

**Testimony of NYC Mayor's Office of Equity Commissioner Sideya Sherman
Before the Committees on Civil and Human Rights and Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
International Intergroup Relations
Regarding the Juneteenth Legislative Package
September 19, 2023 – 10:00am**

Chair Williams, Chair Ossé, members of the Committees on Civil and Human Rights, Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations, distinguished members of City Council and the public: good morning. I am Sideya Sherman, Commissioner of the New York City Mayor's Office of Equity. I am joined today by Sreoshy Banerjea, Executive Director at the New York City Public Design Commission; JoAnn Kamuf Ward, Deputy Commissioner for Policy and External Affairs at the New York City Commission on Human Rights; Silvia Montalban, Chief Citywide Equity and Inclusion Officer at the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services; and other representatives from the administration.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the Council's Juneteenth legislative package, which seeks to advance racial equity and justice through truth and repair. This administration is committed to upholding these values, as we work to foster a fairer and more equitable city.

Foundational Values

Last November, New Yorkers voted overwhelmingly to embed racial justice in the heart of city government, passing all three ballot measures proposed by the Racial Justice Commission. Included in the ballot measures is a new preamble for our New York City Charter, which, for the first time, introduces a set of foundational values to guide how we govern and serve the public. In the preamble, New Yorkers acknowledge "the grave injustices and atrocities that form part of our country's history" and the government's responsibility to "act intentionally to remedy these past and continuing harms and to reconstruct, revise and reimagine our foundations, structures, institutions, and laws to promote justice and equity for all New Yorkers."

The Office of Equity is steadfast and focused on uplifting these profound values throughout government as we lead implementation of these recently passed measures. This includes developing the city's first citywide racial equity plan, consisting of measurable goals and strategies for structural reform across all city agencies. The charter calls on all public servants to

reorient our roles to bring in practices of repair. With this shared commitment, we express our support for the spirit and intent of these bills and look forward to discussing them further with the Council this morning.

There are eight bills in this package. I appreciate your patience as we discuss and share overarching comments.

Int 1082, CM Louis: *creates a task force to consider the impact of slavery and past injustices for African Americans in New York City and reparations.*

The legacy of slavery in our city and country requires that we thoughtfully document past harms and integrate approaches for repair. To achieve the most meaningful impact, we believe this bill could benefit from further refinement to align and address potential overlap with Intro 1073 – which calls for a Truth & Reconciliation Commission -- and the recently passed reparations taskforce bill that awaits Governor Hochul's signature at the state level. We also recommend extending the implementation timeline and that the start date is timed to fall more than one year after the city issues its first citywide racial equity plan.

Executing this work with the rigor it deserves requires significant staffing power, legal resources, research, and academic expertise. For example, California's reparations task force undertook two years of work with considerable staff resources and support from the California DOJ. More than one year would be required to lead this vital work in our nation's largest city, with one of its longest histories.

Int 1073, CM Hudson: *would create a truth, healing, and reconciliation process.*

Our charter's preamble recognizes "the profound physical, emotional, social, and psychological harm and trauma to individuals, families, and communities" and charges us to "reconstruct, revise and reimagine our foundations, structures, institutions, and laws to promote justice and equity for all New Yorkers." Truth and reconciliation commissions can be a powerful vehicle for promoting racial equity and justice.

As stated earlier in my testimony, we recommend the Council consider refining this bill to address potential areas of overlap with Int 1082. We also share the same concerns regarding

allowing an adequate timeline to ensure appropriate staff resources and quality execution of this work.

From a statutory perspective, Bill 1073 tasks the Commission on Racial Equity (CORE) to lead this work, which may fall outside CORE's intended focus as presently defined in the charter. CORE is not written into law as a watchdog or as a fact-finding body. As reflected in the Racial Justice Commission's report, CORE was developed in response to New Yorkers who "desired to have City government more directly reflect community priorities and, to the extent possible, incorporate community power directly into decision-making." CORE's essential charter-mandated duties include identifying community equity priorities and responding to the citywide racial equity plan. CORE's current composition reflects this goal. This process will require additional resources, access to experts, and ample time. We recommend that the Council consider how to best work with CORE to leverage its resources and clarify within the bill which body would implement the reconciliation process after a plan is created.

We support the aim and intent of both bills and would happily continue working with the Council to identify or review paths forward.

Int 1101, CM Farias: *requires the Mayor's Office of Racial Equity to create anti-racism training for employees of human services contractors used by human services agencies.*

Our city's robust human service sector provides critical social services to New Yorkers in need. It is crucial that those who selflessly serve our city's diverse communities understand anti-racism and can incorporate best practices into their work. We support this bill with caveats.

Fueled by the pandemic, the human services sector has experienced considerable strain over the past few years. The Administration has worked diligently to improve how we do business with nonprofits, creating a new Office of Nonprofits, clearing over \$6 billion in backlogged payments, and embarking on the reform recommendations outlined in the Joint Task Force to Get Nonprofits Paid on Time. To ensure this requirement is a true value add for employees and New Yorkers by extension, the city would need to invest significant resources and allow ample time for implementation. We also suggest resolving the ambiguity of "covered employee" by applying the requirement to all employees involved in providing services, including managers. We don't think anti-racism or anti-discrimination should only be for front-line workers.

Int 1118, Williams: *Requires the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) to annually create anti-racism and anti-racial discrimination training for all city workers. Agencies can satisfy this requirement with alternative training if approved by the Mayor's Office of Racial Equity and CCHR.*

The preamble directs our government: "Vigilance is required to prevent the recurrence of past or worsening of continuing harms." DCAS implements an "Everybody Matters" training biannually that helps employees recognize different types of discrimination and racial inequity, introduces anti-racism concepts, and is mandated EEO training. To expand city employee understanding of racism and how it can show up in our work, we recommend that the Office of Equity and CCHR partner with DCAS to help build upon their existing "Everybody Matters" training to introduce a new and expanded anti-racism module. This module would also help city employees understand the recent racial justice charter amendments and the citywide racial equity planning required by law.

We support recognition of the painful history of slavery that endures through our city and country today, as well as highlighting and uncovering the often-underappreciated history of resilience, courage, and community-building by the city's Black communities across generations. In this spirit, the city, led by the Department of Cultural Affairs, looks forward to working with the Council to advance **Int 1150 (Marte, 13)** - *in relation to establishing a New York City freedom trail*. Furthermore, DOT and NYC Parks look forward to further discussions with the Public Advocate to identify an appropriate location for the sign, in response to Intro 934 (**Public Advocate Williams**) - *which requires the Department of Transportation to place a sign at Wall Street and Pearl Street marking the establishment of New York's first slave market in 1711*.

With respect to **Int 716 (CM De La Rosa)**, *which would create a school diversity monitor within CCHR, the City's Human Rights Commission, and Int 1085 (CM Nurse)*, *which would task the Public Design Commission (PDC) within six months to conduct a public works review and create a removal plan*, we have concerns regarding appropriateness of the agencies identified and alignment with existing efforts and requirements.

The administration shares the Council's commitment to increasing diversity across our school system and ensuring equitable educational opportunities and outcomes. However, Int 716, which places an oversight monitor at CCHR, is inconsistent with CCHR's core functions of civil law

enforcement outreach on the Human Rights Law's protections. Further, the critical work outlined in 716, which includes identifying the complex root causes of inequities is potentially duplicative of current and ongoing administration efforts to advance educational equity, including work of agencies like New York City Public Schools, and the newly mandated citywide racial equity planning process, requiring agencies to disaggregate data by race, establish goals, and build strategies to achieve racial equity through structural reforms.

