

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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February 28, 2012  
Start: 10:29 a.m.  
Recess: 10:52 a.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E:  
DANIEL DROMM  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Charles Barron  
Mathieu Eugene  
Ydanis A. Rodriguez  
Jumaane D. Williams

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. We're  
3 ready. Alright. Good morning. My name is Daniel  
4 Dromm, and I'm the chair of New York City's  
5 Council's Committee on Immigration. Before going  
6 any further, I would like to introduce the other  
7 members of the Committee here with me today.  
8 We've been joined by Council Member Jumaane  
9 Williams, Council Member Charles Barron, Council  
10 Member Mathieu Eugene and Council Member Tish  
11 James. We are here today to vote on two  
12 resolutions effecting immigrants not only here in  
13 New York City, but also throughout the country.  
14 Proposed resolution 1096-A sponsored by Council  
15 Member Mathieu Eugene calls for the implementation  
16 of a Haitian family reunification parole program,  
17 which would allow for Haitians to wait in the  
18 United States for their visa priority dates to  
19 become current instead of in Haiti. There is  
20 currently a three to eleven year waiting period  
21 for Haitians with approved visa to be allowed to  
22 enter the United States. As Haitians wait to  
23 legally enter the United states, they must remain  
24 in Haiti where they are exposed to harsh living  
25 conditions and lack of access to medical care.

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2 New York City has long been an entry point for  
3 Haitian immigrants and has become home to the  
4 second largest Haitian community in the nation.  
5 After the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, New  
6 York City opened its arms to Haiti and Haitian  
7 nationals in response to the devastation. This  
8 resolution supports the preservation of the family  
9 unit, legal and safe entry into the United States,  
10 the Haitian community and is just another  
11 statement from the Council of its support of Haiti  
12 and its people. Proposed resolution no. 1193-A  
13 sponsored by Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez  
14 supports the Corporation Counsel's decision to  
15 join an amicus brief on behalf of New York City in  
16 support of plaintiff appellee [phonetic] in the  
17 United States versus Arizona Case currently  
18 pending before the United States Supreme Court.  
19 New York City along with other municipalities have  
20 long voiced their opposition to the harsh  
21 immigration law the State of Arizona is trying to  
22 implement, a law that would deter immigrants from  
23 reporting crimes to local enforcement and alienate  
24 a vulnerable community. By joining the amicus  
25 brief, the Council would make it clear that it is

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2 important not to compromise the relationship  
3 between immigrant communities and law enforcement  
4 agencies as we try to promote and strengthen  
5 public safety. At this time, I would like to give  
6 the sponsors of the resolutions an opportunity to  
7 make a statement. Council Member Eugene?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Thank you  
9 very much, Mr. Chair. Let me first and foremost  
10 thank you for your leadership on this issue.  
11 Thank you very much, and also to thank the Speaker  
12 of the City Council, Speaker Quinn, for her  
13 leadership and her understanding also the  
14 importance of this resolution and the impact of  
15 this resolution on thousands of Haitians living in  
16 the - - and the family members. I want to take  
17 the opportunity also to thank my colleagues and  
18 from the Immigration Committee for their support.  
19 Thank you very much to each one of you. I want to  
20 take the opportunity also to thank - - Newman for  
21 the wonderful job that he has done to make this  
22 resolution come to the floor. Also, - - Beckford,  
23 the counsel, thank you very much for what you have  
24 done. Also, Jennifer Montalvo, policy analyst,  
25 thank you so much. There's my wonderful staff

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2 also - - and David Suarez [phonetic], thank you  
3 very much because this is a team effort. You  
4 know, immigration is a very important topic to all  
5 of us here and it is our responsibility from the  
6 government, from the city, all of us from this  
7 nation, to work together to ensure that we improve  
8 the immigration system, and enhance immigration  
9 laws because we all know that United States is a  
10 country that has been built by immigrants, and  
11 each one of us can trace our origins from one or  
12 different countries. The contribution of  
13 immigrants to this nation is remarkable and we all  
14 know that Haiti was hit by a horrific earthquake  
15 on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010. In two years after the  
16 earthquake the situation is still critical.  
17 Hundreds of thousands of Haitian people they are  
18 still trying to cope with the loss of their family  
19 members and their friends and those who survived  
20 the earthquake, they don't have adequate shelters.  
21 They are living in shelters in tents with very  
22 little basic necessities like water, food and  
23 access to medicine. The situation is horrible in  
24 Haiti, but today what we are doing today, we are  
25 asking the President of the United States and

