

REMARKS OF

COMMISSIONER CECILE NOEL  
MAYOR'S OFFICE TO END DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY  
on

**"Support Survivors"**  
June 14, 2022

Good morning, Chair Cabán and Members of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity. I am Cecile Noel, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV). I am joined by Deputy Commissioner Hannah Pennington. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about access to services for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence (DV/GBV) in New York City.

ENDGBV partners with numerous City agencies and over 100 non-profit providers and community stakeholders to implement innovative initiatives – like the NYC Family Justice Centers. Our agency directly manages a contract portfolio of prevention and intervention programming, builds capacity for agency staff and community members to identify and respond to DV/GBV through outreach and training, and develops policies and best practices to strengthen the City's approaches to these issues. We collaborate with City agencies and community stakeholders to reduce barriers and ensure access to inclusive services for survivors

of DV/GBV, including intimate partner and family violence, sexual violence, stalking, human trafficking, and other forms of GBV.

### ***NYCHope***

ENDGBV is committed to ensuring survivors have knowledge and access to the many city and community-based services NYC has to offer. In 2018, ENDGBV launched NYCHope - a web-based portal that provides educational materials and comprehensive information on services available to survivors. In developing NYCHope, ENDGBV partnered with Cornell Tech to ensure the development of an accessible platform that also protects survivor privacy and security. During development, ENDGBV consulted with domestic and gender-based violence services providers, New York City agencies and survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. Survivors also participated in user testing to evaluate the platforms' accessibility and utility.

NYCHope includes a resource directory that allows users to search for community-based service providers in all five boroughs. The site currently lists 121 programs that serve survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. Users can filter providers by borough, service type, population served, language – including American Sign Language, wheelchair accessibility, or remote or in-person services to find a program that best meets their needs. Currently, the site

uses Google translate to convert text to languages other than English. We are in the process of humanly translating NYCHope into designated citywide languages.

ENDGBV partners with New York City Department of Information Technology & Telecommunications (DoITT) to maintain and update NYCHope, including quarterly communication with service providers to review and update organizational information on NYCHope. In 2020, as a component of the City's COVID-19 Response Work Group on Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, ENDGBV worked with community-based organizations to update the resource directory. Updates included increasing the number of services listed, creating a remote service directory, and providing direct links to hotlines and text and chat services maintained by providers. During the development and implementation of these changes, survivors participated in user testing to ensure NYCHope continued to meet their needs. Currently, providers can notify ENDGBV of any service or information changes, or request to be added to the site. In the coming months, we plan to incorporate a link on NYCHope that will allow providers to easily notify ENDGBV of new or expanded services

ENDGBV's Outreach Team, Family Justice Center staff, and partners work to spread public awareness about NYCHope. In 2020, during the height of the pandemic, ENDGBV coordinated a widespread publicity campaign to elevate NYCHope. This campaign included Notify NYC text messages through the Office

of Emergency Management, a public service announcement, paid online advertising, and a social media toolkit. ENDGV continues to partner with agencies and community-based organizations to publicize NYCHope. For example, ENDGBV is ensuring NYCHope is incorporated into new office initiatives such as our recently launched HUD grant in which ENDGBV and HRA are integrating the unique needs of domestic and gender-based violence survivors into the City's coordinated entry system. In the City, coordinated entry uses the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS) to streamline the way people move from homelessness into housing. Later this month, anyone seeking housing through CAPS who identifies as a survivor of domestic or gender-based violence will be referred to NYCHope for domestic and gender-based violence-related support and services.

Regarding Intro 154, we believe that NYCHope meets the criteria for an online portal as described in the legislation, and we look forward to discussing this legislation with Council to ensure our goals are aligned with the needs of survivors.

### **Financial Assistance for Survivors**

ENDGBV is committed to identifying strategies and implementing programming that financially supports survivors and recognizes the great value in

low barrier and flexible funding initiatives for survivors and their families. In June 2020, to address the increase in emergency needs for survivors during COVID, ENDGBV launched the City's first financial relief program for survivors.

ENDGBV's program incorporated best practices from other successful flexible funding models across the country and built upon existing City investments for domestic and gender-based violence survivors. The program goal was to serve 312 families with an average disbursement of \$1,500.00 per client. However, shortly after launch the program received an overwhelming number of requests --- 693 -- and were able to fund 377 clients with grants that averaged \$1,243.37, exceeding program goals. The program disbursed a total of \$468,750.00.

In addition to directly funding emergency relief, the City is playing an active role in connecting survivors to federal funding and vouchers. This year, ENDGBV convened regular calls and collaborated with the 35 community-based service providers who received federal Pandemic Emergency Assistance Funds (PEAF) allocations through the New York State Office to Prevent Domestic Violence (OPDV). This collaboration included raising implementation questions to OPDV and expediting responses to service providers, creating a platform for providers to learn from each other to expedite disbursement of funding, and linking programs to maximize the number of survivors served. Service providers disbursed both small and large amount of financial assistance to survivors for expenses such as

furniture, moving costs, rental arrears, and basic living expenses like clothing and food.

ENDGBV is also the designated City agency for Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) for survivors in community who are fleeing domestic and gender-based violence. ENDGBV was allocated 1,168 of the City's EHV voucher allotment and launched its EHV program in July 2021, creating the first opportunity for survivors to access emergency housing vouchers without having to provide criminal justice supporting documentation in more than a decade. Our agency provides intensive and ongoing support to our large community of service providers to onboard them to the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS) and help them navigate the EHV application process. In partnership with New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), ENDGBV is contracting with New Destiny Housing Corporation to fund housing navigators who can support survivors who have received EHV vouchers in their search for affordable housing and the leasing process.

We support the goals of Int.153 and look forward to discussing a version of the bill that aligns with our existing work in this area.

