

Written Testimony in Support of Bills 26-2024 and 70-2024 to Ban Non-Essential Helicopter Traffic in New York City

Today, April 10, 2025, a tourist helicopter crashed into the Hudson River near Lower Manhattan, resulting in what appears to be multiple fatalities and a desperate rescue operation for two adults and three children. This tragedy, unfolding just hours ago in the heart of our city, is not merely a random accident—it represents the deadly culmination of a danger many New Yorkers have been warning about for years.

The Urgent Need for Immediate Action

I stand before you today (virtually) with an urgency that cannot be overstated. This afternoon's helicopter crash near Pier 40 provides the most devastating evidence possible that our city's current approach to non-essential helicopter traffic is fundamentally unsustainable and dangerous. The Bell 206 helicopter, conducting what was reportedly its third sightseeing tour of the day, now lies submerged in the Hudson River as emergency responders work to recover victims¹⁶.

How many more tragedies must we endure before we recognize that tourist and commuter helicopters pose an unacceptable risk to our community? The time for debate has long passed—the time for action is now.

Environmental Devastation in Our Skies

The environmental impact of helicopter traffic over Manhattan is staggering and represents a direct contradiction to New York's climate goals. Each helicopter produces approximately 950 pounds of CO₂ per hour and burns over 40 times the fuel of a passenger car during the same period³⁸. With nearly 100,000 annual non-essential helicopter flights from NYC's three heliports, we are allowing a small luxury industry to inflict disproportionate climate damage on our city⁸.

Particularly concerning is the continued use of leaded fuel in some helicopters—a substance banned by the EPA 25 years ago due to its devastating impact on neurological development, especially in children³. According to the FAA, leaded aviation fuel represents "the largest remaining aggregate source of lead emissions to air in the U.S."³ Even non-leaded helicopter fuel produces dangerous particulate pollution that increases risks of respiratory and cardiovascular disease³⁸.

The Public Health Crisis of Noise Pollution

The cacophony of helicopter noise has become unbearable for New York residents. Complaints to 311 about helicopter noise have increased 17-fold over the past five years⁴. Last year alone, New Yorkers filed 59,000 complaints about helicopter noise—more

than double the 26,000 filed in 2022². These are not merely annoyances; they represent a legitimate public health crisis.

"Noise pollution is a proven health hazard and we're subjected to these non-essential helicopter flights—the tourists and the commuter flights—seven days a week, at all hours," explained Melissa Elstein, chair of Stop the Chop². A study from Robert Wood Johnson Medical School found heart attack rates were 72% higher in areas with significant transportation noise³. The constant drone of helicopters is tantamount to "the new second-hand smoke"—an environmental toxin forced upon unwilling recipients³.

A Pattern of Safety Concerns

Today's tragic crash is not an isolated incident but part of an ongoing pattern that puts both passengers and the densely populated neighborhoods below helicopter routes at risk. The vibration-heavy machines fly at low altitudes over our homes, schools, parks, and waterways³. As we saw earlier today when witness Peter Park observed detached rotor blades plummeting dangerously close to people on the New Jersey shore, the danger extends well beyond those who choose to fly⁶.

The Solution: Bills 26-2024 and 70-2024

The legislation before you represents the most consequential action this council can take to address this urgent crisis. Bills 26-2024 and 70-2024 would prohibit all non-essential helicopter operations at the Downtown Manhattan Heliport and East 34th Street heliport, effectively eliminating over 40,000 non-essential flights annually⁵⁷.

This is not about restricting essential services. Police, emergency medical services, news gathering, and military operations would continue unimpeded. Rather, this legislation targets the unnecessary luxury services—tourist flights and commuter services for the wealthy—that account for the vast majority of helicopter traffic, noise complaints, and environmental damage.

A Call for Immediate Passage

In light of today's devastating crash, I implore this council to act with the urgency this situation demands. The families of those lost in today's tragedy deserve more than our thoughts and prayers—they deserve decisive action to ensure others do not suffer the same fate.

New Yorkers have been clear in their demands. The 59,000 noise complaints filed last year tell only part of the story². Today's tragic events speak to the deadly consequences of our inaction. Non-essential helicopter flights represent minimum benefit to a tiny fraction of

our population while imposing maximum cost on our environment, our health, and, as we have seen so tragically today, human lives.

I urge you to pass bills 26-2024 and 70-2024 without delay. The time for study, for debate, and for half-measures has long passed. The stakes could not be higher, and the evidence could not be clearer. Ban non-essential helicopter traffic now, before another tragedy strikes our city.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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