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2 Homeland Security to create the family  
3 reunification program for Haitians. The same  
4 thing that they have created for Cubans—they have  
5 created that also for Cuba. I think that this is  
6 a fair enough—what we are asking, we are asking  
7 for fair treatment, equal treatment, something  
8 that is humanitarian, something that is fitting  
9 because the reconstruction of Haiti, the  
10 rebuilding of Haiti is going to take a long time,  
11 and it is very important that we in New York City,  
12 we do everything that we can do to alleviate this  
13 suffering of those who are in Haiti. The people  
14 we are trying to fight for, they are people who  
15 have applied for residency, green card, for the  
16 authorization to come to United States even before  
17 the earthquake. They fulfill all of the  
18 requirements. The applications have been approved  
19 already. They will come to United States anyway.  
20 There, at least to be called to come to the United  
21 States, but the problem is they have been waiting  
22 too long; some of the people they have been  
23 waiting for 5, 10, 15, 20 years, and the family  
24 members they are here—fathers, mothers, children,  
25 siblings and spouses waiting for them. So we just

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2 want to give them the opportunity to unite with  
3 their family members, to come to the United  
4 States. They will come anyway, so what we are  
5 trying to do, we are trying to expedite the  
6 process and to allow them to come to the United  
7 States because—many people go to my office and  
8 they'll say that the family members that have been  
9 waiting for a green card or for their  
10 authorization to come to New York, they died.  
11 They never saw the opportunity to come, and  
12 children, young people who are 18, 17 years old or  
13 when the application were approved, when they turn  
14 21 years old, they become disqualified. They are  
15 not qualified anymore, so there are many reasons  
16 why Haitian people who have been qualified before  
17 lost the opportunity to come to the United States.  
18 We don't believe that this is correct and that's  
19 the reason we are asking—we are urging the  
20 President of the United States and Homeland  
21 Security to grant to Haitian people the same  
22 privilege that went to Cubans because the Cubans  
23 when their applications become approved, the  
24 family members have the opportunity to come to the  
25 United States to wait for their green card.

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2 That's the same thing that we are asking for  
3 Haitians. Let me conclude by saying we have to  
4 continue to work together to fight for DREAM Act  
5 because it is a win/win situation. So many  
6 children, intelligent, brilliant children with  
7 good intent to pursue their education and become  
8 leaders for tomorrow, but they don't have the  
9 opportunity to go to college because of the  
10 immigration situation, and I salute and I commend  
11 all my colleagues and the advocates who are  
12 fighting for the - - . We have to continue to  
13 fight for comprehensive immigration reform because  
14 there are people who have been living in the  
15 United States for 20, 25 years, 30 years that  
16 deserve to have the opportunity to be part of this  
17 great nation, and I think this is a good thing to  
18 fight for immigration because immigration and  
19 immigrants are good for New York, they are good  
20 for the United States. To all of you who have  
21 been working hard to make this resolution possible  
22 and to bring it to the floor, thank you very much.  
23 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you,  
25 Council Member Eugene, and now we'd like to hear



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2 from my colleague, Council Member Barron.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you  
4 very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to say that I  
5 certainly support my colleague, Mathieu Eugene on  
6 this particular resolution and it was very moving  
7 when we did actually get a testimony from an  
8 individual from Haiti who said that his family  
9 member actually died because they couldn't get the  
10 proper medical treatment in Haiti that they could  
11 have gotten here. The United States owes Haiti.  
12 The United States owes Haiti because of the  
13 Louisiana Purchase when Napoleon was fighting  
14 Toussaint [phonetic] - - in Haiti. The French  
15 actually sold the territory to the United States  
16 because of the Haitian Revolution and then in  
17 return, the United States supported one of the  
18 worst, brutal dictators in the world, - - and then  
19 removed a democratically elected president in John  
20 - - . So I think that this should be a no  
21 brainer. This is pittance in compared to what  
22 France and America owes Haiti and then we should  
23 expeditiously do this and then push the United  
24 states government to do more to provide  
25 humanitarian aid for Haiti where our people are

