



**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Parks & Recreation
Parks Enforcement Patrol**

February 26, 2020

Testimony by: Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner for Urban Park Service and Public Programs

Good afternoon, Chair Koo and members of the Parks Committee. My name is Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner for Urban Park Service and Public Programs at the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. I am joined by Edwin Rodriguez, our Assistant Commissioner for Urban Park Service, and Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations. Thank you for inviting us to discuss the work of our Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) unit. The safety of our patrons, parks, and public facilities is one of our most important responsibilities.

The PEP unit's mission is to preserve and protect our parks and public spaces by enforcing rules and regulations, educating the public, advocating conservation, and responding to the needs of our patrons. PEP achieves its mission through the combined efforts of the various teams that fall under the umbrella of the Urban Park Service (UPS) Division, which I'd like to quickly outline in more detail. Our Central Communications staff are the internal link to first responders throughout the Agency, providing support as a 24/7/365 call center utilized to report incidents, request help, dispatch employees, and respond to emergencies. The Emergency Management team advocates for continuity planning and spearheads agency responses to larger incidents. Their operations are critical to ensuring that PEP is supported during their patrols and prepared for any situation. Currently we have city tax levy-funded budget lines for 254 PEP officers, sergeants and captains in the field,



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plus 81 PEP staff lines which provide contract security services to 11 parks through funding provided by third-party organizations. This does not include administrative staff, the PEP instructors in our Academy, our Central Communications division, or the 80 additional lines for this year, made possible by Council funding provided through the “Play Fair” campaign led by New Yorkers for Parks and other park advocates, for which we are grateful.

PEP was founded in 1981 as a companion to the Urban Park Ranger program. PEP personnel are uniformed, shielded officers with NYC Special Patrolman and New York State Peace Officer status who provide security and safety in city parks, educate patrons on Parks rules and regulations, and safeguard Parks’ wildlife and facilities. PEP officers are entrusted to enforce NYC Parks Rules & Regulations, in addition to the New York State Penal Law and NYC Health Code. Though they do not carry firearms, officers are equipped with ballistic vests, batons, handcuffs, and pepper spray. Their focus is on quality of life offenses and deterring patrons from violating Parks rules through education, but they are empowered to issue summonses for violations on Parks’ property (including street trees) and to make arrests, when necessary.

Our officers patrol city parks by bicycle, horseback, car, and on foot. Officers also provide security at many events held in parks, as well as rallies, protests, and concerts throughout the city. They also maintain order, manage pedestrian traffic flow, and conduct security checks at Citywide events, such as the St. Patrick’s, Puerto Rican, and Thanksgiving Day parades.

PEP officers play a substantial role in the City’s response to emergencies. In the past year, PEP officers were recognized for heroic life-saving efforts; from pulling an accident victim from a burning vehicle, stopping someone from jumping into the frigid waters of the East River, and administering



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naloxone, a medication designed to reverse opioid overdoses, on five different occasions. PEP has also been called upon to help close parks, direct patrons to places of safety, report downed trees, road conditions, and other damage, in addition to supporting NYPD as needed. They also assist the NYC Department of Homeless Services in engaging and aiding the city's homeless population in parks, especially during Code Red and Blue emergencies. As part of the Mayor's Homelessness Task Force, our PEP officers conducted over 12,000 patrols aimed at finding and aiding people experiencing homelessness, and assisted DHS and NYPD with the relocation of clients and their belongings from parks.

Upon being hired, PEP recruits enter the UPS Academy, and undergo 12 weeks of training to prepare them for the many responsibilities of the job. Training encompasses but is not limited to: public engagement skills, self-defense, equipment use, patrol, arrest, summons writing, gang awareness, fire safety, naloxone, CPR, and first aid for mental and physical health. Our PEP academy instructors are certified by the State of New York Division of Criminal Justice Services in Methods of Instruction and train on all general topics of the basic course for peace officers. After the 12-week training, staff are given their assignments. We have begun targeting a broader band of new recruits with emphasis on security and military experience, in order to continue our success in addressing the issue of attrition in PEP. This improved targeting, along with careful analysis of data, has led us to pinpoint trends and work on a multi-year plan to reduce our turnover rate. We are already seeing improvements, but strive to make even more progress. We are proud to see more officers making PEP and NYC Parks their home for long-term careers.