**Resolution No. 111**

As to Resolution No. 111, we recognize that many survivors and their families require extended periods of time to address and heal from domestic violence. The City recognized this by working with the Council to pass the City's Earned Safe and Sick Time Act in 2017 and we support state action to further support survivors.

ENDGBV is committed to continuing to explore ways that we can support survivors, provide low-barrier financial relief, and spread awareness about available services. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with Council and identify shared goals.

We look forward to continued collaboration with our City agency colleagues, our community partners and other stakeholders to better serve survivors. Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today. I welcome any questions that you may have.



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
**Jumaane D. Williams**

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**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS  
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON  
WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY  
JUNE 14, 2022**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Cabán for holding this hearing and the opportunity for me to share testimony. In addition, I would like to thank the members of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity.

For over two decades, the City of New York has sought to coordinate its response to domestic violence. The first office created was under the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence and now the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence.

Like in so many areas of life, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed systematic gaps in our response. In 2021, nearly 94,000 calls were made to the city's domestic violence hotline.<sup>1</sup> The amount of calls this hotline received is very alarming and we have an obligation to each and every one of these callers.

The three bills for discussion today work in tandem to reiterate the City of New York's commitment through action, by providing culturally competent and comprehensive support to survivors of domestic, intimate partner, and gender-based violence.

I have worked with this body for over a decade to address the housing crisis in this city.<sup>2,3</sup> We know the cost of housing in New York is an impediment to many seeking stability and opportunities to pursue their goals and dreams. For survivors of domestic violence seeking to leave abusive households, the lack of safe, affordable housing can often be an "insurmountable barrier".<sup>4</sup> It is within our capacity to fix this crisis within a crisis.

Intro. 0153 provides low barrier grants to survivors for urgent expenses and domestic violence-related services. We would reaffirm survivors' autonomy with these grants. 94% of intimate partner violence survivors report experiencing some form of economic abuse, including economic control.<sup>5</sup> Your passage

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<sup>1</sup> Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence. *ENDGBV 2021 Fact Sheet*, (2021). <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/Annual-Fact-Sheet-2021.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> N.Y.C. Loc. Law Int. 0659 (as introduced Aug. 17, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> N.Y.C. Res. 0410 (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Amber Clough, et al. "Having Housing Made Everything Else Possible": *Affordable, Safe and Stable Housing for Women Survivors of Violence*, *Qualitative Social Work*, vol. 13, no.5, pp. 671-688 (2014), doi:10.1177/1473325013503003

<sup>5</sup> Judy L. Postmus, et al. *Understanding economic abuse in the lives of survivors*, *J. OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE*, vol. 27, no.3, pp. 411-30, (2012). doi: doi:10.1177/0886260511421669.



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

## Jumaane D. Williams

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of this act would tell survivors that the City of New York trusts their decision making and discretion. Your passage would rebuke the spiritual and psychological denigration that arises from economic control.

We know maintaining stable housing encompasses more than paying rent. This bill recognizes that fact. Survivors can use their grants to pay phone bills, utilities and moving costs, in addition to direct rent payments. This type of program works. Similar survivor-driven flexible grants have been successfully implemented in Washington State, California, and Washington D.C.<sup>6</sup> I believe New York City must be next.

At the same time, Intro. 0153 will place New York City at the forefront of addressing gender-based violence. No survivor will be deemed ineligible based on their credit history, criminal history, or immigration status. In addition, survivors with incomes up to 300% of federal poverty guidelines will be eligible for grants. I look forward to when our program is cited as a national model for inclusive, survivor-driven support.

Our approach must be dynamic and continuous, because support neither begins nor ends when a survivor leaves an abusive household. The creation of NYC Hope in 2018 was a promising first step in providing survivors with a comprehensive review of city-based resources.

Intro. 0154 would enhance survivors' access. It would require the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence to create an online portal and written resource guide of services available to survivors of domestic, gender-based and intimate partner violence.

We have an obligation to ensure that survivors receive resources which are culturally appropriate and accessible. We meet this obligation through this bill. Services will be organized by category, languages in which services are provided, and eligibility requirements. This framework integrates service and government organizations, ensuring survivors are able to efficiently and confidentially seek help.

At the same time, resource providers and government agencies would be provided a central, comprehensive guide to help achieve positive outcomes for clients and survivors. Intro 0154 ensures that no matter where a survivor turns for assistance in this city, they will be given a complete understanding of resources available to them.

Our collective responsibility to survivors does not end at the city's edge. In 2017, this body took decisive action in extending paid leave protections for survivors of domestic violence through the Earned Safe and Sick Time Act.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Flexible Funding for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survivors: Frequently Asked Questions*, NAT'L ALL. FOR SAFE HOUSING, (2019). <https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/SafeHousingPartnerships-FlexFundingFAQ-Jan2019.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> N.Y.C. Loc. Law No. 199 (2017).



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# Jumaane D. Williams

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Five years and a pandemic later, it is time for the state to do the same. Resolution 0111 calls upon New York State to “pass legislation that would provide domestic violence survivors and their families with job-protected, paid leave”.<sup>8</sup> Our failure as a state to have these protections fails survivors. 83% of survivors of intimate partner violence report disruption to their ability to work<sup>9</sup>. Protected paid leave will help restore survivors’ physical, mental, and economic wellbeing.

We have a duty to support and affirm survivors of domestic, gender-based, and intimate partner violence. While New York has made great strides, survivors are still forced to surmount barriers and transcend gaps the city could help ameliorate. These bills create clear guidelines for organizations, center survivors’ backgrounds and journeys, and reflect the diverse array of needs that this city and its organizations have the capacity to address. We can create a system of support that reiterates this city’s full unshakeable commitment to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. I look forward to their passage.

Thank you.