We support the intent of **Int 1085** to reevaluate, recontextualize, and foster greater diversity in the city's art collection. We should note that the Public Design Commission considers applications related to permanent public art in the city's collection following the process outlined in the City Charter, which requires a public meeting and vote by the PDC, among other steps. The city owns approximately 2,500 pieces of art. The PDC would need a significant commitment of resources to conduct extensive research, likely in phases, and begin the collaborative process of creating and issuing new guidance on items in the city collection, requiring significantly more than six months to develop.

As part of the city's broader efforts to create a public art collection that better reflects our city's diversity, PDC is committed to promoting equity and diverse narratives through art, including by partnering with Black Gotham Experience to expand the City Hall tour program, focusing on the untold histories and impact of the African diaspora. The Commission recently approved the addition of a monument honoring Shirley Chisholm in Prospect Park, which is the first artwork in a larger project to honor more women in our public realm. Earlier in 2018 and 2021, following the 2018 Mayoral Monument Commission report, the PDC also approved the removal of the Teddy Roosevelt Statue at the American Museum of National History and the J. Marion Sims Sculpture at Central Park. The PDC advanced these actions through its existing application, public hearing, and vote cycle.

We look forward to discussing these bills and the full Juneteenth bill package further in today's hearing. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment and for these bold proposals to create a more just city. We welcome your questions.



JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS

**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON
CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS AND COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS
SEPTEMBER 19, 2023**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I thank Chair Williams and Chair Ossé and members of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights and the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations for holding this hearing and allowing me the opportunity to provide a statement.

In 2014, I introduced [Int 0036-2014](#) when I was a Councilmember. This bill was heard, but not voted on. However in 2015, the De Blasio administration agreed to proceed with placing a sign near, but not at the original location of the first slave trade at Pearl and Wall Streets. Today, the signage currently stands in Manhattan Park on the corner of Wall Street and Water Street. I am calling on my colleagues to support [Int 0934-2023](#) to ensure that we place a plaque at the correct location of where the slave trade first took place in 1711.

While I am grateful that the previous administration took the initiative to move forward without the benefit of a local law, it is also necessary for our history to be captured accurately. In fact, two of my staff went out last year looking for the existing sign and they encountered a senior citizen who had learned about the sign on a Manhattan Neighborhood Network documentary. She ventured out on three different occasions before finding the sign.

This plaque ensures that every New Yorker and visitor knows that this city was built on the backs of the enslaved. Captive African slaves arrived on slave ships along the East River and were brought to the market on this site as part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. During this time, New York's economy was fueled by slavery. Enslaved Africans used to clear the lands to create Broadway, build the first City Hall, the Fraunces Tavern, and the very wall that Wall Street is named for.

At this very moment throughout our nation, some are introducing legislation to not teach this history. It is critical that people see the connection between what is happening today and what happened at this market. It has been more than 250 years since this market was active and all of these communities still feel the crippling generational effects of our past. The centuries that followed clearly show the ramifications of slavery transitioning into structural, institutional and systemic racism.



JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS

I would like to thank Councilmember Charles Barron for co-introducing this bill with me. Passing this legislation will allow us as a city to acknowledge the enslaved men, women, and children and pay our respects to the descendants. It is monumental that we permanently document this onto the walls that mark this intersection along with speaking about it into the record.

Thank you.



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

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**Testimony in Support of Bill 1150 Freedom Trail Task Force
September 19, 2023**

Contact: Frampton Tolbert, Executive Director, framptont@hdc.org/212-614-9107

As the citywide advocate for New York's architectural, historical and cultural neighborhoods, HDC enthusiastically supports Bill 1150, Establishing a New York City Freedom Trail Task Force.

This Task Force would establish walking tours that commemorate historical sites in New York City that are associated with the Abolitionist Movement and Underground Railroad both citywide, and in Lower Manhattan specifically. Such walks offer New Yorkers the opportunity to honor, to learn, and to identify this vitally important history in the city's built environment.

Too often, New York City's physical fabric does not commemorate this history, and the agencies which steward New York's buildings and protect its landmarks, have for a long time left the histories the Abolitionist Movement, the Underground Railroad, and of the Black New Yorkers more broadly, out of the record of the city's history. While these agencies recently have begun to protect places to rectify this long oversight, much work needs to be done.

Community advocates have worked tirelessly to gain landmark status for sites related to Abolitionist history, including recent notable Individual Landmarks such as the Harriet and Thomas Truesdell House at 227 Duffield Street in Brooklyn, the (Former) Colored School No. 4, at 128 West 17th Street in Manhattan, and the Joseph Rodman Drake Park and Enslaved African Burial Ground in the Bronx, which is under consideration by LPC for landmark status as we speak.

HDC has been proud to support all of these designations. We hope that the Freedom Trail Task Force will uplift both landmarked sites, and those which have yet to receive such recognition and protection from the City. We hope the Task Force's work will not only inspire New Yorkers, but also inspire city agencies to give these sites the consideration, care and protection they have so long deserved.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

New-York Historical Society’s Testimony for the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations Introductory Hearing on establishing a New York City Freedom Trail Task Force

September 19, 2023

Good morning. My name is Salonee Bhaman, and I am a Postdoctoral Fellow in Women’s and Public History at the New-York Historical Society’s Center for Women’s History. I hold a PhD. in History from Yale University, and have been a public historian working in New York City for the last eight years. Thank you to the Chair to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Chi Ossé, the Chair of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights, Nantasha Williams, and Councilmember Christopher Marte for convening this important hearing on preserving and highlighting New York City’s important role in the history of freedom and abolition in the United States. This is especially important given recent attacks on history education throughout the United States.

The New-York Historical Society (NYHS) is a scholarly and cultural institution that has been preserving and interpreting New York City history since 1804, making it the first museum in New York City. In addition to curating and interpreting history for the public through exhibitions, programming, and a robust K-12 educational department, NYHS is a major research institution, offering visitors and scholars access to a vast collection of art, objects, artifacts, documents, and manuscripts through its Library and Museum divisions. In 2017, the NYHS opened the newly re-designed Henry Luce III Center for the Study of American Culture, which offers visitors an interactive expiration of historic objects from the collection, including the 1863 draft wheel used in the lottery that set off the Civil War Draft Riots as well as the Center For Women’s History, the first of its kind within the walls of a major museum in the United States.

The eleven original founders of the New-York Historical Society lived through the American Revolution and subsequent British occupation of New York. They founded the NYHS to ensure that eyewitness evidence of their own historical moment would be preserved, relieving that without the “aid of original records and authentic documents” that “history will be nothing more than a well-combined series of ingenious conjectures and amusing fables.” It is in that spirit that the NYHS has endeavored to preserve, interpret, and publicize the history of New York over the past century.

This mission often requires the museum to reckon with parts of the past that are complicated, fraught, and integrally important to telling an accurate version of the American story. Investigating and interpreting New York’s own historical entanglement with the institution of slavery has been a major part of that work in the recent past. For example, in 2005, the New York Historical Society mounted a landmark exhibition exploring the history of “Slavery in New York.” It was one of the first exhibits to reckon with our State’s role in a history often relegated to the American South in popular imagination. In 2007, a follow up exhibition, “New York Divided” guided visitors through the history of the City between the abolition of slavery in New York State in 1927 and the end of the Civil War in 1865. In 2011, the New-York Historical Society expanded its own street presence by installing life-size bronze sculptures of Abraham Lincoln on Central Park West and Fredrick Douglass on West 77th Street.

