



Legislation Text

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**File #:** Res 1005-2019, **Version:** \*

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Res. No. 1005

Resolution calling upon the United States Federal Aviation Administration to ban all non-essential helicopter travel, including tourist and chartered helicopter flights over New York City.

By Council Members Levine, Rosenthal, Chin, Kallos, Rivera and Holden

Whereas, A large number of tourist helicopters fly over the city of New York every day; and

Whereas, There have been several notable accidents over the City's airspace, raising congestion and safety issues; and

Whereas, In May of this year, a charter helicopter crashed into the Hudson River while the pilot, who only suffered a hand injury, was moving the aircraft from the fueling area to the customer section of the West 30<sup>th</sup> Street Heliport; and

Whereas, A month later in June of this year, a helicopter crashed on the roof of a building in Manhattan, killing the pilot who was the sole person in the aircraft; and

Whereas, Before these incidents, there have been several other notable accidents over the City's airspace; and

Whereas, In April 1997, a corporate helicopter taking off from a heliport on East 60<sup>th</sup> Street, crashed into the East River, killing one passenger and injuring three others; and

Whereas, Later that same year, a helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing after clipping a Manhattan building, resulting in damage to the helicopter's rotor; and

Whereas, In 2007, a tour helicopter had to make an emergency landing in the Hudson River on its emergency pontoons; and

Whereas, On August 8, 2009, a helicopter operated by Liberty Helicopter Tours collided with a small

private plane over the Hudson River resulting in the deaths of all nine individuals aboard both crafts making the incident one of the deadliest helicopter accidents in New York City history; and

Whereas, In October 2011, a woman was killed and four others were injured when a tour helicopter crashed into the East River; and

Whereas, In June 2013, a tour helicopter carrying a family of four and their pilot made an emergency landing in the Hudson River after the helicopter lost power; and

Whereas, More recently, in March 2018, another helicopter operated by Liberty Helicopter Tours crashed in the East River resulting in the deaths of five passengers on board, however the pilot survived; and

Whereas, This accident was the third involving Liberty Helicopter since 2007 and since this incident, the United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) banned flights that use restraints in which passengers cannot easily free themselves ; and

Whereas, These accidents are reminders of the dangers associated with helicopters in an urban setting; and

Whereas, In addition, helicopter noise and traffic has substantially increased in the Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn areas as a result of helicopters being rerouted to the Downtown Manhattan Heliport (DMH) near South Street Seaport after the West 30<sup>th</sup> Street helipad closed to sightseeing helicopters; and

Whereas, DMH now has approximately 200 takeoffs and landings per day, 70 percent of which are sightseeing flights; and

Whereas, According to the Natural Resources Defense Council's 1999 study "Needless Noise: The Negative Impacts of Helicopter Traffic in New York City and the Tri-State Region," studies have shown exposure to frequent overhead flights to be associated with a number of health effects in children, including high blood pressure, neuroendocrinological issues, impaired psychological and cognitive functions, learned helplessness, poorer long-term memory, and diminished reading comprehension; and

Whereas, Helicopters emit air pollutants such as particulate matter, nitrogen oxide, and formaldehyde,

which are known to cause asthma, cancer, and other illnesses; and

Whereas, The federal government regulates airspace and the FAA is the entity that is charged with developing airspace regulations; and

Whereas, In an attempt to make the airspace over New York City safer, on September 2, 2009, the FAA announced new recommendations which would include new training programs for pilots, air-traffic controllers, and the tourist helicopter operators, set new mandatory speed limits for these vehicles and require all pilots to tune into the same radio channel; and

Whereas, Despite these proposed safety measures, some public officials felt the recommendations did not go far enough, because air traffic controllers would still not be required to monitor aircraft below 1,000 feet; and

Whereas, In April 2010, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC) released a Helicopter Sightseeing Plan (the Plan) to address the problems presented by tourist helicopter flights operating on city-owned property; and

Whereas, The Plan eliminated short tours, sightseeing tours over Central Park and the Empire State Building and sightseeing flights over Brooklyn; and

Whereas, The Plan also improved sightseeing tour routes and added an enhanced 311 protocol directing helicopter complaints to 311 representatives for input, improving EDC's ability to track complaints and allowing the agency to report data on noise complaints more effectively; and

Whereas, In January 2017, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) reduced tourist helicopter traffic and noise in half by limiting the number of flights departing from Manhattan's Pier 6 heliport to 28,000 per year and ending all Sunday flights; and

Whereas, The NYCEDC, working with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), five helicopter tour operators, and the Eastern Region Helicopter Council, has also established agreed

upon rules to limit the impact of helicopters on the public; and

Whereas, However, the airspace above New York City remains dangerous for these types of vehicles;  
and

Whereas, A great deal of public outcry for relief from harms caused by helicopter tours in New York City still exists, including from a wide range of public officials; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the United States Federal Aviation Administration to ban all non-essential helicopter travel, including tourist and chartered helicopter flights over New York City.

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