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<sup>8</sup> N.Y.C. Res. 0111 (as introduced Apr. 14, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Cynthia Hess & Alona Del Rosario, *Dreams Deferred: A Survey on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Survivors’ Education, Careers, and Economic Security*, INST. FOR WOMEN’S POL’Y RSCH., (2018).  
[https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/C475\\_IWPR-Report-Dreams-Deferred.pdf](https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/C475_IWPR-Report-Dreams-Deferred.pdf).

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moving victims of violence from crisis to confidence

Testimony of  
Michael Polenberg, Vice President, Government Affairs  
Safe Horizon

On Intro. 153, Intro. 154 & Resolution 111

Committee on Women & Gender Equity  
Hon. Tiffany Caban, Chair

New York City Council

6.14.2022

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Michael Polenber, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victim services organization. Safe Horizon offers a client-centered, trauma-informed response to 250,000 New Yorkers each year who have experienced violence or abuse. We are increasingly using a lens of racial equity and justice to guide our work with clients, with each other, and in developing the positions we hold.

Whether we are called on to provide expert testimony at an oversight hearing or to assist a constituent in crisis and in need of emergency services, we are proud to partner with the City Council in a collective effort to make our city safer for all. We look forward to helping you and your staff learn how best to support survivors and connect them to the resources available in your borough and community.

Our testimony today will focus on Intros. 153 and 154, part of the "Support Survivors" legislative package sponsored by Chairperson Caban. We are grateful for the Chair's interest in strengthening the support network for survivors, and we look forward to working with Committee in the coming months and years to remove barriers to safety and healing for New Yorkers impacted by domestic violence and other crimes.

#### Intro. 153

Intro. 153 would create a "domestic violence survivor housing stability program" by enabling at least five community-based organizations to offer "low-barrier grants" to survivors in need of legal services, counseling, and other services. The intent of the grants is to help survivors maintain housing and avoid homelessness. The Administration would issue periodic reports documenting the efficacy of this program.

Safe Horizon is a proponent of offering low-barrier grants to survivors to cover expenses that might otherwise create barriers to safety. In our set of recommendations that we developed last year for the 2021 Mayoral candidates, we wrote that the next Administration should "commit to funding flexible microgrants for survivors' needs. Too often, the survivors and young people that come to our programs for help need small amounts of money for immediate needs – clothing for a job interview, a bus ticket to a safe location, a phone bill to help stay connected to social supports. These small expenses are often the one thing standing in the way of safety. The next Mayor should create a fund – outside of the criminal justice system – for low-barrier direct microgrants that prioritizes choice, flexibility and timeliness."

While we support the overall goal of Intro. 153, we do have some questions about how to manage this endeavor, including:

- What, if any, impact would these grants have on public benefits that survivors may be receiving?
- Would there be any cap as to how much a person/family could receive, or on the number of grants someone could receive?
- Will the designated community-based organizations work together to develop the program to ensure consistency?
- Will the data requested for reporting create a barrier to survivors seeking support?
- Can the grants also be extended to victims of sexual assault?

We look forward to working with the Chair and the Committee to help ensure that the housing stability program can best meet the needs of survivors of domestic and gender-based violence.

#### Intro. 154

Intro. 154 would require the Mayor's Office of Domestic & Gender Based Violence (ENDGBV) to create an "on-line services portal and guide."

Safe Horizon agrees that survivors should have one central portal where they access the full range of services – shelter, counseling, legal services, safety planning, and other options – that can help them seek safety and healing. Currently, both ENDGBV and the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) operate on-line portals to help victims of domestic violence and other crimes find services. Perhaps instead of creating a third portal, the Committee can work with ENDGBV and MOCJ to consolidate their data and develop a single option for survivors.

Additionally, the Committee may choose to work with the Administration to create a far-ranging public awareness campaign, in multiple languages, that can help ensure that survivors across the five boroughs know how to access the portal and learn what services and programs can be accessed.

#### Funding

Finally, Safe Horizon is grateful to the City Council for once again recognizing the impact of our services and investing in our response to victims of violence and abuse in the FY23 budget. We urge the Council to continue this investment in our Child Advocacy Centers, DOVE Initiative and our Streetwork Project for homeless youth in the post-budget designations. We are proud of the client-centered, trauma-informed response that we offer to survivors each day, and hope to be able to continue this important work in the months ahead. Thank you in advance for your continued support.

We thank the Committee for considering our questions and suggestions for these bills, and look forward to working with you and the full City Council to help ensure that every survivor can access the services they need to chart a path to safety. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

**TESTIMONY OF SHAINA WEISBROT, EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS LEGAL  
FELLOW AT DAY ONE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL, COMMITTEE ON WOMEN  
AND GENDER EQUITY, REMOTE HEARING ON SUPPORT SURVIVORS  
PACKAGE Held on June 14, 2022**

Thank you, Council Members, for holding this virtual hearing about the “Support Survivors” Legislative Package. We would like to thank Chairperson Tiffany Cabán for introducing legislation with services that protect and support domestic violence survivors.

Day One is the only nonprofit in New York that commits its full resources to addressing intimate partner abuse among youth ages 24 and under. Through a combination of educational, social, and legal services we educate and assist more than 25,000 young people annually. The need for Day One’s services are essential - nationally, women aged 16-24 experience the highest per capita rate of intimate partner violence, triple the national average.<sup>1</sup>

Yet despite its prevalence, the young survivors face a myriad of obstacles in accessing services and support. These challenges have only become more pronounced during the COVID-19 crisis. This legislative package will address some of these challenges, however, we would like to acknowledge where there continue to be gaps in services for this unique population of survivors.