As a fellow at the Center for Women’s History, my job is both to think about how to best tell stories about the centrality of women and their work to American history— stories that have often been overlooked. My colleagues and I strive to create exhibits, blog posts, and events that speak to both those who seek out our programming as well as those who might only have a passing interest or simply stumble upon it. Often, we showcase history that is in conversation with the content and goals of the proposed

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

Freedom Trail project. For example, just this past Spring, the Center for Women's History mounted an exhibition of the artist Kara Walker's re-imagining of fifteen prints from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*, annotated to highlight the African American figures left out of the original two-volume anthology.

In addition to my work at the New York Historical Society, I have led walking tours throughout New York City exploring topics ranging from the history of Harlem, the Revolutionary War, Central Park, Immigration History, and the Labor Movement for nearly eight years. I most recently developed and wrote an original tour exploring the Queer History of the Lower East Side in partnership with the Henry Street Settlement and the Close Friends Collective. Being a tour guide has allowed me to watch the history of the City of New York come alive for hundreds of New Yorkers and visitors alike as they explore the places and spaces where history took place for themselves. The creation of a "Lower Manhattan Freedom Trail" represents an important opportunity to emphasize the centrality of struggles over slavery and freedom within our City's story by offering the thousands of people who pass through the area daily a chance to learn about this often-obscured history.

As any walking tour guide worth their salt will tell you, much of the area is already designated as "Historic Lower Manhattan" -- sometimes referred to as the "Stone Street Historic District." It includes several key landmarks useful in telling the story of enslavement, abolition, and freedom in New York City. To name just a few of them, these sites include the Fulton Street Docks, where many free Black sailors worked. Some of them would translate the stories of enslaved Africans aboard the infamous *Amistad*, garnering support for the abolitionist cause throughout the area during the highly publicized trial. Other sites include the Meal Market, which was the largest open-air market slave market in the United States until the years following the Haitian Revolution; two sites of the African Free School; and the Isaac Hopper book store where abolitionists and the likes of Harriet Tubman organized for their cause.

Lower Manhattan also has a dense concentration of well-marked sites that are notable for their place in the founding of America-- underscoring just how intimately this history is tied to that of enslavement. For example, within a few blocks of each other are the tavern where George Washington bid farewell to his troops after the Revolutionary War, an event that also set in motion a battle over whether or not enslaved people who fought for the British in exchange for their freedom would remain free; the Tontine Coffee House where enslaved people were bought and sold which would go on to house the first New York Stock Exchange in 1792; and Trinity Wall Street, where prominent congregants like Alexander Hamilton and John Jay founded the Manumission Society to educate Black children. In 1991, during the construction of the Ted Weiss Federal Building at 290 Broadway, workers discovered the remains that are now believed to have belonged to more than 400 free and enslaved Africans buried over 300 years ago. The site was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1993 and became a National Monument in 2006.

However, without a unifying historical narrative, these landmarks risk appearing to the average viewer as a form of trivia from the past. A project like the "Freedom Trail" would make sense of these disparate sites by connecting the dots with what we in the history business call "scaffolding": context, detail, and narrative structure. It is my belief and hope that someone might encounter a piece of information inadvertently on the trail and become interested enough to pursue learning more about the past.

The addition of physical markers commemorating sites along a "Freedom Trail" would make an important contribution by giving voice to the rich history of resistance and abolition that was also part of our City's history. Unlike a freestanding exhibition or digital archive curated by one institution, physical markers commemorating a "Freedom Trail" put in place by a collaborative task force would allow a much

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

wider audience to reckon with this history and invite them into a rich historic conversation underway at many of our cultural institutions. A diversity of viewpoints perspectives on the task force would ensure that the story is told with historical rigor, accuracy, and fresh perspective. It is my belief and hope that someone might encounter a piece of information inadvertently on the trail and become interested enough to pursue learning more about the past.

We live in an era where historical inquiry is under attack. Across the United States, book bans and state curriculum mandates forbid teachers from discussing topics as fundamental to understanding our history as slavery and Reconstruction. For historians, this is bad news: our work, at its best, is to rigorously account for the past in the hope that a different future might be possible. In 2022, New York City hosted over 56 million tourists. If we do it right, the creation of a Freedom Trail project allows us the rare opportunity to speak to them about the history of this country with truth, integrity, and care. The New-York Historical Society looks forward to working collaboratively with the other partner institutions who will be involved in crafting the final version of the Freedom Trail in Lower Manhattan.

Thank you, Chair Nantasha Williams, Chair Osse, and members of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights and the Committee on Cultural Affairs. My name is Steven Payne, and I am a professional historian and Director of The Bronx County Historical Society, a member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for your ongoing support of arts and culture across New York City.

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support of Intro. 1150, which would work towards establishing a Freedom Trail in New York City commemorating sites that were associated with the Underground Railroad and Abolitionist movement. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Abolitionist movement aimed at abolishing slavery—like the contemporary Abolitionist movement aimed at abolishing the afterlives of slavery—represents the core of genuine democracy in this country. Creating a Freedom Trail from the multiple sites throughout New York City that contributed to this legacy of struggle is an excellent way to uplift and foster a tangible sense of pride in this history. In many instances, more research needs to be conducted to identify and unearth sites relevant to this history, especially in the outer boroughs. Then, as now, Abolitionism was a dangerous affair, so secrecy and lack of record-keeping were par for the course. The appointment of members of the proposed Task Force for Intro. 1150, therefore, should be taken very seriously, given the incredible importance and contemporary relevance of this history.

As has been the case in Boston, a Freedom Trail in New York City also has the potential to attract more visitors to our great city. As a result, it will be important to situate this commemorative project in a holistic and intentional framework of contemporary social, racial, and economic justice. It is my hope that this Freedom Trail, when implemented, will provide multiple otherwise disenfranchised neighborhoods across New York City a chance to become major cultural hubs, grounded in the elevation of the history of struggles for human freedom and liberation.

Thank you, as always, for the opportunity to testify, and for your leadership.



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September 22, 2023

To the Honorable New York City Council,

On behalf of the staff, Board of Trustees, and all constituents of the Queens Historical Society I would like to voice our full support of the proposed bill, Int. No. 1150, that would establish a task force to consider the creation of a citywide New York City freedom trail and a Lower Manhattan freedom trail in that area.

The freedom trail will feature walkable tours which mark and commemorate historical sites in New York City that are associated with the abolitionist movement and Underground Railroad.

As executive director of the Queens Historical Society, I am honored to support this bill as trails like the proposed freedom trail will serve the community for generations to come who will learn of these important stories of the past long after we have gone.

Flushing, Queens, the home of the Queens Historical Society, has played an integral part in the Underground Railroad. Notable historic Flushing locations including the John Bowne House, the Quaker Meeting House and even the present day location of Citi Field (which 200 years ago was an island called St. Ronan's Well), were all used as hiding places for runaway slaves who were making their way to freedom.

For more than 50 years, the Queens Historical Society remains committed to preserving, showcasing, and celebrating the history and culture of Queens - the most dynamic and diverse county in America.

Thank you and stay safe,

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FOR THE RECORD

UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS



LEGISLATIVE MEMO



The United Federation of Teachers represents more than 190,000 employees including teachers and classroom paraprofessionals, along with school secretaries, attendance teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, adult education teachers, administrative law judges, nurses, laboratory technicians, speech therapists, and 60,000 retired members. We also represent teachers and other employees at a number of private educational institutions and some charter schools.

