes even when a building is not generating commercial income.

The leaders of NYC BIDs wanted to note the factors contributing to retail vacancy differ depending upon the neighborhood or corridor. For example, some corridors may be dependent upon office workers to be back in force, while others may be deeply affected by changes in transportation access; competition at the curb caused by delivery & service vehicles, street vendors not following time, place & manner rules; or ongoing infrastructure projects. Quality & adaptability of older building stock; the growth of competing commercial destinations that sap away interest in other existing retail corridors; the expense of providing venting, backflow protectors and creating gas connections to convert retail to food service-related use are also frequently cited issues.

We cannot emphasize enough how creating a safe environment for shoppers and for retail workers is essential for stores to thrive. Shoplifting and grab & go break-ins deter shoppers, threaten workers, and cause losses that are not made up by insurance. Public disorder, such as public drug use, deter local and tourist shoppers alike. We commend and support Chair Feliz's legislation to aid small businesses in purchasing anti-theft technologies, and we suggest that applications to this program be coordinated with the Crime Prevention Officers stationed at each police precinct.

Illegal cannabis shops have sprouted throughout our corridors. As noted by the director of the Bed-Stuy Gateway BID, not only have these entities generated crime, but they have also repelled existing and prospective businesses from opening beside them. We appreciate the work led by Council Member Shulman to help end the leases of these harmful locations, and legislation proposed by Council Members Powers to use nuisance laws to shut down these illegal operations should be a strong help.

Many of our members commented that there needs to be greater flexibility regarding how & which kinds of businesses utilize the space in our corridors, and that the zoning changes presented by the Department of City Planning in City of Yes for Economic Opportunity will allow new types of businesses to locate in our corridors, and ease some regulatory burdens, such as parking requirements.

In the last year, small businesses have had to navigate new rules and regulations, such as changes to the setout rules for commercial waste. We respectfully request that any new regulations enacted by the Council affecting "Main Street" businesses be as narrowly drawn as possible, and have adequate enforcement mechanisms (so businesses don't feel they are being foolish to follow the rule when their neighbors are not). Like the expanded CAPA rulemaking process that city agencies must go through, we ask that an impact analysis of the costs that businesses must incur to follow any new Council-generated legislation be conducted prior to going before the full Council for a vote.

We would like to conclude our testimony by thanking the many Council Members that have BIDs in their respective districts, and thus serve on our respective Boards of Directors. We deeply value your contributions to making our organizations and the neighborhoods we serve remain strong and resilient.

Thank you for considering our testimony, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

## **Rockaway Development & Revitalization Corporation, Inc.**

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**April 17, 20`24**

**Re:** T2024-1721- Oversight - Vital Corridors: Storefront Vacancy Rates and Trends

Good morning, Chair Feliz and members of the Committee on Small Business, and special acknowledgment to my City Council Member, Selvena Brooks-Powers of the 31<sup>st</sup> Council District.

My name is Kevin Alexander, and I am the President of Rockaway Development & Revitalization Corporation located in the heart of the Downtown Far Rockaway Commercial-Retail Corridor. I have served in this capacity for 17+ years and have witness the highs and lows of the DFR commercial corridor. As the LDC, one of our services includes assisting small businesses and commercial property owners access grants, resources, and opportunities to at a minimum sustain their businesses, and at best grow their businesses through professional development, district marketing, and placemaking activities to bring more pedestrian foot traffic and spending into the district.

What we have observed through our Downtown Far Rockaway Vacancy Report that we do track quarterly, is that the smaller storefront businesses are turning over at an extremely high rate, that does give the full story of the amount of turnover within the three-month period between our Vacancy Report of 12% for the period ending March 31<sup>st</sup>. We are experiencing the growth of a number of illegal weed shops that have no qualms about being “open for business”, and who can afford to pay up \$5,000 per month for rent on short-term leases as a number of smaller landlords look to “cash out” on the DFR Project, putting tremendous financial pressure on many of our longtime storefront business to stay in business. Storefront businesses are also faced with the dilemma of redevelopment – the looming threat of larger businesses that larger developments can attract into their commercial spaces – and little opportunity to expand into those newer, structurally sound, and highly visible spaces with a built-in consumer that they cannot either afford due to the build-out costs or cannot meet the minimum space requirements.....And it continues, with over \$139M invested in infrastructure and streetscapes improvements, there is no revenue base via a BID currently in place to pay for essential cleaning services to maintain amenities such as sidewalk tree pits, planters, and furnishings as well as sidewalks and common areas. I do readily acknowledge the support of the Council in making funds available in the City council budget, but it is not enough to cover the needed daily cost, and with the business owners already struggling to keep their doors open, and a number of property owners unwilling to sign-off on a proposed BID, DFR is at risk of even greater vacancy fluctuations without relief to storefront businesses and the LMI, BIPOC neighborhood they cater to.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kevin W. Alexander, MPA  
President & CEO