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2 dying there and then anybody that needs to come  
3 here to get the assistance that they need that  
4 they cannot get in Haiti should be allowed to do  
5 that, so I support this resolution a thousand  
6 percent.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, and  
8 Council Member Williams?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank  
10 you, Chair, and I want to thank Councilman Eugene  
11 for his leadership on this as well. Both his and  
12 my district represent the largest Haitian  
13 concentration outside of Haiti and some people  
14 argue even outside of Florida. It is very  
15 frustrating to me as my colleague said. I think  
16 the entire world, particularly the free world, owe  
17 Haiti a debt of gratitude even now more than ever.  
18 America owes Haiti. I think there was some  
19 promises that weren't kept after the earthquake.  
20 I don't think any other country besides one  
21 resembling an African country will be allowed to  
22 languish in the way it's being languished today,  
23 and I think it's absurd and America really needs  
24 to step up and all the people, who made promises  
25 when the red carpet was there and people came down

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2 to take pictures, need to come back and make sure  
3 that Haiti is again where it should be, so I'm  
4 very proud to be supporting this. Thank you  
5 again.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you, and  
7 Council Member Tish James?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Thank you,  
9 Chairman Dromm and again, I also want to thank the  
10 leadership of Council Member Eugene in regards to  
11 this resolution. The earthquake resulted in the  
12 deaths of approximately 230,000 people, the  
13 injuries of more than 300,000 people, and left  
14 more than 1 million people homeless with limited  
15 access to water and food. At the time of the 2010  
16 earthquake, there were 54,716 with approved  
17 petitions to immigrate to the United States, who  
18 were waiting for visa to become available. In  
19 response to the fiscal and humanitarian needs of  
20 Haiti and its people, advocates have urged the  
21 Department of Homeland Security to give  
22 humanitarian parole to Haitians with approved  
23 petitions for visas. This would allow Haitians  
24 with approved petitions for visas to be permitted  
25 to be in the United States temporarily while they

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2 wait for their visas to become available. The  
3 purpose of the program would be to expedite family  
4 reunification through safe, legal and orderly  
5 channels of migration to the United States,  
6 similar to that which was done for Cuba. All that  
7 we are asking is that the Haitian people be given  
8 fair and the same treatment that the Cubans have  
9 been given with regards to this program. In  
10 addition to all that my colleagues have said, let  
11 me also go on to say that the United States should  
12 also reduce the debt that is owed by the Haitian  
13 government. We need to do all that we can do to  
14 rebuild Haiti. The devastation that occurred  
15 during this earthquake is just insurmountable and  
16 at this point in time, we need to do all that we  
17 can do to support this country. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very  
19 much, Council Member James. Just before we vote,  
20 I'd like to say that this resolution is very  
21 important. It is a fair, just and needed push to  
22 the federal government to say that we in New York  
23 City support this effort to help Haiti, so I guess  
24 with that, we will take the vote.

25 COMMITTEE CLERK: William Martin,

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2 Committee Clerk, roll call vote in the Committee  
3 on Immigration. Council Member Dromm?

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I vote aye.

5 COMMITTEE CLERK: Barron?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Aye.

7 COMMITTEE CLERK: Eugene?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Aye, and I  
9 thank all my colleagues for their support.

10 COMMITTEE CLERK: Williams?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Aye.

12 COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of four  
13 in the affirmative, zero in the negative and no  
14 abstentions, both items are adopted. Members,  
15 please sign the Committee Reports.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: I'd like to  
17 leave the vote open for a half hour for any  
18 Council Member who is not yet here who wants to  
19 vote. In addition, I want to apologize to Council  
20 Member Mathieu Eugene for not being able to make  
21 your press conference because I do have an offsite  
22 hearing that I have to attend up in Pleasantville,  
23 and can't be two places at once. At least I  
24 haven't figured that out yet.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Thank you

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2 very much, Mr. Chair. You have done enough  
3 already. I know you won't be there physically,  
4 but your spirit will be there. Thank you very  
5 much for your effort and your support also. Thank  
6 you.

7

CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very  
8 much everyone. Thank you.

9

COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member  
10 Rodriguez?

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COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Aye.

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COMMITTEE CLERK: final vote in the  
13 Committee on Immigration is now five in the  
14 affirmative, zero in the negative and no  
15 abstentions. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Meeting is  
17 adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Kimberley Uhlig certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature Kimberley Uhlig

Date 3/13/12