Committee on Civil and Human Rights

Int. 716 (De La Rosa): Creating a school diversity monitor within the human rights commission

Summary of Legislation

Int. 716 would create a school diversity monitor within the city's Commission on Human Rights. This position would monitor racial segregation in the city's school system, including charter schools under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education, and would make recommendations to alleviate disparate impact discrimination. The bill would require the monitor to produce annual reports to the mayor, the DOE, and the Speaker on the DOE's efforts in combating segregation in the schools and implementation efforts by the DOE to ensure greater integration of the overall school system.

Statement of Position

New York City has always been a gateway city for immigrants from across the globe and transplants from across our country and is widely considered a beacon of diversity like no other. However, studies have shown that our schools are considered among the most segregated in the state and the nation. As educators and child advocates, we have a responsibility to grapple with the policies and practices that we believe have the greatest impact on children. The current level of segregation in many of our schools harms our students and limits their ability to learn about tolerance, acceptance and creating connections across difference.

Integrating our school system will require a deep understanding of what schools and districts are the most segregated, and we welcome the insights that a school diversity monitor would add to existing reporting requirements on school diversity, including data on disparate impact discrimination. We also applaud the inclusion of monitoring for charter schools under the jurisdiction of the DOE, given that among charter school students, 95% of black students and 91% of Latino students attend intensely segregated schools. In addition, most New York City charter schools have far lower enrollment rates of high-needs students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, and are known for their excessive disciplinary policies that push out students who do not comply with their strict disciplinary codes. Given these patterns, we believe this monitor should extend its scrutiny to all charters within the City.

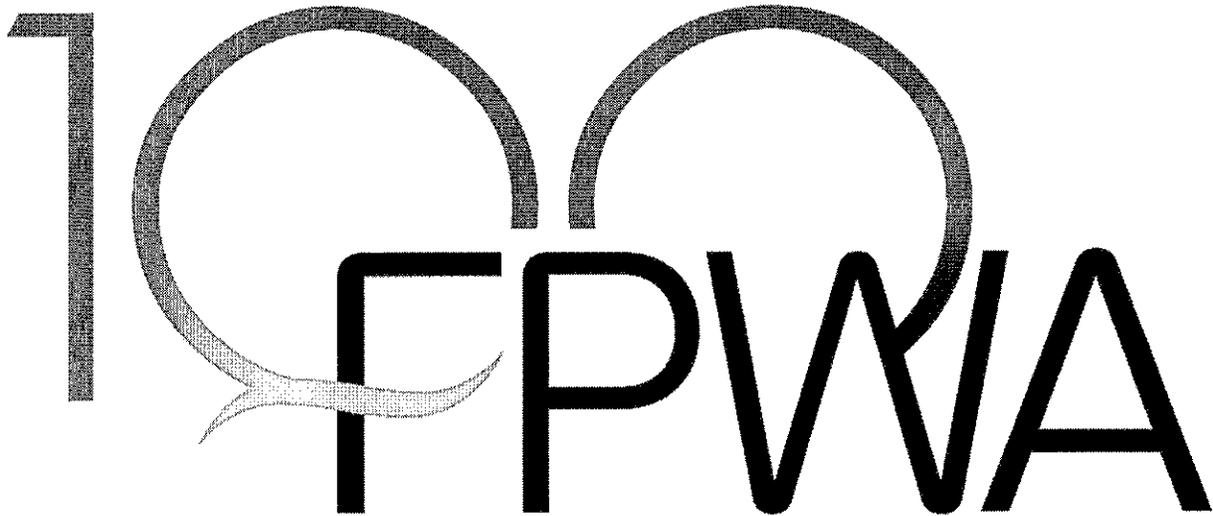
That said, as our union has previously testified before the Council, we are concerned about the creation of additional levels of administrative and bureaucratic titles in city government given the urgency of ensuring adequate funding for staff providing direct services to students. Our recommendation is that the duties of this title and the responsibility for related reports and data be incorporated into existing roles in the Commission on Human Rights rather than accomplished through the creation of a new office.

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Testimony of FPWA

**Presented to:
Committee on Civil & Human Rights
Hon. Chair Nantasha Williams
Council Chambers
September 19, 2023**

**Jennifer Jones Austin
Executive Director/CEO**

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Good morning, Chair Williams and Committee members. I am Jennifer Jones Austin, CEO of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Intro 1118, which requires anti-racism and anti-discrimination trainings for City employees, and Intro 1101, which requires an anti-racism training for human services contractors.

The Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA) is an anti-poverty, policy, and advocacy organization committed to advancing economic opportunity, justice, and upward mobility for New Yorkers with low incomes, and ensuring that human services agencies caring for persons experiencing hardship have the resources and key supports needed to do so impactfully.

Significantly relevant to this hearing today is the reason FPWA was founded 101 years ago. In 1922, FPWA was organized to be a voice at the policy and decision-making table for mothers, children, and families in need, and particularly mothers, children, and families of color. At a time in New York City's history when the delivery of government-funded social services programs was often segregated on the basis of race and religion with white people of the Jewish faith receiving services from agencies of the Jewish faith and with the support of the United Jewish Association, and people of the Catholic faith-- many white--receiving services from agencies affiliated with Catholic Charities, agencies caring for mothers and children of color were without a voice to speak up for them and their clients. FPWA was founded by notable New Yorkers of the Protestant faith to be their voice and to champion their causes for equality and equity in services and supports.

At all times centering on and appreciating the impact of our work on people and communities of color, FPWA has driven groundbreaking policy reforms to better serve those in need and the agencies caring for them. We work to dismantle the structural and systemic barriers that impede economic security and well-being, and to strengthen the capacity of human services agencies and faith organizations so New Yorkers with lower incomes can thrive and live with dignity.

FPWA's century's long history of fighting for racial justice and equity in government-funded social services programming and delivery in New York City, along with my nearly 30 years of experience working in and with the City of New York and non-profit human services agencies under contract with the City compels me to urge the City Council to pass Intro 1101-2023 (Farías) and Intro 1118-2023 (Williams). As a former City official serving as Deputy Commissioner for the Administration of Children's Services and subsequently as the first Family Services Coordinator of the City of New York, as Senior Vice President of the United Way of New York City, Chair of the New York City Board of Correction, Chair of the New York City Racial Justice Commission, and as CEO of FPWA, experience has taught me that given the structural and institutional racism and bias that permeate every pillar of society, unless and until we embed and require anti-racism and -bias teaching and practice in government and human service agency functions, we cannot and will not begin to realize equality and equity for all New Yorkers.

Passing Intro 1118, and thereby creating an annually mandated anti-racism and anti-racial discrimination training requirement for all City employees, would be a concrete and demonstrative step forward in achieving the desires of New Yorkers of a more just and equitable New York. As we all remember, an overwhelming majority of New Yorkers expressed with their vote in November 2022 their commitment to becoming the first city in the nation to embed racial justice and equity in the New York City Charter and all government agencies and functions. Intro 1118 is essential to fulfilling this mandate.

As Chair of the Racial Justice Commission and Chair of the Board of Correction, and as an advisor in 2020 and 2021 to the New York Police Department Commissioner on critical reforms in connection with people and communities of color, I have heard from many New Yorkers about their run-ins and experiences with discrimination and bias—both conscious and unconscious—when interfacing with City employees. During the Racial Justice Commission community meetings in 2021, commissioners heard from City employees themselves about racism in hirings and promotions; in 2020 this distinguished City Council released a report evidencing persisting racial and gender inequities and disparities in pay; and in

2022, the City of New York settled a lawsuit with several employees who alleged racial discrimination and bias in overtime distribution on the part of management.