April 17, 2024

Re: The Legal Aid Society's Testimony on Vital Corridors:  
Storefront Vacancy Rates and Trends, presented before  
New York City Council's Committee on Small Business

Alan Levine  
*President*

Twyla Carter  
*Attorney-in-Chief  
Chief Executive Officer*

Adriene L. Holder  
*Chief Attorney  
Civil Practice*

Jason Wu  
*Attorney-in-Charge  
Harlem Community Law Office*

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on Storefront Vacancies. My name is Taylor James, and I am staff attorney at The Legal Aid Society's Community Development Project, a unit that addresses some of the most urgent problems facing New York City's small businesses, including the threat of displacement. We work with grassroots organizations to help make sure that people of color, immigrants, and other low-income residents that have helped build our city are not displaced.

### Who We Are

The Legal Aid Society (LAS), the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, was founded in 1876 to provide free legal representation to marginalized New Yorkers. The Legal Aid Society operates three major practices – Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Rights – and through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices provides comprehensive free legal services in all five boroughs of New York City. With a caseload of nearly 200,000 cases and legal matters for clients, The Legal Aid Society takes on more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States.

Our Civil Practice works to improve the lives of low-income New Yorkers by helping vulnerable families and individuals to obtain and maintain the necessities of life- housing, health care, food, and self-sufficiency. We serve as a "one-stop" legal resource for clients with a broad variety of legal problems, ranging, among others, from government benefits and access to health care, to immigration and domestic violence. Our depth and breadth of experience is unmatched and gives LAS a unique capacity to go beyond any one individual case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals, and broader, more powerful systemic change at a societal level.

The Community Development Project (CDP) provides targeted support to small business owners and nonprofit organizations to help our clients achieve long-term success, thereby promoting economic and social stability in their communities. We provide advice on selecting the right legal structure, writing corporate bylaws, and additional services related to establishing and growing their businesses. In addition, we protect small businesses from the threat of displacement and support strong lasting protections for commercial tenants.

**Justice in Every Borough.**

## **Displacement of Small Businesses Is Harmful to Entire Communities**

Through our representation of commercial tenants, meetings with community organizers and supporting small businesses, unregulated rents continue to be a common concern when discussing commercial displacement. For entrepreneurs displaced by excessive rent increases, finding a new brick and mortar location for their business venture is a huge challenge. We routinely hear from commercial tenants that are at risk of displacement. It is important to note that these “mom and pop” businesses have the most profound effect on the character and social fabric of the neighborhoods experiencing this phenomenon.

*For example, one of our clients, a Washington Heights restaurant owner of 40-years, was given an eviction notice along with seven other Latinx-owned businesses. The businesses’ owners were each given the option of paying higher rent — for the restaurant that essentially doubled the current rate of \$5,000 a month. Our client could not afford that option. Since there is no law preventing a landlord from doubling the rent, a long-term tenant has no protections to ensure stability. In the process, much is lost. An eviction meant our client was not only losing their restaurant but their life savings that were invested to open their business. They were also losing the opportunity to provide employment for themselves, for their family and for other members of the community. This is also a loss for the community because POC- and immigrant-owned small businesses offer everyday goods, services and amenities that had been denied to Black and Latinx neighborhoods during decades of commercial redlining. They provide a neighborhood’s unique character and cultural identity, with products and services geared to the needs and desires of residents. In this case an entire block of Latinx, including long-term business owners were displaced. A high vacancy rate, especially when it persists over years, can indicate underlying neighborhood-level concerns, such as high rents, which can force businesses to close.<sup>1</sup>*

Our legal services directly prevent vacancies, we assisted six immigrant-owned businesses impacted by a partial building collapse of a seven-story building in the Bronx, on December 11, 2023, when seven commercial storefront businesses were displaced.