PEP is mostly organized into Borough Commands, each led by a Captain and a number of Sergeants. They typically provide coverage from 7:30 am to midnight each day at our parks, patrolling



either through daily fixed-post patrols, or several times per week with mobile patrols. Additional patrol priorities are developed in conjunction with Borough Commissioners and their Chiefs of Operations and reflect issues or concerns raised by community members, elected officials, partner agencies, service requests received through 311, and quality of life conditions such as canine waste, graffiti, and vandalism documented through the Parks Inspection Program.

In addition to our standard foot and mobile patrol units, PEP also patrols by horse and by bicycle. Mounted PEP is a specialized unit of equestrian officers trained in horse care and stable management. The unit currently consists of six horses, three sergeants, 11 officers, and two hostlers. Our stables are located in Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, Central Park in Manhattan and Ocean Breeze Park in Staten Island. We also have a Mounted Auxiliary unit, which is a 501(c) 3 non-profit group of dedicated and organized volunteers who assist the Mounted Unit at special events, on patrols, and in the stables. We recently re-invigorated and expanded our bicycle patrol unit, which is comprised of approximately 24 officers citywide. These officers are trained and outfitted with uniforms and bicycles that are fully equipped for patrol. Both the mounted and bicycle patrol units provide an alternative method of patrol that allows staff to cover different areas on parkland property that vehicles may not reach.

PEP additionally includes our Park Security Service (PSS) officers, which consists of two types of uniformed staff: City Seasonal Aides (CSAs), who are hired to provide extra security at parks, beaches and pools during the busy season and at our recreation centers citywide; and Parks Opportunity Program workers (POP), who receive six-month security jobs with Parks, providing on-the-job training experience that helps prepare them for future employment. These uniformed staff members, however, are distinct from PEP – their training takes place over eight days, they are not



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empowered to write summonses or make arrests, and unlike PEP, do not carry weapons. At our recreation centers, the Parks Security Service provide front desk security and patrol the facility to ensure a safe environment. CSAs provide additional uniformed presence at beaches and pools, advise the public about swimming rules, and help find lost children. They also support PEP with crowd control at park events like the US Open and New York City Marathon and conduct foot patrols of regional parks.

Like most of the agency, PEP's staffing and role expands as the summer approaches. It begins in April when the first round of roughly 350 seasonal PSS employees are hired and trained to help establish the right tone at ballfields and picnic areas and to assist with large events and festivals. This deployment continues through May and June, as we establish summer commands at beaches in the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island and maintain safety at our 54 outdoor pools. This past year, we saw great success during the beach and pool season, which experienced a significant decrease in locker break-ins and incidents. Of course, our summer responsibilities are not limited to beaches and pools. Borough patrols cover hundreds of events and activities that occur in parks throughout the city.

The additional "Play Fair" funding provided by the Council in Fiscal Year 2020 has enabled us to increase staffing levels for standard citywide patrols, increasing time spent in parks across the city. We also assigned some of this new staff to a new Task Force Unit comprised of one sergeant and six officers. This unit can be deployed to any park citywide at any given time to address any conditions that require additional resources. The unit also focuses on special deployments, such as assisting in patrolling parks with a high volume of drug-related issues and addressing illegal dumping citywide.



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In closing, without the diligent work of PEP and our partners, the park experience would be greatly diminished. Every day, we work to ensure park rules and regulations are being upheld and a helpful hand is provided to patrons in need. We are proud of the work of our officers and thank them for their continued service to the City of New York. Also, in recognition of the tremendous support we receive from the Council, we would like to invite you to our upcoming Urban Park Service graduation ceremony, on March 25th at 11am, at the Prospect Park Picnic House, to help welcome our new PEP officers as they begin their service. I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony and welcome any questions you may have.



New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Oversight – Examining the Parks Department’s Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Program
February 26, 2020
Emily Walker, Director of Outreach & Programs

Good afternoon. My name is Emily Walker, and I am the Director of Outreach & Programs at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). I want to thank the Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting us to testify at today’s hearing.

NY4P believes that the safety of our public parks and open spaces is critical for their accessibility to the widest number of New Yorkers and its visitors possible. Perceptions of park safety are key to a number of constituencies feeling safe to visit and use their parks, in particular women, families with children, and the elderly. The presence of uniformed staff, such as Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Officers and Urban Park Rangers, in our parks is one critical way to ensure that visitors can feel safe entering their local open spaces.