Clearly, efforts to overcome racism and bias require more than legislation making such practices illegal. By raising awareness and understanding of racism and bias, especially that which is unconscious, through annually mandated trainings of all City employees—similar to the successful practice of annual, anti-sexual harassment training required of them--we have a better chance of changing minds, attitudes, and beliefs, which is essential to our becoming a city where racial equity is an active pursuit, not just an admirable aim.

Intro 1101 is equally essential to dismantling structural and institutional racism and bias in New York City. The human services sector has long been a lifeline to millions of New Yorkers in their time of need. Yet, this sector is far from being immune to racism and bias and its lingering harms. These societal ills have pervaded the human services sector from the earliest days of social services delivery when often women of color were treated as less worthy of support and assistance than white women, and agencies founded by other women of color from within marginalized communities had to rise up to care for their own, to City practices in the 1990s when human services agencies caring for children of color were hard pressed to hold government contracts paying equitable rates, and more recently with agencies paying sub-par wages for nonprofit workers, the great majority of whom are persons of color and overwhelmingly women, in large part because of government funded contracts that do not provide funding for fair wages. Sadly and alarmingly, in New York City's human services nonprofits a majority of workers whose salaries are funded with government contracts are paid so little that they are eligible for some of the same income supports as their clients, and the government knows it.

In 2021, FPWA, working with several of its member agencies and subsequently with NYU, the Fund for the City of New York, and 1 Digit, examined the ongoing challenges human services agencies

confront daily in seeking to help individuals, children, and families overcome their hardships. Our research led us to conclude that much like the rest of society, the human services sector is also plagued by racism and bias. Views and beliefs about clients—their conditions and their abilities—are influenced by human services workers' conscious and unconscious biases. In 2022, we brought our research and related concerns to the Adams Administration and began working together to reimagine human services. Our collaborative work has identified structural racism as a chilling root cause of the human services sector's ongoing challenge in helping people overcome persisting hardship and in strengthening and supporting the human services workforce. The system is constrained by design to remain rooted in structural racism and to perpetuate biases about who is worthy of support and who is not—including the persons providing services-- and what the responsibility of the government is to ameliorate these ills and resulting harms.

Intro 1101, which would require an annual anti-racism training for nonprofit human services employees, would help build and foster among them greater awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation for people with diverse backgrounds and cultures, and also empower them to combat racism, bias, and related injustices, and would promote anti-racist and biased policies, practices, and norms in human services.

Laws that outlaw discrimination have been codified for decades. Yet sadly, these laws do little to weed out racism and bias, especially that which is discrete, in everyday government and human services policies and practices. And, when these biases are held by persons in power—leadership, management, and staff—working for, with, and on behalf of those with lesser structural and situational power, unfair and disparate treatment is not only allowed but enabled to endure. With Intro 1118 and Intro 1101 we can begin to change the trajectory and bring an end to sanctioned structural and institutional racism.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

The Gotham Center for New York City History

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Testimony for New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations, Hearing on INT 1150-2023 New York city Freedom Trail Task Force Proposal

September 19, 2023

Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to make a statement in support of the goal of bringing greater public awareness to the central place of New York City to the history of struggle in America over slavery, equality, freedom, and citizenship, contests that go to the very core of the meaning of America, and what it means to be an American. New York City is the home for numerous important sites in the history of American abolitionism and the Underground Railroad, some already recognized, others largely forgotten and unmarked. The Gotham Center for New York City History at the City University of New York's Graduate Center supports the proposal for a Freedom Trail, which should use a series of informative markers to link these sites to educate the public about both the history of slavery and the movement to destroy it.

The Freedom Trail would give the public a major resource that is sorely absent from the landscape, paying homage to all those New Yorkers who suffered in captivity and bravely fought to liberate others. The Gotham Center has just launched a similar project, NYC Revolutionary Trail, which combines walking tours of historic sites with educational material for teachers, to likewise raise awareness of NYC's centrality in the history of the American Revolution. A key part of this effort is to diversify the standard narrative, and highlight the complicated role that slavery played in the story, particularly in New York.

To take just one example, many people know Fraunces Tavern, a prominent stop in our Trail, as the location at which General George Washington announced his resignation to a gathering of his officers after the British evacuation. Fewer know that it hosted an even larger moment in the history of freedom as the site of the Birch Trials, which determined the fate of 3,000+ black Loyalists, before Washington's return. Under British occupation, New York became an "island of liberty," with 10,000 "fugitives" or "runaways" finding sanctuary in the wider metropolitan area during the war, roughly half the number who escaped slavery during what has been called "the first emancipation." With independence assured in 1782-83, slaveowners flocked to New York from around the colonies in search of their "property." Boston King remembered the "inexpressible anguish and terror" the population felt at the sight and thought of masters "seizing upon slaves in the streets of New York, [and] even dragging them out

of their beds.” Aware of such threats and violence, British General Sir Guy Carleton established a commission to meet every Wednesday to evaluate owners’ claims. The commission issued documents (“Birch certificates”) granting freedom to thousands, including many soldiers like King who settled in Nova Scotia. In all, 1,336 men, 914 women, and 740 children were manumitted. While modest in number, not until the Civil War would so many again gain their freedom at once. The British decision to not compensate their owners was also historic, rarely exemplified later.

In direct response to the “kidnapping industry,” which continued to threaten Black New Yorkers even after British evacuation, citizens gathered at Simmons’ Tavern at the northwest corner of Wall and Nassau Streets on January 25, 1785 to establish the New York Manumission Society (NYMS). While no historic marker exists for the Tavern, the NYMS was perhaps only the second abolitionist organization ever to be created at that point. Their work involved lobbying the state legislature for various reforms, providing legal assistance to enslaved persons, reporting violations of laws against slave trading, and most significant for this committee establishing the foundation of Black education in NYC by building the African Free Schools, probably the first schools for Blacks in America. Founded with the aim of proving that whites and Blacks were equal in intellectual ability, they educated the children of formerly enslaved people for economic independence and civic participation. The schools were eventually incorporated into the city’s common school system, and left a legacy well worth commemorating. Among those who graduated were important Black abolitionists like Henry Highland Garnet and James McCune Smith.

The Freedom Trail should also educate the public about other nationally important sites in NYC, like 152 Church Street. This was the original home of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, where one of the first African Americans to earn a college degree, John Brown Russwurm, and his partner Reverend Samuel Cornish, printed the first African American newspaper in 1827, *Freedom’s Journal*. That year, New York finally mandated the emancipation of its 3,000 remaining slaves. Russwurm, Cornish, and other Black printers defended the freedom of runaway slaves, fought to provide equal educational resources, civil and political rights, and abolition of slavery.

Other key sites include the offices of the *Colored American* at No. 2 Frankfort Street¹ and No. 9 Spruce Street,² and later the *Weekly Anglo-African* at 48 Beekman Street.³ These newspapers served as hubs for connecting Black New Yorkers with activists elsewhere in the state and country. Alongside Black churches, they were also centers of community organization, protecting free Black New Yorkers from kidnapping through vigilance committees. They also successfully petitioned the state for laws protecting due process rights of alleged fugitives, planning and carrying out interference with the activities of slave catchers, and providing refuge, transportation, and material assistance to those fleeing enslavement. Perhaps no location was more important to this last set of

¹ *Colored American*, March 28, 1838.

