Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

250 BROADWAY, NY – 8TH FLOOR - HEARING ROOM 1 – RES. 04582026
PUBLIC HEARING — NO REMOTE WEB, REMOTE AUDIO AVAILABLE TO REGISTER
THURSDAY– OCTOBER 8, 2026 – 10:00 A.M.

Written Testimony to PUBLIC HEARING prepared by **Thursday, October 8, 2026**
Bernadette Ferrara, President of Van Nest Neighborhood Alliance

PUBLIC NOTE: On Wednesday October 7, 2026, several calls were made to 250 Broadway to inquire why there was no available online registration for audio or video, no option for in-person or written testimony for this Hearing on the City Council registration page. Many Van Nest residents who could not attend in-person were not able to register for public remote testimony. Those who were able to attend in-oerson could not register.

Van Nest wants to make the truth very clear. John Zacarro Jr., and now all of our elected officials in the Northeast refuse to acknowledge the fact that when the idea for bill A7033D was introduced to John Zacarro by the Yemeni leaders, the broader Van Nest community that Little Yemeni resides in, should have been asked to the discussion table. That was never done. Van Nest Neighborhood Alliance (VNNA) was already a 501c3 established since 2012 which John Zacarro knows very well. Even though John Zaccaro's representative attended our monthly meetings VNNA was never made aware this bill was gaining traction in 2025. John Zacarro is publicly stating he did his due diligence. We can tell you he did not. Many of the large business owners are calling us asking what is this Yemeni Cultural District all about? Yet John Zacarro stated he spoke to all of the businesses in Van Nest. John states he put it in his newsletter. You can barely read a bulleted point on page three of his Summer 2025 newsletter. He never had any intention of including the greater Van Nest yet he boasts that this legislation passed unanimously with bipartisan support in both the Assembly and Senate and is awaiting the Governor's signature! Of course it passed, there was no community opposition on paper or in the media with the truth that John Zaccaro did not do his due diligence with public outreach. No Town Hall. No Public Hearing. No invite extended to any Van Nest stakeholders from the broader Van Nest community. Now he states that "any changes to A7033D will not be feasible." How can an elected official say this when we've laid out our concerns which he has mocked as "myths" and "rhetoric"?

Van Nest is aware that Resolution 04582026 and bill A7033D will not alter the historical recognition already established of Van Nest but with its history known for decades comes the character of the neighborhood which is tied to its identity. It is all intertwined. Legislative actions like these that will significantly alter the character of an established neighborhood must demonstrate a compelling public interest and a rational basis grounded in objective criteria. Public officials carry a fiduciary-like obligation to act in the best interests of all residents–not a select segment–while maintaining transparency and ccountability. New York's strength lies in its diversity but also in its adherence to the rule of law, fairness and inclusive governance. Any initiative that risks undermining those principles must be carefully examined. We urge the City Council to take all necessay steps to ensure the rights, voices and identity of the Van Nest neighborhood are fully protected.

We respectfully ask this Committee body to vote NO on resolution 04582026.

VAN NEST NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE

636 VAN NEST AVENUE, BRONX, NEW YORK 10460

March 30, 2026

Assemblymember John Zaccaro, Jr.
New York State Assembly
80th District
2018 Williamsbridge Road
New York, New York 10461

Re: The Designation of Little Yemen as an area of Cultural Significance (S6478C / A7033C)

We are writing this letter to express the dismay of the Van Nest Neighborhood Alliance (VNNA) at the designation of "Little Yemen" as an area of cultural significance. As you may know, the Van Nest Neighborhood Alliance is a 501 3(c) charity founded in 2010 by local residents to combat crime and improve the quality of life in Van Nest. The VNNA works closely with our elected officials, community leaders and the 49th Precinct to promote the wellbeing of our community via civic action and community engagement. The VNNA is open to all members of our community. We are volunteers that devote hundreds of hours each year to activities that benefit the entire community. We hold monthly meetings and perform numerous activities to improve and support members of the Van Nest community that include but are not limited to: Food Giveaways, The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Action Community Clean-up, Spring Beautification Projects, Candidate Debates, Fall Festivals and Book Bag Giveaway, Thanksgiving Turkey Giveaway and a Holiday Christmas Tree Lighting with Santa and caroling, treats and toys that are given away to about one hundred plus Van Nest children and families. In addition, we advocate for residents who are struggling with matters that require support from various government officials and institutions on a one-to-one, as needed basis. Although our community is small, it is made up of many members whose families have lived in the community for decades. There is a lot of love and history in our Village of Van Nest!

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As such, we cannot sit silently as a wholesale change in the culture of our community is imposed with no input from key stakeholders in the community such as the VNNA. The most upsetting aspects of the passage of this legislation have to do with:

1) **The manner in which the legislation was developed with no buy in from the VNNA or other longstanding institutions within our community is disturbing**. The Assemblymember mentioned that he did inform our community because the legislation was mentioned at a VNNA meeting and at an IFTAR dinner. This level of communication is wholly inappropriate given the significance of the change. I believe there were several meetings with leaders of the Yemeni Community but we were never invited to the table.

2) **Almost the entire community of Van Nest would be identified as an area of Yemeni Cultural Significance**. Identity is strongly tied to culture. The proposed legislation would subsume almost the entire community of Van Nest under the rubric of Yemeni Cultural Significance. We believe that such a designation is misleading, lacking in inclusivity and disrespectful of those individuals that built and maintained Van Nest. Our community has many veterans including some who made the ultimate sacrifice by fighting in foreign wars for the freedoms extended to all. We have a war memorial dedicated to the fallen at Van Nest Park. The designation of an area of cultural significance is an honor that must not be doled out without consultation from the entire community. The Yemeni community is quickly growing in influence and political power but their contributions to the entire community remains to be seen. Any fair analysis of the cultural significance of contributions of the Yemeni community to the entire Van Nest community or even New York City is still developing. We see that they own many businesses but their culture has yet to become integrated within the culture of Van Nest writ large.