At Day One, we witness the ways young survivors' experiences are regularly erased when services are not designed with young people in mind. To ensure their needs are considered throughout the development of this legislation, we encourage the City Council to explicitly include young people as recipients eligible for these services. Day One also defines domestic violence as inclusive of interpersonal partner violence,

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<sup>1</sup> Breiding, M.J., Chen J., & Black, M.C. (2014). Intimate Partner Violence in the United States — 2010. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

dating violence, and sexual violence as we know that young people are not always captured or considered domestic violence victims. For this reason, it is critical that the City Council explicitly considers the needs of young people in its “Support Survivors” legislative proposal and clearly defines domestic violence in an expansive and inclusive way. For example, Day One wants to ensure that legislation is responsive to the needs of young people of color, pregnant and parenting teens, undocumented youth, youth-in-care, students, and young survivors working multiple low-wage jobs. We believe that investing resources towards young survivors creates new opportunities to limit domestic violence in the future and the foundation for healthy relationships. Young people are future community leaders and transforming the lives of youth helps promote stronger and safer communities.

Day One supports all parts of the “Support Services” legislative package and believes it will offer innovative assistance and pathways to safety that the young people we serve have not yet received.

**1. Int 0153-2022: Establishing a Domestic Violence Survivor Housing Stability Program with a Low Barrier Grant**

Day One supports low barrier grants for survivors that are in need of housing stability. Young survivors of domestic violence are often in need of emergency financial assistance that this low-barrier grant provides; a no-strings-attached opportunity for stability that is often impossible to find. Since young people can be excluded from discussions about survivor programs and unable to access related support, we hope that youth, students, and pregnant and parenting young adults will be explicitly included in City Council’s definition of a “covered individual” to ensure they can access the low-barrier grants as proposed.

In addition, many of our young clients do not maintain independent housing as they still live with their family. Further, these young survivors of domestic violence who are under the age of 18 may live in a household that deems them income ineligible. The bill defines income eligibility based on gross household income, which could exclude survivors who live in a household that exceeds the threshold income. Based on this formula, survivors in this situation would not be able to access the assistance that would allow them to obtain safe housing at another location.

Yet, survivors with stable housing still experience economic hardships that result from their abuse and would greatly benefit from emergency funds for the relevant expenses listed. Emergency financial assistance both in and out of the context of housing would help young survivors maintain their safety, child care, employment, and foster financial independence from their abuser.

Young survivors of abuse may have difficulty receiving grant disbursements in conventional ways. Some survivors have difficulty receiving funds electronically if their phones and/or bank accounts are being monitored by an abuser or financial difficulties interfere with their phone service. Also, some young survivors and undocumented clients may not have bank accounts that allow for electronic transfers. Alternatively, other survivors may not have a safe address where a physical check could be sent. Therefore, disbursement of funds should be provided in a variety of ways to support the unique needs of each survivor.

Further, the logistics of this program should maximize survivor accessibility. To ensure youth access to these funds, it is essential that youth-serving organizations should be included as designees by the office. We are concerned that limiting these important resources to a small, select number of organizations risks creating a bottleneck and inaccessibility to youth. Consequently, including youth-serving organizations are critical

for this program as young people may not be connected to any other services in the community.

Similar to disbursement logistics, outreach and communication methods must cater to the diverse needs of survivors. Ongoing abuse prevents some survivors from accessing program support while it keeps other survivors from safely accessing the internet, thus requiring a variety of outreach methods to reach survivors in need of financial assistance. For youth in particular, not only is it important for youth-serving organizations to distribute this grant but outreach should also be targeted to platforms that young people are connected to so they are aware of the opportunity.

## **2. Int 0154-2022: Creating an online portal and a written resource guide of available services for domestic, gender-based and intimate partner violence.**

At Day One, we applaud efforts of the Mayor's office to ENDGBV to increase access to information for victims of domestic violence. From the advertisements on public transportation, to Family Justice Centers to the online resources available at [NYC Hope](#), we recognize that the city endeavors to connect survivors through various means. Should legislation seek to enhance the resources and access by way of an online portal or written resource guide, Day One suggests the following:

- Center the user experience of survivors, with particular attention to youth. Review language so that resources use plain language that promote youth accessibility. Whether through the use of search features, commonly used language by youth, we ask that the creation of resources include diverse user testing, including youth students, and pregnant or parenting teens.

- Dedicate funding so that the website and written materials are maintained and regularly updated for a user-friendly platform as well as efficiency with safety measures to protect a survivor's technology access.
  - Include the voices of young people or youth serving professionals to determine the efficacy of current efforts and the measures that can be used to tailor accessibility to young people and promote ongoing engagement.
  - Accompany any product launch with outreach that responds to the needs of young people including social media, other youth serving city agencies, schools and community-based organizations that interact with youth.
- 3. Res 0111-2022: Job-protected, paid leave for any activities relating to the actual or perceived status as a domestic violence survivor or family member of a domestic violence survivor**

New York City led the way for paid family leave for survivors of domestic violence to which we now support the City Council's call to New York state to follow suit.

Any statewide legislation should be mindful of the lived experiences of young survivors. For example, is it not uncommon for a young survivor to have multiple low-wage jobs, while balancing school, parenting, and the myriad of issues related to experiencing dating violence. From homelessness, pending litigation, interruptions with school to medical issues, we believe young survivors, statewide, would benefit from paid leave. Further, should efforts be made on the Statewide level, it should be accompanied with a communications and public awareness strategy to educate employers and the public about protections for survivors, destigmatizing the issue of domestic violence, warning signs of abuse, and the accessibility of resources. NY State should have the same employment leave for survivors as local law NYC passed years ago.



Barriers remain that survivors may face when accessing paid family leave. Many survivors may be afraid to reveal the abuse to their employer, for fear of discrimination or retaliation by their abuser. The frequency of electronic monitoring by many abusers may also prevent a survivor from applying for paid family leave, for fear their abuser may see email or text communications with their employer. Additionally, undocumented survivors who cannot work “on the books,” would be excluded from the assistance. Lastly, the proposal is silent on what documentation would qualify a survivor for paid family leave. Yet, we continue to support paid family leave for domestic violence survivors as it could help them obtain safety without losing their necessary income.