² *Colored American*, October 2, 1841.

³ *Weekly Anglo-African*, October 29, 1859.

activities than 36 Lispenard Street, the home of Black abolitionist David Ruggles and, for years, headquarters of the New York Vigilance Committee, which helped thousands of refugees from enslavement escape through New York.

At 143 Nassau Street, the American Anti-Slavery Society (AAS) served as the headquarters for a massive campaign during the 1830s that pushed the issue of slavery onto the floor of the national legislature. The AAS issued the *Emancipator*, and later the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. Its presses also turned out copy after copy of searing indictments like *American Slavery As It Is*, a book compiled by Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke-Weld and Sarah Grimke. Not least importantly, for decades before the Civil War, the Nassau Street printing office also published works condemning discrimination and prejudice against people of color.⁴ Alongside these publications, NYC's abolitionist organizations played an outsized role in the struggle against American slavery. So central was the Nassau Street office to the abolitionist movement that pro-slavery forces in Congress used 'Nassau Street' to denote similar activity in the nation at large, just as today people refer to 'Wall Street' or 'Silicon Valley' metaphorically.⁵

Many people know about the NYC draft riots, which viciously targeted abolitionist homes, Black churches, and the Colored Orphan asylum in July 1863. Few know about the anti-abolition riots that rocked NYC between October 1833 and August 1834. The most intense rioting lasted over two days in July 1834, requiring the National Guard to restore order. Pro-slavers condemned New York's many abolitionists and sought to reassure slaveholders that their aims had little sympathy in the city. Rioters targeted Black homes, churches, and businesses, and burned the home of Lewis Tappan on Rose Street, minutes from City Hall by foot. Tappan, a prominent abolitionist, had contributed significant amounts of money to the cause and served on the boards of the American Anti-Slavery Society as well as on the New York State Vigilance Committee.

These activities made NYC a national testing-ground for debate over the civil and political rights of all persons (regardless of color), the constitutional obligations of states, the powers of the federal government, and the place of African Americans in American society and their relationship to the system of government. All these contests were rooted in conflicting beliefs about the morality and legality of enslavement. They were a powerful force driving the nation towards both Civil War, laying important groundwork for the dramatic changes of Reconstruction.

⁴ William Jay, *An Inquiry in the Character and Tendencies of the American Colonization, and American Anti-Slavery Societies*, 10th Ed. (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1840); [William Jay], *On the Condition of the Free People of Color in the United States* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839); see notice of American Anti-Slavery Society's press issuing Lydia Maria Child's anti-racist *An Appeal on Behalf of that Class of Americans Called Africans* (originally published in Boston in 1833) found in New York *Emancipator*, April 1, 1836.

⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1 session, Appendix, 90, 287; William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 97.

There are other sites connected with this history also deserving of recognition, but any Freedom Trail linking NYC's historically significant sites would be an important step in bringing greater public awareness to the history of these contests and their pivotal role in shaping the American past, present, and future.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Andrew J. Lang
The Gotham Center for New York City History
The Graduate Center, City University of New York

To: The New York City Council Committee on Civil and Human Rights and the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

From: Hope Church East Village, Reparations Working Group

Re: Int. 716, Int. 934, Int. 1073, Int. 1082, Int. 1085, Int. 1101, Int. 1118, and Int. 1150

Date: September 19, 2023

Thank you to the Committee on Civil and Human Rights and the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations for the opportunity to testify in support of the bills being heard today, especially Intro 1082 and Intro 1073. We are a group of New York City residents and congregants at Hope Church East Village, who are deeply interested in seeing reparations paid to Black Americans in New York City. Given the centuries of federal inaction on this topic, we formed this group to consider what reparations could look like for us individually and as a church community in New York City. The proposals before the committee mirror some of the reforms we have been trying to practice and implement in our church community.

We acknowledge that European colonizers stole the land that constitutes New York City from the Lenape people, for which they have yet to receive redress. While we understand that the focus of this hearing is reparations for Black Americans, we hope that these efforts inspire reconciliation and reparations for Indigenous peoples as well.

New York City actively participated in and facilitated the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. Large corporations that currently call New York City home earned unconscionable profits on goods produced by slave labor. This mass exploitation continues to have downstream effects in the present for Black Americans. Yet so many New Yorkers do not know or understand our city's horrific, inextricable connection to slavery.

We are encouraged to see that Intro 1082 would create a task force to consider the impact of slavery and reparations for past injustices. It is crucial to fully understand the extent of the loss and harm caused by the institution of slavery to properly address them. To that end, we also support the intent of Intro 1073 to establish historical facts about slavery in New York City and recommend changes for governments and institutions to prevent recurrence and perpetuation of harm. We agree that it is crucial for this process to have robust public participation where the experiences and recommendations of directly impacted communities are centered. Further, we hope that the report and its recommendations will lead to actionable change and tangible economic benefit for Black New Yorkers. In support of this, our church is open to hosting a public forum as described in 1073 § 8-1104. Our facility possesses capabilities for livestreaming, media presentation, and convenient access to public transportation.

Given New York City's deplorable history of facilitating and profiting from the slave trade and the centrality of enslaved labor to the city's economic growth, we applaud the committees' leadership on taking these first steps towards reconciling the atrocities of slavery. We urge the council to vote in favor of Intro 1082 and Intro 1073 so that the process of paying reparations to Black Americans may finally begin. We look forward to seeing bold and creative approaches to reconciliation and reparation.

Respectfully,

Nathan Lee
Flora Wang Lee
Sonya Chung
Robert Lewis Briggs
Ariana Chuang
Gabrielle Tang
Jiwon Kim

NEW YORK SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL dba THE PUBLIC THEATER

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations Jointly with the
Committee on Civil and Human Rights

The Public Theater's Anti-Racism & Cultural Transformation Testimony

Tuesday, September 19, 2023

Thank you, Chair Ossé and Chair Williams, for calling this committee hearing to discuss these necessary introductions. Since our inception, The Public Theater has had extensive social and artistic impacts on the theatrical community throughout the nation and the world. Our founder, Joe Papp established The Public Theater as a civic institution to engage, both on-stage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues. It seems only right to show our support publicly and strongly for each introduction before the committee today.

As stewards of City-owned property, The Public supports Int 0934 and Int 1082 that deal with historical markers and past injustices. We currently operate two City-Owned properties: The Public Theater on Astor Place and the Delacorte Theater in Central Park home to Free Shakespeare in the Park – both of which are part of the Lenape people's indigenous homeland Manahatta. In addition to operating on the homeland of the Lenape people, The Delacorte Theater is adjacent to the site of Seneca Village, the largest community of free African-American property owners in pre-Civil War New York which existed from 1827 until 1857 when black property owners were forced to leave, and their houses torn down for the construction of Central Park through eminent domain. The Public honors the legacy of Seneca Village that previously existed on the land nearby The Delacorte and supports Central Park Conservancy's efforts to bring awareness to the history of the site through signage and guided walks.