Last year, our organization spearheaded the creation of the Play Fair Coalition, which advocated for a \$100 million addition to the City’s expense budget for NYC Parks. One of our Coalition’s successes was the addition of \$6 million to the FY20 budget to fund 80 new Parks Enforcement Patrol officers, and \$3 million to fund 50 new Urban Park Rangers. While these positions are different in many ways, they both share the ability to enforce park rules and regulations, and we believe help convey a sense of safety to park-goers when they are present.

While our Coalition was thrilled to have successfully advocated for these new staff lines, we want to convey our concern that the funding for these positions was made possible by the City Council on a one-shot basis, which is set to expire on June 30th of this year. There are advanced education requirements for both positions, as well as a lengthy mandatory background check and months-long training process for PEP. These are good things: we want our uniformed Parks safety professionals to be the right ones for the positions, and we want them to be trained sufficiently. But that all takes time, and as we know, that time costs money. Although we won the funding for these positions last summer, many of them have just recently deployed into our parks at the beginning of this year. We are concerned that without a commitment from the Administration to baseline these positions, the City will lose these critical 80 PEP and 50 Urban Park Ranger staff lines come July 1st, when the FY21 budget goes into effect. We wouldn’t just lose those dedicated professionals: we would lose the significant investment the City has made in recruiting and training these hard-to-fill, critical positions. The Play Fair Coalition will be asking the Mayor to baseline these positions for the FY21 budget, to preserve these hard-fought jobs, and ensure that NYC Parks’ investment in training these new PEP officers and Urban Park Rangers is preserved.

Finally, NY4P strongly believes that the safety of our parks and open spaces depend on a number of factors beyond the work done by our PEP officers, or even our Urban Park Rangers. Parks that lack sufficient maintenance and programming are parks that are less likely to feel welcoming to the communities they are located within. Depending on the features of a park, there are even specific horticultural maintenance issues that can lead visitors to feel unsafe in their parks. To that end, we firmly believe that creating a more welcoming and safe park system for all New Yorkers depends on robust, dedicated funding for more permanent, baselined staff, from PEP officers and Urban Park Rangers, to City Park Workers and Gardeners. This idea is at the heart of our work convening the Play Fair Coalition, and informs our advocacy to seek more resources for NYC Parks maintenance and operations staff. All of our NYC Parks staff play an integral role in keeping our parks clean, safe, and beautiful, and we urge the Council to remember this as we enter budget season.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. I'm happy to answer any questions the Council might have.

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For over 100 years, New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. www.ny4p.org

Testimony for Committee on Parks and Recreation's Oversight – Examining the Parks Department's Parks Enforcement Park (PEP) Program – 2/26/2020

Dear Chair Peter Koo and members of the committee,

I am Roxanne Delgado on behalf of Friends of Pelham Parkway testifying in front of you and your committee to better assist you in improving our PEP program and well as our parks and I thank you for the opportunity in doing so.

(1) Reporting Violations of Park Rules

Since there is a short time window for PEP to response, I call the Parks Central Communication Division instead of 311. The issues are that sometimes Parks Central mistakenly state they don't take reports from the general public. Second, they sometimes mistakenly state that Pelham Parkway is not under parks jurisdiction. Lastly when they do take my report and dispatch the PEP, there is no follow up. The PEP don't follow up with me on whether the violation has been resolved. Also, Parks Central has no record of how the violation was resolved or if it was resolved.

The Problem lies when Parks Central states that PEP was dispatched and responded yet the violation is still in progress. Central does inform me whether PEP responded to the call but they don't know how the violation was resolved or if it was resolved

Sometimes after reporting illegal barbecuing, I witness PEP cars drive by the illegal barbecuing in progress without stopping. I call Central and they inform me that the violation was not seen by the responding Officers. Sometimes people barbecuing do so behind trees and since the PEP officers stayed in their cars they missed the violation. I often have to call Central to dispatch the PEP officers again to respond to the same violation in progress.

Lastly, based on my interaction with Central, I know they don't keep track of these calls but I do wonder if Parks Enforcement has a daily log of these calls.

