



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITINGS AND DISPOSITIONS
JANUARY 15, 2025**

Good Morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, the Public Advocate for the City of New York. Thank you to Chair Hanks and committee members for holding today's hearing.

Today, New York City has the opportunity to honor an important piece of our history. The Jacob Day Residence, a three-story Greek Revival Style brick row house that sits at 50 West 13th Street in Greenwich Village, is an exemplary reminder of the strength and perseverance of our city's Black community.

The residence was owned and operated by Jacob Day for 27 years, from 1857-1884, during which time Day built a successful and widely praised catering business.¹ Beyond his business successes, Day was a pillar of the Abolitionist movement, a card-carrying member of the National Anti-Slavery Society, and a contributor and patron of the Freedman's Bank.² It is rumored that Day's Greenwich Village residence served as a safe haven for the Underground Railroad, making not only his work, but the location itself a crucial symbol of our city's commitment to equality and opportunity for all newcomers, especially those in need.

After Day's passing in 1884, the residence became a staple of the community again in 1959, when it was renovated to become a theater and school.³ Among other patrons, the theater served the Afro-American Folklore Troupe, a four person theater troupe that performed an array of works by renowned Black writers and artists. Subsequently, the theater served as one of New York's longest-operating "Off-Off Broadway" theaters until its closing in 2020.⁴ Today, the building is empty and in need of repair. By consecrating this space as a landmark, I am hopeful that a pathway towards renovation and much-deserved distinction will follow.

We have a duty to honor the legacy of the Jacob Day Residence and all of its facets. Just as the space has changed over time to accommodate new communities, ideas, and purposes, we must ensure that the Day Residence is preserved by landmark recognition and safeguarded for whatever purpose it might serve our future generations. This building is a space that asks us all to reflect on the brave and meaningful work of

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https://www.nyc.gov/assets/lpc/downloads/pdf/proposed_landmarks/Jacob_Day_Residence_proposed.pdf

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.



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our brothers and sisters, who led by an example we should all follow. One that prioritizes freedom, expression, and togetherness.

Thank you.