While The Public has always been guided on the principles of diversity and inclusion, The Public Theater developed a formal Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Plan in 2019 which was adopted by the board and set a course for more intentional goal setting around its Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work. The 2019 plan was then adjusted and integrated into a new Anti-Racism and Cultural Transformation Plan which was adopted in 2021. The development of the plan followed a conscious, in-depth, organization-wide assessment of our practices following the pandemic and social protests throughout the city and nation. Much like Int 1073 we are committed, as an organization that receives funding from the City of New York, to change the very wording of our administrative code. Since then The Public has made significant progress towards implementing the plan including:

- hiring Senior Director of Anti-Racism, Equity, and Belonging Alexa Smith.
- developing a manager training program for managing people with a DEI-centered approach.
- holding curated all-staff sessions to create space for learning and on topics of race, gender, sexual identity, disability, and concepts like the model minority myth, bystander intervention training, Living Land Acknowledgements, and more.

Int 1118 proposes to amend the city charter to require city employees to complete anti-racism and discrimination trainings to continue employment. Already implemented at The Public Theater, all staff members were required to participate in a six-month anti-racism training program. New staff on-

boarding automatically includes this training. Additionally, our organization requires Board Members and each of our production artists to participate and complete anti-racism trainings.

And finally, we want to highlight that our action is not a temporary performance, rather it is an intentional commitment to ongoing work. Our mission is to create art for all by all; therefore, we will continue to produce countless works that represent the experiences and identifies of the people of the City of New York, the people of New York State, and our country. Furthermore, we are in continuous partnership with the Lenape Center as we work to develop bridges with local and national indigenous communities to build collaborative relationships and to make amends for past and present harms. This partnership will be especially relevant as we begin rehearsals and performances of our fall production MANAHATTA written by Native playwright, Mary Kathryn Nagal, which puts onstage the gripping journey from the fur trade of the 1600s to the stock trade of today. Through our work at The Public we hope to honor our ancestors, and we pay our respects to the former and current Indigenous peoples and Black American communities that suffered and still suffer injustices and discrimination here in New York City. Thank you for your time, Chairs.

Ten Reasons Int. 1085 is Bad Legislation

Washington Street Advocacy Group, September 19, 2023

1: The Public Design Commission is unqualified. This small entity contains design professionals, not historians. It is unqualified to do mass evaluation of all historical figures represented in public art (as well as school names) in New York City.

2: The definition of “crimes against humanity” is too broad. By Int. 1085’s definition, normal historical practices in both war and “peacetime” would now be declared as “crimes against humanity.” However, in those eras, this concept did not exist. Even now, we would not declare any “persecution” of a group as a “crime against humanity.” This definition whittles down a term that is supposed to be used against exceptional acts in the present that violate broadly-accepted, current moral standards. It provides no historical insight besides allowing present-day people, who have their own massive moral failings, to feel self-satisfied.

3: The time scale is too short. There are thousands of artworks in the City’s collection, including paintings, drawings, and sculptures. 180 days is insufficient to both review these works and create a generalized plan for removal.

4: The slavery provisions are overbroad. New York was a slave state until 1827. As a center of finance, almost all major figures in New York City history could be said to have benefited economically from slavery. This legislation would give an unelected body the ability to remove public art tied to nearly every figure in New York City’s history who was alive before the end of the Civil War.

5: The indigenous people provisions are also overbroad. American commerce and expansion were inherently linked to the “forcible transfer of indigenous people.” This would justify the removal of artwork related to many historical figures across nearly all eras of American and New York City history, arguably even up to today. There is no indication that current indigenous people are demanding such an action, which provides no compensation against this central aspect of colonization itself. One should ask if the City Council would be prepared to return Manhattan Island itself.

6: There are no real alternatives to removal provided because an artwork theoretically “can” always be removed. The legislation assumes that “removal” is the only remedy to address an artwork that represents a controversial figure, and that the choice of a plaque would be for practical reasons. In truth, the choice of removal versus a plaque would become a political one, making the purpose of the commission moot. The legislation would just serve to mask political decisions by the Mayor’s Office.

7: The legislation would target George Washington. Clearly, as worded, this legislation could result in the removal of the statues of George Washington in City Hall and in Union Square, and certainly in paintings and drawings elsewhere. This needs a broader and specific discussion, or it could divide the nation unnecessarily at a dangerous moment in American history.

8: The timeframes are arbitrary. The legislation contains no standards on the scale of what is to be reviewed in 180 days versus annually. This would enable the Commission to be used purely as a tool by the Mayor's Office to address political needs as they come, rather than establish a thoughtful body of historical review and plaque authorship staffed by experts.

9: The role of the speaker of the council is not clear. The Council doesn't have jurisdiction over Public Design Commission decisions beyond oversight.

10: No budgeting. The removal of artwork on this scale would be extremely expensive, and the legislation does not address this. It also does not address what will happen with the works.



UNDERGROUND
RAILROAD
CONSORTIUM
OF NEW YORK STATE

September 21, 2023

To: New York City Commission on

Re: Int 1150-2023

Version *

Establishing a New York City Freedom Trail
Task Force

Dear Council Members:

I am writing today – on behalf of the Underground Railroad Consortium of New York State (URCNYS) - in support of the Council bill to establish of a task force to study the development of a city-wide, or neighborhood, walking tour to promote education and understanding of the important antislavery and Underground Railroad history of New York City. We believe such a task force could lead to important social, educative and tourist value to the City.

The Underground Railroad Consortium of New York State (URCNYS) is a group of over two dozen historic sites and supporters whose focus has been on research, education and public presentations about the verified and rich history, specifically, of the Underground Railroad and, more generally, of the history of enslavement and the abolition movement throughout the state. URCNYS has recently been awarded a grant to develop and manage the *Harriet Tubman Corridor*, a cross-state trail offering scores of opportunities for in-person experience of Tubman's specific legacy along with the broader history of antislavery and the UGRR in the State. You can find out more about us at <https://www.urncys.org>.

We believe in-person tours bring great value to the visitors' experience. This includes the visitors' direct experience of the spatial and geographic relationships of history. While on-line "tours" (e.g., digital maps) can be very helpful in gaining a quick overview of the breadth of history, it's the *in situ* experience that permits a deeper understanding of the history. Even when a building or site no longer exists, the *story* of the site and its *relationship to other nearby sites* lends an invaluable dimension to the tour. In addition, bringing historic walking tours to neighborhoods can foster greater appreciation of both the historic and current position of the neighborhood in the history of New York City ... and might also promote tourism, which would accrue to the benefit of both the specific neighborhood and to the city itself.

Across New York State, group organizations (for example, URCNYS, county and local historical societies) as well as individual historic sites (including many in New York City) are promoting and successfully hosting in-person walking tours. The addition of an organized and City-



UNDERGROUND
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CONSORTIUM
OF NEW YORK STATE

sponsored walking tour program would undoubtedly bring powerful educative and cultural benefits to the city and its people.

For these reasons, we again note our support for the creation of the proposed as a n important step in this direction.

Thank you for your consideration. Please let me know if I can provide additional information.

Yours sincerely,

Peter A. Buntin
Vice President
Underground Railroad Consortium of New York State
pabunten1@gmail.com
301-335-0196



Schomburg Center
for Research
in Black Culture
The New York Public Library

September 22, 2023

TESTIMONY - Int 1150-2023 | To Establish a New York City Freedom Trail Task Force

Dear Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations:

I submit this testimony in support of the legislation seeking an exploratory commission on the matter of freedom trails in NYC on behalf of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, our director Joy L. Bivins, our staff, and volunteers.

On the simple matter of an exploratory commission, the answer is a resounding yes. We make this recommendation convinced of the tremendous benefit of well-researched and designed freedom trails in NYC (perhaps connecting as we know they obviously can to other such trails of historic significance that extend through the state of New York and westward marking the many roads to freedom.