*The CDP participated in a Business Recovery Meeting arranged by the NYC Department of Small Business Services Emergency Response Unit and NYC Council Member Pierina Sanchez, held at the office of the Council Member. The impacted businesses included a deli, restaurant, multi-service business, hair salon, and nail salon. All six businesses are immigrant-owned and four are also women-owned—all are monolingual Spanish speakers. We gave presentations and provided consultations on topics ranging from the landlord’s responsibility to restore the business owners to their commercial space, responsibility for*

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<sup>1</sup> Gina Lee, Sarah Internicola, Karen Yao “The State of Storefronts: Alarming Vacancy Rates and Rising Rents during the Pandemic” Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development, accessed website on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, <https://anhhd.org/report/state-of-storefronts>

*replacement of the commercial tenants' destroyed property, obligation to pay rent, termination of the lease. Tenants with insurance policies were advised on the best practices for filing and following up on claims with their insurance companies, and what steps to take if their claim was denied. Due to the uncertainty of when they would be able to return to their commercial space, several business owners were seeking to terminate their leases. Due to our services, the impacted business owners understood their rights, legal options, landlord's obligations and the next steps in the process.*

### **NYS Needs Commercial Rent Stabilization to Combat Storefront Vacancies**

When addressing storefront vacancies, The Legal Aid Society recommends that the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) should address landlord's unregulated power to increase rent and hold storefronts vacant. The rising cost of rent impacts commercial tenants across New York City. The communities that tend to be hardest hit are communities of color and communities facing rapid gentrification. Right now, there is no rent protection for commercial tenants outside their lease. No law prevents a landlord from raising rent by 400%.<sup>2</sup> We need commercial rent stabilization in order to curtail vacancies, to protect low-income and immigrant New Yorkers and to preserve culture and community in our neighborhoods.

Between 2007 and 2017, the commercial vacancy rate doubled across New York City, with many neighborhoods experiencing almost 20% vacancy rates. At the same time, retail rents rose an average of 22% citywide, with some neighborhoods seeing more than 50% rent increases on average. The vacant spaces you see are most likely empty because the landlord is holding out for rent much higher than a small business can pay, and the amount they want is an astronomical increase from the last rent a tenant paid at the same location. Contrary to the claim that rampant organized shoplifting is cutting into retailer profits, and thereby driving storefront vacancies, this has been retracted by the National Retail Federation.<sup>3</sup> Many small rental buildings have changed hands in the last two decades, moving from smaller landlords to larger portfolios. Small and nonprofit landlords often charge more affordable rent increases to keep existing tenants in their space. The larger owners can and do wait for higher paying tenants.<sup>4</sup>

Due to the issues discussed above, Black and Brown-owned businesses in gentrifying areas are still at risk of displacement due to the cost of rent and storefront vacancies. When they cannot afford to renew or enter into a lease—these neighborhoods transform, physically and culturally. People of

<sup>2</sup> See A. Randle, *Is a 400% Rent Increase the Future of Coney Island?* N.Y. Times (Jan. 15, 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/15/nyregion/coney-island-rent-hike.html>.

<sup>3</sup> *Retail Group Retracts Startling Claim About 'Organized' Shoplifting* N.Y. Times (Dec. 8, 2023) [Retail Group Retracts Startling Claim About 'Organized' Shoplifting - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/08/nyregion/retail-group-retracts-claim-about-organized-shoplifting.html)

<sup>4</sup> NYC Planning, *ASSESSING STOREFRONT VACANCY IN NYC: 24 Neighborhood Case Studies* (Aug. 2019), <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/planning-level/housing-economy/assessing-storefront-vacancy-nyc.pdf> (“Some owners kept spaces vacant while seeking high rents;” “soaring rents contributed to higher vacancy”).



color-owned businesses that have kept neighborhoods afloat deserve protection and predictability when it comes to their rental cost and available storefronts.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for reviewing our testimony and for the opportunity to comment on this important issue. Keeping New York City storefront business alive means not only running a successful business but combating displacement threats on multiple fronts. The City can bring formality and regulation to the commercial tenant-landlord relationship, hold landlords accountable, and ultimately, combat displacement in New York City neighborhoods. The Legal Aid Society encourages the Council to provide resources to small businesses and take a more direct role in supporting smaller retailers. The City should conduct an investigation into other ways it can support commercial tenants including, but not limited to, funding free legal services programs for commercial lease negotiation, tax breaks, grant funding, and other financial incentives. These protections against displacement will ensure the survival of small businesses, and in turn ensure the vitality and vibrancy of New York's neighborhoods.