One of the Captains provided me with his number to help respond to the violations quicker yet when he is not on tour I have to deal with Central.

(2) Common Violation of Parks Rules in Pelham Parkway

(A) **Illegal dumping** – Metal scraps, furniture and construction materials often dump on our parkway. Our PEP officers have gone out of their way to track these dumpsters when I informed them of the dumping. The issue is that our grounds people clean up the illegal dumping but the Parks Managers don't report it to PEP. I think this lack of communication destroys evidence of pattern of dumping which is often done by a few in the same spot.

Due to the constant dumping, I do suggest cameras in NYC Parks. There is just too much dumping for PEP to deal with and I think technology is needed to address illegal dumping in our Parks.

(B) **Fireworks** – Both NYPD and NYC Parks state every year that they can't address this issue in the parkway because they are undermanned and they have too many calls. This happened every July 4th and New Year's Eve which results in trash, burned lawn and harms wildlife. In fact, these are not fireworks but explosives as cherry bombs and M-80s.

(C) **Dog Poop** - our free dog poop bags have made a positive impact in us Parkway. Yet there are those that refuse to pick up after their pet. I think it is time for Parks to send undercover PEP to summons those who don't pick up after their dogs. We have signs and free poop bags all over the parkway, there is no excuse not to pick up after one's pet

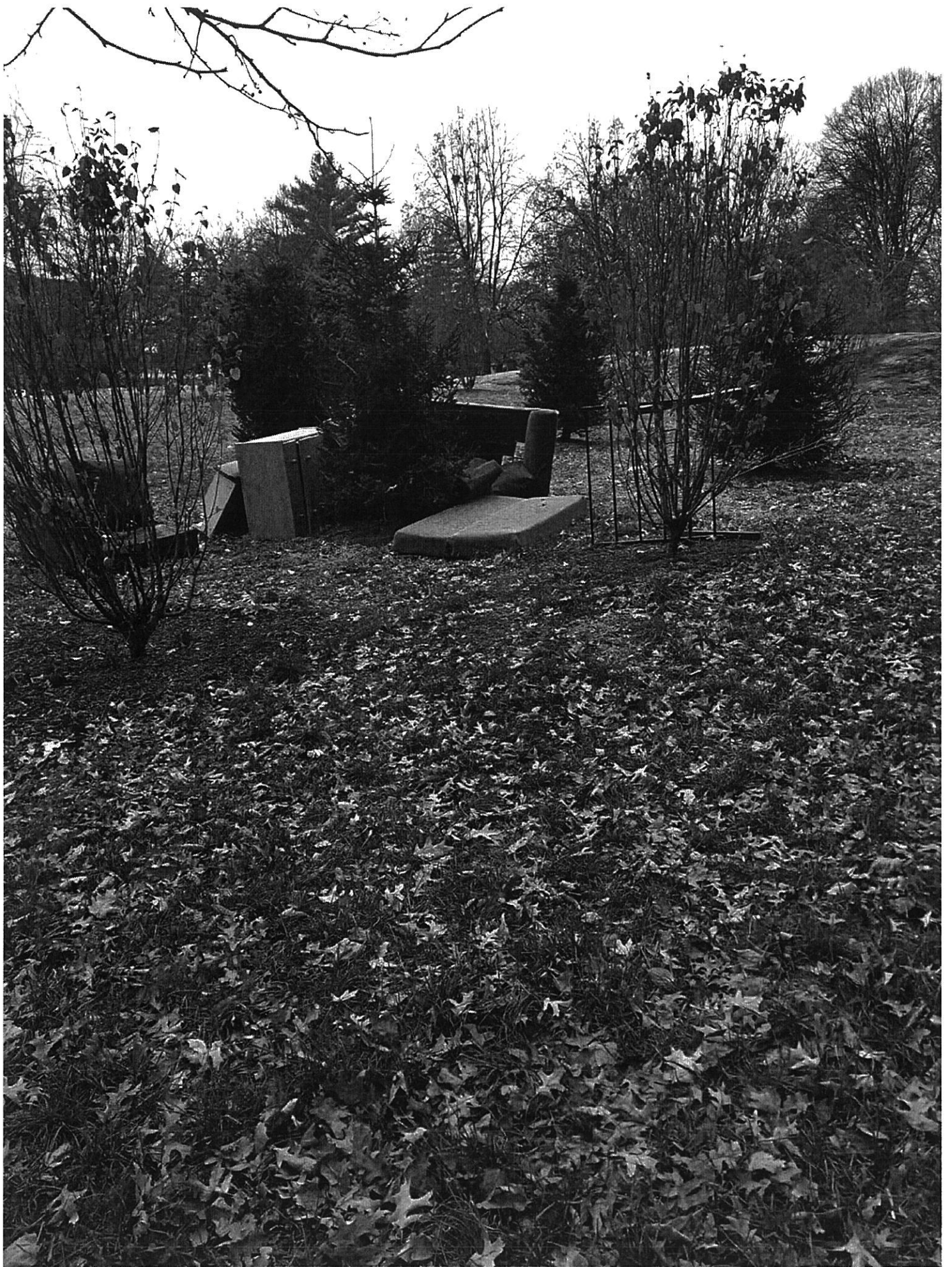
(D) **Sleeping in the Parkway overnight** – We though CBS report on the squatters camping and doing drugs resolved this issue. We do sometimes have people camping out in the parkway but PARKS can't address it because the Parkway is closed at 1am and PEP is off tour after 11pm and NYPD won't respond.