The Schomburg Center is a research library of The New York Public Library and a world renowned archive with over 11 million items revealing the richness and complexity of the history and culture of African Americans, Africans, and the African Diaspora. As stewards of the collection we make it accessible to students and curious individuals eager to know this history. We know there are many doors through which people access this history, and the use of freedom trails, with mapping, walking tours, and online investigation is potent for all age groups, for New York City schools and residents, and for a burgeoning tourist market. There is literally no downside to researching and devising freedom trails, as long as it is done with historic accuracy and honesty, without political or personal guile, and with an educational framework in mind.

Freedom trails, like park monuments, historic homes and sites, and cultural centers, offer visitors a view into the history of our country and all of the people who came and contributed to the American fabric. Freedom trails make this history easily accessible and once crafted through research, mapping, and other educational tools, it remains forever for all to enjoy.

The Schomburg Center wholeheartedly supports without reservation the proposal to establish a New York City freedom trail task force.

Sincerely,

Kevin C. Matthews
Deputy Director

Submitted By:
Jerry Mikorenda

jmikore@yahoo.com

Hi, I'm Jerry Mikorenda, the author of *America's First Freedom Rider: Elizabeth Jennings, Chester A. Arthur, and the Early Fight for Civil Rights*.

I'd like to thank the committee for this opportunity to provide input on the development of a Freedom Trail for Lower Manhattan. People, especially the young, need to see, hear, touch... *walk history* to claim it as their own. Too many crucial events and people from our heritage have been bulldozed and nearly forgotten. Let me tell you about one.

In 2019, Elizabeth Jennings Graham was chosen by New Yorkers to have her statue placed in Manhattan. Earlier this year, Community Board 1 passed a resolution urging "... a suitable monument [to her] in Lower Manhattan where this important historical event took place."

I'm here to suggest her monument, the story of the early civil rights movement, can help anchor the rich saga that a Lower Manhattan Freedom Trail can provide *all* New Yorkers.

For those of you not familiar with Elizabeth.

She was... a NYC schoolteacher... *An early Feminist...* and *A Civil Rights Advocate*.

On Sunday, July 16, 1854, she took a Chatham Street horsecar bound for church where she led the choir. When Elizabeth refused to leave because she was black, the conductor brutally assaulted her and threw her off. *Undeterred*, she reentered the car and the conductor tossed her out *again*, aided by a city policeman.

- In 1855, Elizabeth won a landmark case that opened transit services to all New Yorkers. Her fledgling lawyer was future U.S. President Chester A. Arthur.
- In 1895, she started the first kindergarten for black children in the country.

I could go on and on, but I'll end on this statement by late New York City historian, John H. Hewitt.

"If only because she started something far larger than herself, she deserves a place of honor in the history of civil rights."

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Zee Dempster
dempstar@hotmail.com

Statement on the formation of a NYC Freedom Trail Task Force

September 17, 2023

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to voice my support for the formation of a NYC Freedom Trail Task Force. My name is Zee Dempster. I am President of the NY Ramblers Hiking Club. I work at the CUNY Graduate Center as the Assistant Director of IRADAC (the Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean), and Assistant Coordinator of the AFCP (the Africana Studies Certificate Program). I am also on the Board of Trustees of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund (Professional Staff Congress).

I became an avid hiker in 2012 when I joined the NY Ramblers. I speak from experience when I say one of the highlights of hiking in the Tri-state area has been discovering all the historic sites intertwined within the numerous hiking trails like the Old Croton Aqueduct, the Old Erie Path and the Walkway Over the Hudson. Individual NY Ramblers hike leaders have already pieced together specialty hikes honoring the area's prominent African Americans. As a trustee for the Welfare Fund, our mission is to ensure solid healthcare coverage for thirty-thousand union members, so they can engage in a healthy, active lifestyle. For the past thirteen years, I have had the privilege of working with the top researchers of American scholarship and African Diaspora studies at the IRADAC and AFCP.

The timely establishment of the NYC Freedom Trail Task Force is imperative. Its creation has the immediate effect of giving the trail credibility and making the formation of the trail a reality. The rapidly changing nature of New York City's real estate development threatens to permanently erase these landmark locations. They can begin immediately researching and identifying the areas that need to be preserved. Post-pandemic NYC may look very different, the timely establishment of the task force is crucial to preserving the trail before its pathways are lost forever.

The task force immediately begins to establish an archive. By documenting what is found, they present proof of the historical past and give evidence of American History. They bring to light an otherwise forgotten past. The task force will be a counterbalance to the negativity surrounding the truths and the retelling of American History. A diverse and well-established task force comprised of people from all walks of life, representing diverse cultures, academics, preservationists, persons connected with parks and recreation, hikers, and average New Yorkers, will be brought together to work toward the common goal of honoring the descendants of African slaves who will be equally represented.

The task force, through the creation of the NYC Freedom Trail, will ultimately aid in the economic recovery of NYC. As people are coming out of Covid-19, they have learned the importance of our

national historic places. National Park attendance and hiking participation is at a record high. People are searching and wanting to enjoy the outdoors. The NYC Freedom Trail will connect to the already established trails such as the NYC Greenway and the Old Croton Aqueduct etc. and encourage people to visit those park sites. Tourists will learn about the city, America, and themselves. Hiking and walking trails are not visited once, they are visited repeatedly as people familiarize themselves with the area, create lasting memories and visit time and time again. People will make annual visits which will add to the local economy. The goal of the task force to create the NYC Freedom Trail will benefit New Yorkers and Americans as a whole, as it will be open and accessible to all people.

I strongly support the immediate creation of the NYC Freedom Trail Task Force. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Zee Dempster

Zee Dempster

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

9/19

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1082 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Devine Prince

Address: _____

I represent: U.S. Freedmen Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1150 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SALONEE BHAMAN

Address: 181 HAWTHORNE ST

I represent: NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1150 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MITCHELL GRUBLER

Address: Confucius Plaza, Apt 40c

I represent: Bowery Alliance of Neighbors

Address: 184 Bowery 10012

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

**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: 9/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Mooligan

Address: _____

I represent: The Public Theater

Address: 425 Lafayette St. NY, NY 10003

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1082 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ANNETTE WILCOX

Address: WEST 140TH ST 10030

I represent: MYSELF

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1118+1101 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/19/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jennifer Jones Austin

Address: Maple St., Bklyn NY 11225

I represent: FPWA

Address: 410 Broad St, New York, NY 10004

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1150-2023 Res. No. 2023

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jerry Mikorenda

Address: 15th Ave, East Northport NY 11731

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1082-2023 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Stephen Baines

Address: E-176 Street

I represent: _____

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: Sept. 19, 2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SILVIA MONTALBAN

Address: Chief Citywide Equity + Inclusion Officer / Dep. Comm. ^{services}

I represent: DCAS

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: 9/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOAN KANE WARD

Address: 2000 4th St

I represent: COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC WORKS

Address: THE CITY COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC WORKS

**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: 9/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SIDEYA SHERMAN, COMMISSIONER

Address: _____

I represent: MAYOR'S OFFICE OF EQUITY

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: 9/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sreoshy Banerjee

Address: _____

I represent: Public Design Commission

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1150 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 19 Sept.

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JACOB MORRIS

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Foundation for Education

Address: 40 W. 96 St NYC

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1085 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 19 Sept.

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JACOB MORRIS

Address: 160 W. 96 St

I represent: HARLEM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Address: same

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