Thank you Councilmembers, for the opportunity to speak on these important issues affecting young people and victims of domestic violence.



**Testimony:** Rachel Braunstein, Director of Policy, Her Justice

**Hearing:** City Council Committee on Women and Gender Equity

**Date:** June 14, 2022

Thank you, Chair Cabán and the Committee on Women and Gender Equity – Council Member Gennaro, Council Member Gutiérrez, Council Member Richardson Jordan, Council Member Riley, and Council Member Stevens – for the opportunity to submit testimony on the critical matter of paid leave for domestic violence survivors. For 29 years, Her Justice has stood with women living in poverty in New York City by recruiting and mentoring volunteer lawyers to provide free legal help to address individual and systemic legal barriers in the areas of family, matrimonial and immigration law. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how Her Justice clients and women like them are the backbone of our communities, serving on the frontlines as essential workers and carrying the brunt of the pandemic’s economic burden. At the same time, they faced heightened rates of intimate partner violence and unemployment, and increased caregiving responsibilities. The solutions to some of our client’s most pressing and life-altering concerns – money to care for their children, safety from abuse and the right to work legally in the U.S. – are administered by a civil justice system that buckled during the pandemic. We are grateful for City Council and the Committee’s long-standing focus on these issues, and for support from the Council that allows Her Justice to provide direct representation to and skilled advocacy on behalf of women living in poverty.

### **Organizational Background**

Through our “pro bono first” model, Her Justice pairs thousands of well-trained and resourced pro bono attorneys from the City’s premiere law firms with women who have urgent legal needs. This approach has enabled us to assist tens of thousands of women over the years, far more than we could have reached relying exclusively on direct service. In 2021, Her Justice provided a range of legal help to more than 5,800 women and their children in the areas of family, matrimonial and immigration law. Among the clients we serve, 90% are women of color, 80% are survivors of domestic violence and more than half are immigrants. Over one-third of our clients do not speak English, which means they are effectively precluded from the legal system if language resources are not available.

By matching more women with lawyers by their side in a system historically designed to have poor people navigate it alone, we ensure their voices and concerns are heard and we begin to break down systemic barriers to access to justice. We pair our client services with policy and advocacy work to advance systemic reform, through independent efforts and in partnership with peer organizations and coalitions. Our policy work is informed by the lived experience of our clients – women living in poverty, whose livelihood and well-being are often determined by the civil justice system. That civil justice system is often invisible to those outside of it, which makes a focus on elevating the reforms to this area that much more essential for our clients and all who depend on it.



## **Paid Leave for Survivors Recognizes the Broad Consequences of Abuse**

We are grateful to the City Council and the Committee for your leadership in passing Res. No. 111 and calling on New York State to pass legislation that would provide domestic violence survivors and their families with job-protected, paid leave, similar to that of New York State's Paid Family Leave law, to be used for any activities relating to their actual or perceived status as a domestic violence survivor or for family members. Based on our experience representing thousands of survivors of domestic violence in civil court we strongly support Res. No. 111. As a matter of policy and law reform, we support this Resolution as we know that a strong and comprehensive legal framework supporting the rights of survivors is critical to their individual stability and to ameliorating systemic issues related to domestic violence. As we did in 2017 when the City was considering enacting paid safe leave, we want to bring attention to the need for a comprehensive State law that would allow survivors to seek a range of needed help, in particular, legal services and the relief available in civil court, along with social services, without detriment to their employment.

Civil legal services are critical for survivors of domestic violence. The effects of domestic violence in a survivor's life are pervasive. For many, fleeing domestic violence may lead to their first engagement with the legal system to directly address the violence they have suffered, by participating in the criminal justice system as a witness or seeking a civil court order of protection. It is less well-known that domestic violence survivors need to access the civil courts for other kinds of relief as well. Domestic violence survivors need child and spousal support orders from Family Court to become financially secure and remain free from abuse. They need orders of custody and, when it is safe for children, orders of visitation that minimize survivors' contact with the abuser. Married survivors need to protect their rights to a fair share of any assets accumulated in the marriage in a Supreme Court divorce litigation. Immigrant survivors need assistance with applications for legal status, along with applications for legal work authorization, which provide a pathway to stability for them and their families. (In the wake of changing federal policy and harmful rhetoric in recent years that have stoked fears among immigrant survivors who need civil legal assistance, Her Justice has redoubled our efforts to provide individual services and advocacy to ensure that our clients and others have safe access to civil justice.)

Legal services are essential, but not sufficient. While our services are free, our clients cannot attain safety or meaningfully participate in their cases if they do not have a job or sufficient income. Domestic violence survivors often face challenges in maintaining employment at the very point in life they and their families most need stable income. This is especially true for immigrant survivors of domestic violence, who often contribute substantially to the economy – indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the many immigrants working at the frontlines as “essential workers” – but suffer poor work conditions and low wages without adequate legal protections around their employment and a swift pathway to legal work authorization.