(E) **Illegal Barbecuing** - One of the most common violations in the parkway and yet NYPD won't enforce it if they don't witness an OPEN Flame even though there is a grill in the parkway where no barbecuing is allowed. So, NYPD tells

me to contact them when the parkers turn on the grill. PEP officers also are undermanned and often in other parks that they state have larger problems than barbecuing. Yet barbecuing pollutes the fresh air for the rest of the parkers as well as harm our tress and our mature trees can't be replaced.

In closing I think a lot of these violations can be resolved or even prevented if we had either dedicated staff or PEP in our parkway that will not only enforce the rules but more importantly educate the park goers. We as a friends of park group had done a lot of progress with our tabling yet we are volunteers and can't dedicate to do so full time nor every day.

Thank you
Roxanne Delgado
Pelham Parkway, Bronx
646 285 6700
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FOR THE RECORD

Testimony by Statue Cruises Vice President and COO Mike Burke
Prepared for the NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Chairman Koo and distinguished members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. Thank you for holding this important oversight hearing today regarding the Park Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Program. I am here today testifying on behalf of Statue Cruises, the only official operator of ferry service to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island on behalf of the National Park Service from Battery Park in lower Manhattan.

As this committee is likely aware, the overall quality of life in Battery Park continues its downward decline with the daily presence of dozens of illegal, unauthorized ticket sellers who mislead tourists and intimidate them into buying tickets for boat rides that cannot sail to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, but merely sail around New York Harbor. This has been an ongoing problem for seven years and counting.

One of the efforts to educate Battery Park locals and the millions of guests who visit the park annually is the presence of Park Enforcement Patrol officers who help public safety in the park and other open spaces around the city. We commend their efforts to enhance the overall quality of life within the park and help to curb the proliferation of such unauthorized ticket selling activities. While the number of PEP officers citywide has increased the last couple of years, unfortunately so have the number of quality-of-life issues, especially the unbelievable number of unauthorized ticket sellers in Battery Park (which average anywhere from 40 to 80 daily).

With hundreds of parks across all five boroughs, current staffing levels of PEP officers in just the few hundreds is simply insufficient and inconsistent. Last year, the Council urged the Administration to increase the baseline funding for PEP officers in the next fiscal year to help fund additional PEP officers. We at Statue Cruises would echo that sentiment again for the next fiscal year to help ensure a regular, increased and permanent presence on a daily basis. We recognize their enforcement capabilities are limited, but they could more closely coordinate with NYPD, who have stepped up not only its enforcement efforts but its educational campaigns to help keep visitors informed.

We have seen firsthand that when there is a regular and well-coordinated presence of both PEP and NYPD officers in the park, that it yields positive results. Thank you for taking the time to listen to our testimony, and we are happy to answer any questions you may have.

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My name is Helen P. O'Reilly. I have lived in Jackson Heights Queens for almost my entire life, raised here by my mom and dad, immigrants from Ireland, and now living here as an adult with my husband and three children aged 5, 3 and 6 months. I love this community so much and I offer this testimony today because Queens deserves wonderful parks and, to make that happen, it needs the City to invest money in the Department of Parks & Recreation and, specifically, in Park Enforcement Patrol (PEP) officers in Jackson Heights Travers Park.