   If one were to compare the contributions of the Yemeni community to the contributions of those of members of the Harlem Renaissance Cultural District or the El Barrio Cultural District those differences in contribution would be best measured in orders of magnitude. Listing the extraordinary contributions of members of the Harlem Renaissance or El Barrio are beyond the scope of this letter. Their cultural influence within New York City and the United States as a whole are legendary and profoundly consequential. Why are we rushing to provide this honor to the Yemeni community? Providing such a designation to a group whose contributions have yet to genuinely impact the culture of Van Nest and the City of New York as a whole is contrary to the genuine spirit and intent of the designation. Taxpayer funded monies and technical support would be provided to a group which has yet to demonstrate their commitment and openness to the entire Van Nest community. Perhaps in the decades to come the contributions of the Yemeni community will rival those of the Harlem Renaissance or El Barrio but that time is not now. The fact that there was no attempt to engage the VNNA in these plans is telling.

3) **Fairness matters**. In a diverse community there must be equal application of the law. Power must be wielded in a just manner. We have seen more than once that the agenda of leaders from the Yemeni community are fast tracked and exceptions to stated rules are granted, often over objections from community members. For example, a street in Van Nest was named after Mr. Ibrahim al Hamdi (2022), a former President of North Yemen who was assassinated in 1977 even though he did not meet criteria for a street co-naming stated in the Community Board 11 regulations. The stated criteria for a proposed candidate for a street co-naming follows: *an individual who is deceased or terminally ill and has contributed at least 10 years of community service that includes extraordinary community commitment by partaking in civic leadership posts, charitable activities or working in activities with city-wide significance*. It is obvious that Mr. Al Hamdi did not meet the stated criteria yet somehow the street co-naming was allowed.

In addition, if one looks at a Google Map, an area of Van Nest is identified as “Little Yemen”. This change was made without any input from the Van Nest community as a whole. We still do not understand how the change was affected. One of the most wonderful attributes of America is the ideal that everyone is equal under the law. This ideal undergirds the peace, freedom and prosperity that until recently has been an integral part of American life. There are numerous examples of differential treatment being applied based upon membership in the Yemeni community. This discriminatory treatment results in disenfranchisement and hopelessness on the part of the larger community.

In addition, the Van Nest community has for years pleaded for the cleaning of the MTA wall between Garfield and Adams Avenues and maintenance of the streets and MTA train station at East 180th Street to no avail. How did the creation of a Yemeni Cultural District take precedence above a goal that has been so long sought and of benefit to all members of the Van Nest community?

These are just a few of our concerns. We are asking you to stay this legislation until key stakeholders throughout the Van Nest community have had an opportunity to weigh in. Communication, responsivity and transparency are the keys to effective governance of our Van Nest community.

We are requesting a meeting with you as soon as you can make yourself available.

Thanking you in advance for attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

The Van Nest Neighborhood Alliance

CC:
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State Senator Nathalia Fernandez
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VNNA
VAN NEST
NEIGHBORHOOD
ALLIANCE

636 VAN NEST AVENUE, BRONX, NEW YORK 10460

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As such, we cannot sit silently as a wholesale change in the culture of our community is imposed with no input from key stakeholders in the community such as the VNNA. The most upsetting aspects of the passage of this legislation have to do with:

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VAN NEST NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE

636 VAN NEST AVENUE, BRONX, NEW YORK 10460

June 3, 2026

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
New York Executive Chamber
Governor of New York State
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224

Re: The Designation of Little Yemen as an area of Cultural Significance (S6478C / A7033C)

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GET UP, STAND UP FOR VAN NEST!

Petition to Oppose Bill A7033D–the Designation of Van Nest as a Yemeni Cultural District!

We, the Van Nest Neighborhood Alliance (VNNA), are asking Van Nest residents and supporters of Van Nest to stand with the VNNA to oppose Bill A7033D that designates most of Van Nest as a Yemeni Cultural District because:

- **We refuse to allow politicians and monied interests to engage in the continued appropriation of the Van Nest community for their own power and enrichment.** We are fed up with things being done to Van Nest instead of with Van Nest. The legislation to designate most of Van Nest as a Yemeni Cultural District was drafted and passed without any consultation or input with Van Nest stakeholders. The individuals that propagated this plan remain unknown. Why was this plan given priority over other community needs, such as the regular maintenance of the 180th Street MTA train station, the MTA wall and adjacent streets? The prioritization of one group of monied individuals over long term residents of Van Nest results in feelings of disenfranchisement and hopelessness.

- **We have the right to representation, self-determination and self-preservation.** Culture and identity are strongly correlated. The proposed legislation would subsume almost the entire community of Van Nest under the cultural rubric of a Yemeni Cultural District. We believe that such a designation is misleading, lacking in inclusivity and disrespectful of those that built, maintained and in some cases gave their lives, in service to Van Nest over the course of its nearly one-hundred-and thirty-year history. We are not aware of the specific Yemeni cultural contributions that have benefited or influenced the entire Van Nest community. Other communities seeking designation as cultural districts include the Harlem Renaissance and El Barrio cultural districts. Can any fair person state that Yemeni cultural contributions in Van Nest rise to the level of those in Harlem or El Barrio? Why the rush? Why are politicians so eager to prioritize Yemeni culture before the community has had a chance to make genuine contributions to American culture on par with other cultural groups who have genuinely earned such a vaulted designation?

STAND WITH VAN NEST!

Say "No" to Bill A7033D that Designates most of Van Nest as a Yemeni Cultural District.

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