As Her Justice and our pro bono partners fight for our clients' rights in Family Court and Supreme Court, our clients are often fighting to keep their jobs or dealing with the consequences of losing them because they sought help in the civil justice system. Consider these stories our clients have shared with us:

- Maria\* was seeking an order of custody of her fourteen- and nine-year-old children against their abusive father in New York City Family Court. For more than a year after the couple separated, Maria worked as a secretary and supported her family. During the custody case, she missed three days of work to attend court hearings, all without pay. At the same time, Maria's abusive ex-partner was calling her workplace, threatening her job stability. Soon after, Maria's boss fired her so that she could "sort things out" in her life. For the next year and a half, she struggled to find work, resorting to government assistance to make ends meet.
- Sophie\* was seeking a child support order in New York City Family Court against her abusive ex-partner who had not provided any support to her seven-year-old child since the client fled years earlier because of domestic violence. Sophie had to appear in court six times in less than a year. Each time her ex-partner showed up without proof of his income and the court set another date to give him a chance to provide the information. For each court appearance, Sophie missed a day at the medical office where she worked and lost wages. Her employer threatened to take action because Sophie was missing work. Faced with the real possibility of losing her job, she decided to withdraw the child support case. Within two months, Sophie lost her housing and moved to a homeless shelter with her daughter and applied for public assistance.
- Madeline\* was fired from the job she loved because she was frequently either late or absent because of court appearances in her child support and custody cases in New York City Family Court against her abusive ex-partner. The effect on her life was catastrophic. Surviving on only temporary child support – an order which was too low given the noncustodial parent's actual income – and food stamps for which she reluctantly applied, Madeline was unable to pay rent. Her landlord pursued eviction in court, and she lost her home.

With stronger legal protections, New Yorkers like these clients would be able to participate in seeking needed legal relief to help them move forward as survivors of domestic violence without risking employment at the very time they and their families most need stability.

New York State has enacted strong laws protecting domestic violence survivors from discrimination in the workplace and, very recently, in other areas of the human rights laws. But paid safe leave laws, such as New York City's Int. No. 1313-A, further strengthen the protections for domestic



violence survivors in the workplace and make it feasible for them to seek needed help while ensuring their continued stability and supporting their great contributions to our economy. We urge the State to pass a comprehensive law providing paid safe leave – following the example of New York City and several other states and cities – and applaud the Council for dedicating this hearing to highlighting the need for it.

We hope that this testimony serves to render more visible the wide-ranging needs of domestic violence survivors, and the opportunity to strengthen legal protections for their rights at work help them remain secure and free from abuse. We thank the City Council and the Committee for the support for survivors and the essential legal services that we provide to women living in poverty in New York City, and for your partnership on policy reform to benefit all New Yorkers. We look forward to continuing to work together to improve the delivery of justice to all.

Respectfully,

Rachel L. Braunstein, Esq.

Director of Policy, Her Justice

[rbraunstein@herjustice.org](mailto:rbraunstein@herjustice.org)

JOE TORRE  
**SAFE AT  
HOME.**

Public Testimony before Committee on Women and Gender Equity

Thank you, Chairperson Cabán and members of the City Council Committee on Women and Gender Equity. I am Aaron Stern, Manager of Grants and Foundation Relations with Joe Torre Safe At Home Foundation.

When our co-founder, Joe Torre, was a child he witnessed the unrelenting verbal abuse and saw the results of the physical harm inflicted on his mother. The perpetrator was not some stranger, but his father. The emotional and physical pain his mother suffered scarred her life, and Joe's, too. As Joe grew older and came to terms with his experience, he wanted to ensure that no child grew up as he did - feeling alone and afraid. That's why he started Safe At Home over twenty years ago in New York City.

Safe at Home currently operates 17 school-based prevention and intervention programs called Margaret's Place – named after Joe's mother – four of which operate in New York City. Margaret's Place is a youth-friendly space within the school, staffed by a full-time, master's-level counselor who provides counseling to youth, anti-violence workshops, peer leadership engaging youth to break the cycle of violence, and support for school staff and parents.

I am here today to discuss the pending legislative package addressing access to resources and supports for domestic violence survivors. Safe At Home believes all survivors should receive access to resources necessary to begin the path towards healing. Ensuring survivors can easily access this resources is crucial to their success.

Developing a portal with easy access to resource guide, particularly developing the materials in a number of languages and inclusive of services for teens as well as adults will allow all survivors to access the support they need. Further, survivors often need a myriad of services on their path toward safety, therefore the resource guide should not only include a list of providers, but a comprehensive list of all of the types of services a survivor could possibly access.

In their path to safety, survivors are often faced with immediate financial needs including housing, medical, counseling, legal and other expenses. It is a high barrier for individuals making the decision to leave an abusive relationship and domestic violence is one of the leading causes of homelessness for women and children. Providing access to low-barrier grants is critical to support survivors path toward safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.



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**TESTIMONY OF NEW DESTINY HOUSING  
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY**

**Gabriela Sandoval Requena, Sr. Policy Analyst**

**June 14, 2022**

Thank you, Chair Cabán and members of the City Council Women and Gender Equity Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

Founded in 1994, New Destiny is a New York City-based nonprofit committed to ending the cycle of violence for low-income families and individuals experiencing homelessness and domestic violence. We build and manage supportive, affordable housing and through our rapid rehousing program, HousingLink, we connect survivors with safe, permanent housing. New Destiny also advocates for housing resources for domestic violence survivors and their families. We invite you to read our [2022 NYC Policy Priorities](#).

New Destiny is a co-convenor of the [Family Homelessness Coalition \(FHC\)](#), a broad group of organizations and New Yorkers with lived experience committed to tackling homelessness among families in our city.

For far too long, domestic violence has been the number one driver of family homelessness in New York City.<sup>1</sup> In 2021, more than 10,000 New Yorkers entered the Human Resources Administration domestic violence shelter system. Once in emergency shelter, survivors are more likely to exit for another shelter rather than to move to permanent housing.<sup>2</sup> Shelter will always be an important resource for survivors of domestic violence, but it should not be the only resource. More must be done to effectively support survivors' housing stability.

We commend Chair Cabán and the Committee members for bringing attention to the plight of survivors of domestic violence and the dire need for additional resources by introducing the "Support Survivors" legislative package.

**INTRO 154**

Intro 154 would require the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV) to create an online services portal and guide. We applaud the Council for their determination to make information about resources for survivors more accessible. Currently, ENDGBV manages the NYC Hope portal, which offers a resource directory that includes information about community-based organizations that work with survivors of domestic and gender-based violence in the five boroughs, while the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice also makes available resources for survivors.