I spend time almost every weekend in Travers Park located on 34th Avenue and 78th Street in Jackson Heights. Thanks to the advocacy of local Councilmember Danny Dromm and many local advocates and supporters both inside and outside of government, Travers Park is now a large, green, and wonderful park. I cannot express to you how happy it makes me to see Travers finally get the love and investment it deserves. Thank you for all you have done to make that happen. But Jackson Heights needs more. As of today, Travers Park is still enjoying the sheen of its newness. However, the newness and cleanliness will not remain if the City does not invest in maintaining the Park's condition.

PEP is great at creating and maintaining beautiful parks. That is their expertise. They know the rules and know how to be ambassadors to communities to enforce those rules. We need investment in PEP officers and a dedicated PEP person on site in Travers Park. Right now, one looks in vain to see any Park rules posted in Travers. And, even if rules were posted, no one is around to educate people on what crosses the line and what doesn't. We need PEP officers to act as liaisons and ambassadors between the Park and the public. The lack of any PEP

presence means some vendors in and around the park block paths as they compete for places to sell. A number of people now buy Silly String in the park and spray it over the equipment and floor. This Silly String, if never cleaned up, remains on the floors and then eventually drains into the sewer clogging it with plastic. Sadly, I also see graffiti already being etched on some park property, with no one on sight to notice and help escalate its removal. Public safety in parks and playgrounds is the responsibility of PEP staff and they are exceptionally good at that work. Jackson Heights Travers Park needs and deserves these personnel on site.

Travers Park is only going to remain beautiful if the City invests in its on-going maintenance, including by investing in having on-the-ground personnel maintaining it and educating people about how to maintain this resource in excellent condition. There should be as much funding as possible for Parks Enforcement Patrol and Queens cannot be neglected in this allocation of PEP resources and PEP officers. Travers Park needs and deserves this attention. And the PEP officers deserve our funding and support. They serve a vital function that is completely absent from Travers Park in Queens. We need the City to help keep Jackson Heights parks beautiful by putting PEP personnel on site every day.

Submitted by: Helen P. O'Reilly

Good afternoon Chairman Koo Council members.

I'm Al Morales I'm with United Athletic Association a non profit advocacy group advocating for recreational youth and adult sports programs the end users.

Your Committee did a great job with the questions to PEP officials.

Our current concern is Morningside Park located on 110th Street and Manhattan Ave where I grew up playing little league baseball.

Over the past three years our members have placed emergency calls to PEP and the local PD from this Park. The level of harassment in this park has increased considerably in these years yo present.

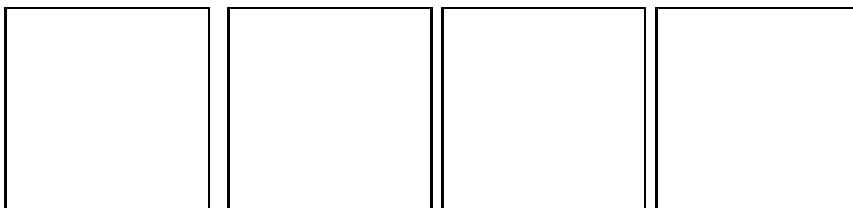
Our main problem with PEP has always been response time and now preventive action. PEP need to improve response time and preventative action at parks they receive repeated complaints about they should station PEP vehicle in or in close proximity to these problem parks.

PEP is a deterrent and have an important function. Based on all the questions I've heard we all agree they need additional officers.

I was there when PEP began in 1981. My experience with PEP has generally been a good one once they arrive.

Thank you.

Adolfo Al Morales
President, YSA
Chairman,UAA



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Name: Marlena Giga

Address: 125 Berkeley Street NY NY 10007

I represent: Treasurer + Grievance Rep.

Address: Local 983

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Name: AL MORALE

Address: 300 E 93rd St. NYC

I represent: UNITED ATHLETIC ASSO.

Address: _____

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Name: Roxanne Delgado

Address: Friends of Pelham Parkway

I represent: Bronx, NY 10467

Address: _____

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Date: 2/26/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joe Puleo

Address: 125 Barclay Street

I represent: DC 37

Address: _____

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