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For more information, please contact The Legal Aid Society's Community Development Project at 212-298-3340, [CommunityDevProject@legal-aid.org](mailto:CommunityDevProject@legal-aid.org) or you can reach Taylor James, senior staff attorney, at 347-991-1729, [tdjames@legal-aid.org](mailto:tdjames@legal-aid.org).



Committee on Small Business  
Wednesday, April 17, 2024

Good Morning, Chairperson Feliz and members of the Committee on Small Business. My name is Tom Harris, and I am the President of the Times Square Alliance, the business improvement district that exists to make Times Square clean, safe, and desirable for all. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in response to the Committee's Oversight Hearing on Storefront Vacancy.



Storefront vacancy in Times Square increased acutely during the pandemic. As the city's locus of tourism and Broadway, much of our customer base disappeared in 2020, having a devastating effect on our retail businesses. I am happy to report that over the past three years, with the steady return of visitors, theatergoers, and office employees, retail leasing has proven robust, and our current availability rate has declined to a post-pandemic low of 12%.

Unfortunately, even with that encouraging vacancy rate, challenges remain. Storefronts along 42<sup>nd</sup> Street between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenues stand at 44% vacant, largely as a result of quality of life and crime problems on that block, some related to the city's decision to locate a large men's shelter in a vacant building on the block. Further, while the prime Times Square Bowtie area has attracted an array of successful businesses, particularly novel food and beverage establishments, Eighth Avenue has become overwhelmed with illegal cannabis shops. These businesses negatively impact our retail corridors, attract crime (at least one has been robbed, there have been two homicides, and a person was shot in front of another,) and hamper our ability to attract legitimate businesses. Our real estate stakeholders report that operators of these businesses offer twice the asking rate to convince reluctant landlords to lease to them, further crowding out the opportunity to attract legitimate businesses. Times Square has also experienced ongoing problems in stores and restaurants with mentally disturbed individuals bothering customers, and on some occasions, threatening staff. A Starbucks's Coffee location on Eighth Avenue ultimately closed because they could not assure the safety of their team.

Several years ago, predictions of the decline of the retail economy were common, with the internet said to be the "store killer." This has not proven to be the case in Midtown Manhattan- leasing is recovering and strengthening. The key barriers to a healthy, thriving storefront economy are not lack of demand or greedy landlords holding space vacant. If the Council wants to help our storefront businesses, the best way to do so would be to enforce against and shut down illegal cannabis businesses, support the Governor and the District Attorney in combatting organized retail theft, and enact robust services and diversion programs for the mentally ill on our streets.

Tom Harris  
President  
Times Square Alliance

Workforce 1 needs Veteran's representatives that are veterans. In the year 2000, when I first left active duty all the Veteran Representatives, serving the New York City employment offices, were actual military veterans. I remember them being older than me and Vietnam era veterans. They guided me, not just with employment advice, but with mentoring as I adjusted to the civilian world. Fast forward to the year 2024 and now the majority of Veteran Representatives have never served one day in the military and appear to be unqualified to give proper advice to veterans seeking employment.

This contradiction creates unnecessary barriers to employment because these non-veterans tend to stereotype veterans into lower paying jobs. The new Veteran's representatives have exceptionally low opinions of us and do not appreciate the kind of experience that we bring to the workforce. I have experienced this recently at all five Workforce 1 centers (Manhattan, Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island). The new generation Veteran Representatives can say "Thank you for your service" but they do not know how to serve us.

I am requesting that the City Council consider legislation requiring all Veteran Representatives, at all Workforce 1 sites, be actual military veterans. This legislation will enforce any State or federal regulations supporting reemploying discharged Veterans and reduce unemployment and our veteran population's dependence on social services.

Sincerely,

Ibrahim Xavier Johnson

Co-Founder of Vet Net of Harlem

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. N/A Res. No. N/A  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/17/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Calvin T. Brown  
Address: 1 Liberty Plaza  
I represent: NYC Small Business Services  
Address: 1 Liberty Plaza

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. N/A Res. No. N/A  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/17/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tian Weinberg  
Address: 1 Liberty Plaza  
I represent: NYC Small Business Services  
Address: 1 Liberty Plaza

**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: Matt BAUER  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
I represent: NYC BID ASSOCIATION  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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: Taylor James

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: The Legal Aid Society Community Development Project

Address: 49 Thomas Street NY NY 10013

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: 9/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leon Johnson

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: SIR

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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