New Destiny supports the intent of Intro 154 and would like to suggest the following to strengthen the language: centralizing information about available resources for survivors in one space,

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<sup>1</sup> Silkowski, A. (2019). Housing Survivors: How New York City Can Increase Housing Stability for Survivors of Domestic Violence. New York, NY: Comptroller Bureau of Policy and Research Bureau of Budget. Retrieved from: [https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Housing\\_Survivors\\_102119.pdf](https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Housing_Survivors_102119.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> NYC Department of Social Services (2022). 2021 Annual Report on Exits from NYC Domestic Violence Shelters.

establishing clear processes to keep the directory of resources up to date, and ensuring that the content is correctly translated to the designated city languages as updates are made.

## **INTRO 153**

New Destiny supports increasing resources to provide low-barrier grants for survivors, and Intro 153 would establish a domestic violence survivor housing stability program. There is high demand for easily accessible financial support for survivors of domestic violence, most of whom are also victims of economic abuse and have been stripped from their social safety nets.<sup>3</sup> Financial abuse can result in limited or no experience with daily financial matters, including paying bills. For low-income survivors, an immediate but otherwise manageable financial or health crisis can quickly snowball into a catastrophe causing homelessness. Research has shown that small infusions of financial assistance can mitigate these crises and foster stability.<sup>4</sup> Flexible funding includes payments to a third party at the request of the survivor, such as childcare provider, utility payment, or health care provider, or cash assistance provided directed to the survivor. Programs that include low-barrier access, rapidly provide funds, and offer survivor-driven advocacy and safety planning have proven to be successful, according to the federal Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium. In essence, survivors know better than anyone what will help their stabilization.

In 2020, in partnership with Sanctuary for Families, ENDGBV launched a first-of-its-kind pilot program to provide a limited amount of microgrants to domestic violence survivors. The project's evaluation showed that microgrants improved survivor's financial situation, helped them remain housed and improved their financial stability and/or lightened their financial burden.<sup>5</sup>

New Destiny would like to respectfully suggest the following to enhance the proposed legislation:

- Implement the housing stability program using a flexible funding model, which incorporates a trauma-informed, survivor-driven approach and respects the survivor's autonomy to decide how to utilize the funding
- Build on the lessons learned from the 2020 ENDGBV microgrant pilot
- Ensure the grants do not impact participants' eligibility for public benefits
- Baseline the funding to safeguard the continuity of the program

We are grateful for the opportunity to submit written testimony and look forward to working with the Council and the administration to advance these initiatives. We welcome any questions you may have.

### **Gabriela Sandoval Requena**

Senior Policy Analyst at New Destiny Housing

[gsrequena@newdestinyhousing.org](mailto:gsrequena@newdestinyhousing.org)

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<sup>3</sup> Postmus, J., Plummer S., McMahon, S., Murshid, N., & Kim, M. (2012). Understanding economic abuse in the lives of survivors. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(3), 411-430.

<sup>4</sup> Sullivan, C.M., Bomsta, H., & Hacskaylo, M. (2016). Evidence that flexible funding is a promising strategy to prevent homelessness for survivors of intimate partner violence: A longitudinal pilot study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. First published on August 12, 2016 as doi:10.1177/0886260516664318.

<sup>5</sup> Holmes, K. (2021). Evaluation Summary Report: Emergency Financial Relief Microgrants Program for Survivors of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence. Retrieved from: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/Emergency-Financial-Relief-Microgrants-Program-Evaluation-Summary-Report.pdf>

# WCJA

**Women's Community  
Justice Association**

**New York City Council Committee on Women & Gender Equity**  
**Tatiana Hill, Director of Organizing and Advocacy**  
**Women's Community Justice Association**  
**6/14/22 10 a.m.**  
*Support Int 153, Int 154 & Res 0111*

My name is Tatiana Hill and I am testifying on behalf of the Women's Community Justice Association (WCJA). We dedicated to improving the lives of women and gender-expansive New Yorkers affected by mass incarceration. Founded in 2018, WCJA is led by justice-impacted women and focuses on change through policy advocacy, community organizing and service.

WCJA leads the #BEYONDrosies campaign, which advocates on behalf of women and gender-expansive people at the Rose M. Singer (Rosie's) jail on Rikers Island. The goals are to:

1. Decarcerate to under 100.
2. Close Rosie's before the city's planned date of 2027.
3. Transform the Lincoln site in Harlem into a standalone Women's Center for Justice for the few who remain; in contrast to the city's plan to relocate those at Rosie's to Kew Gardens where they would share spaces and staff with men.

The measures being proposed today would help the many people at Rosie's who are domestic violence survivors to avoid being criminalized in the legal system and ending up at Rosie's, and we strongly support them.

We also urge the city and state to do more regarding criminalized survivors. WJCA recently wrote a report with the Rikers Commission that found 45-97% of people diverted from Rosie's suffered from physical, sexual and/or emotional violence. Nationally, an estimated 77% of women in jail are domestic violence survivors.<sup>1</sup> Studies have found this abuse can play a significant role in the criminal allegations people face and that women's justice involvement is more likely than men's to flow from their relationships with family or intimate partners.<sup>2</sup>

The city's current plan to close Rikers would relocate women and gender-expansive people to a new Kew Gardens facility, opening in 2027, where they would share spaces and staff with men. With such high rates of sexual abuse and domestic violence, any exposure to men or to catcalling inside a jail can be retraumatizing. Additionally, women and gender-expansive people who live in Queens will be especially vulnerable to exposure to their abusers as most men facing trial in Queens will be housed in the Kew Gardens facility.

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<sup>1</sup> A New Path to Justice: Getting Women Off Rikers Island Vera Institute of Justice, November, 2018

<sup>2</sup> Covington, S. S. (2008). "The Relational Theory of Women's Psychological Development: Implications for the Criminal Justice System." In *Female Offenders: Critical Perspectives and Effective Interventions*, ed. by Ruth T. Zaplin, 2nd ed. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett.

National and international standards recommend completely separate facilities for men and women in custody.<sup>3</sup>

#BEYONDrosies is advocating for those at Rosie's to instead be relocated to their own separate site at the former Lincoln Correctional Facility at West 110<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem. This should be transformed into a Women's Center for Justice that provides trauma-informed, holistic care to put women and gender-expansive people on a path to successful reentry.

#BEYONDroseis is pushing for improved decarceration, particularly for domestic violence survivors. The story of Stephanie, who was diverted from Rosie's in 2018, exemplifies why gender-responsive Alternatives to Incarceration programs are so important for women.

Stephanie was pregnant when she was sent to Rosie's on charges related to her relationship with an abusive partner. She had recently returned to New York City after serving a prison sentence for giving her boyfriend drugs while he was in prison. When she got home, she was raped by that same partner and became pregnant.

Fearing for her life, Stephanie went to a domestic violence shelter. Her parole officer claimed that she failed a drug test, which Stephanie denies, and failed to report her new address at the shelter. She was sent to Rosie's because of the alleged parole violations.

At Rosie's she experienced major health problems because she has sleep apnea and was not allowed to bring her machine. She was sent to the hospital twice and doctors said that she and her baby were in danger if she remained in those conditions, but Stephanie said she was still not allowed to have her sleep apnea machine.

After three months at Rosie's, the court agreed to place Stephanie in an alternative-to-incarceration program called SHERO that offers transitional housing and services for women and their children. At SHERO, Stephanie had a safe place to raise her daughter. She enrolled in culinary school and SHERO helped her find affordable permanent housing.

WCJA thanks you for considering these important measures and would like to work with this committee on ways to help domestic violence survivors that have been criminalized to get them help rather than punishment

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<sup>3</sup> Available [here](#).

06/08/2022

Avii Van Praagh

Support Survivors Package Testimony

Before I begin, I want to be clear that I have never been one to speak on my experience publicly. As I have worked through the trauma I have endured, I have endeavored to spend less and less time ruminating on my past experiences. When I received the email informing me of this trial, however, I felt it was my responsibility to speak up despite my discomfort for the sake of those like me who have the potential to receive the help I did not.

When I was 18 years old, I was kicked out of my home due to religious differences. I couch-surfed for a while, and upon running out of places to stay, was brought to the youth shelter Covenant House. On paper, the shelter was a place for young adults to seek shelter and gain vital skills through different job-prep courses and resume workshops. In reality, however, the shelter was a hotbed of trauma perpetuation and neglect. When I was raped in the back stairwell of the shelter, I felt I was no longer able to stay there. I took what little I owned and reluctantly agreed to stay with an old boyfriend of mine, thinking it couldn't possibly be worse than the environment I had been sexually assaulted in. I was wrong.

My boyfriend's generous offer to house me was a ruse which culminated in two years of domestic abuse, sexual servitude, and absolute debasement. I was to do what he wanted, when he wanted, and the consequences for refusing or appearing unenthusiastic were severe. I was very aware that I had nowhere else to go (as was he), and as such, it was necessary for me to do whatever it was he asked of me in order for me to have housing stability. I got a job as a busboy in an Applebee's and tried to save up money so that I could move out of his house and have a

chance to escape him. I managed to save up enough money to rent an illegal boarding room in Flushing.

The room was small, unfurnished, and had no heat. I would wake up in the middle of the night to my landlord in my room, going through my things. I would wake up from the freezing temperatures in the winter. I was still in my “relationship,” if only out of fear and the need for a warm place to sleep through February. I ended up taking a job in Nassau County that paid more money, in the hopes of saving up enough to find a stable housing situation and get out of my predicaments with both my landlord and my boyfriend. I spent the better part of a year commuting two hours each way, five days a week, to save up the money I needed to find a better living situation.

As I was writing this, I felt that I ought to tell you that I stand here today, a college student and CUNY employee, with an apartment and a partner who is supportive and kind. As true as that might be, I think the only reason I feel pressured to end my testimony on a positive note is because I don't want to leave you feeling uncomfortable or upset about my situation. But perhaps I am doing a grave disservice to those who are still in this predicament by doing so. Not everyone's story ends the way mine did, and even though I am now in a stable situation, I have to face and work through a mountain of trauma, fear, distrust, flashbacks, night terrors, and other ghosts while being a full-time student and part-time employee. If the Support Survivors Package existed when I was unhoused, my story may have gone very differently. I believe that nobody on earth deserves to be in a situation where they are required to suffer abuse for shelter, or trade sex for basic human needs. As you reflect on my testimony, I implore you to refrain from thinking of me as one resilient survivor in the face of extraordinary hardship; I am every person who has been unhoused, abused, trapped, afraid, and abandoned by the city they live in. I have been one

of the invisible people in this city, and I know the lengths to which people go to avoid eye contact with you so that you don't become a blemish on their conscience. I know the lengths to which the city has gone to avoid acknowledging the extent to which it has failed marginalized and exploited populations. I beg of you to end the cycle of avoidance and fix this today. You have both the potential and the responsibility to keep your constituents safe. People need you- how many of them will have to suffer before you decide it is enough?

Thank you.

**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: 6-14-2022

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cecile Noel (Commissioner)

Address: 100 Gold Street

I represent: Commissioner Office to End

Address: Domestic and Gender Based Violence

**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: Hannah Pennington

Address: 100 Gold Street

I represent: Mayor's Office

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

**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: Michael Rosenberg

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

I represent: Safe Horizon

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



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

