

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS

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March 28, 2012  
Start: 9:53 a.m.  
Recess: 10:01 a.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway  
Committee Room, 14th Floor

B E F O R E:  
DEBORAH ROSE  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Melissa Mark-Viverito  
Larry B. Seabrook  
Julissa Ferreras  
Margaret Chin  
James G. Van Bramer

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2 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Committee on  
3 Civil Rights is called to order. Good morning, my  
4 name is Debbie Rose, and I'm the Chair of the  
5 Committee on Civil Rights.

6 As we all know, the resolution that  
7 we are considering today is in response to the  
8 tragic and untimely death of Trayvon Martin. The  
9 Preconsidered Resolution that the Committee will  
10 be voting on this morning condemns the senseless  
11 shooting of Trayvon Martin and the inadequate  
12 investigation that followed; expresses deep  
13 sympathy for the Martin family; it calls for a  
14 full and impartial investigation holding those  
15 responsible to account for what happened; and  
16 calls for a full and impartial examination of  
17 Stand Your Ground; Stand Your Ground laws  
18 nationwide and the role they play in the spread of  
19 illegal guns on our city streets.

20 Trayvon Martin was a 17-year old  
21 black male high school student who, shortly before  
22 he was killed, was walking through a family  
23 friend's gated community after making a quick trip  
24 to the local 7-Eleven to buy a bottle of iced tea  
25 and Skittles. As he returned to his family

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2 friend's home where his father was staying, he  
3 noticed that he was being followed by someone.  
4 That someone was George Zimmerman, a white-  
5 Hispanic male. Mr. Zimmerman was a self-appointed  
6 neighborhood watchman who pursued young Trayvon,  
7 even though he was told by a 9/11 dispatcher that  
8 it was not necessary to do so.

9           To say that what happened to  
10 Trayvon after he and Mr. Zimmerman met was  
11 unfortunate is a complete understatement.  
12 Although we do not know all of the details  
13 surrounding the death of Trayvon, I am still  
14 angered by his untimely death and deeply sorry for  
15 his parents and the suffering that they must be  
16 going through right now.

17           There are many theories out there  
18 to explain Mr. Zimmerman's actions and the Sanford  
19 Police Department's failure to act. Some theorize  
20 that Mr. Zimmerman's visceral reaction to seeing  
21 Trayvon was reasonable because of the way he was  
22 dressed, but that is not good enough theory for  
23 me. In my opinion, a person's life should not be  
24 taken away simply because of what they are  
25 wearing, as demonstrated by what I'm wearing

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2 today. The choice of clothing that one chooses to  
3 wear should not relegate them to unwarranted  
4 search, negative profiling, or the most tragic of  
5 outcomes, death.

6 Others say that Mr. Zimmerman's  
7 actions were justified and that the Sanford Police  
8 Department did not need to arrest him because he  
9 reasonably believed that he was defending himself  
10 and his neighbors from harms at the hands of  
11 Trayvon. That theory is also not good enough for  
12 me. Trayvon was younger, smaller, and lighter  
13 than Mr. Zimmerman and he was armed with only a  
14 drink and a bag of Skittles, not a gun.

15 Stand Your Ground laws, like the  
16 one that protected Mr. Zimmerman from arrest, seem  
17 to have some flaws if it protects individuals who  
18 fear being harmed by an unarmed young person. If  
19 everyone all over this country felt that they  
20 could use deadly force against someone because  
21 they felt they were in immediate danger, like the  
22 danger that Mr. Zimmerman supposedly felt he was  
23 in, there would be more deaths similar to  
24 Trayvon's than we could count. If we don't rein  
25 in this case and Stand Your Ground laws throughout

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2 the nation, our young men of color will most  
3 certainly be at even greater risk than they are  
4 right now. These types of practices often  
5 unfairly target young men of color and amount to  
6 racial profiling.

7 In the past, when this Committee on  
8 Civil Rights has considered racial profiling in  
9 local stop-and-frisk practices, we were concerned  
10 with what implications these practices could have  
11 on the economic hardship, the loss of housing, and  
12 emotional pain for our young men of color, but we  
13 never considered that this type of practice could  
14 lead to the loss of one's life. So today, by  
15 hearing and hopefully passing this resolution, we  
16 are standing our ground in solidarity with all of  
17 the Trayvons cut down in their prime solely  
18 because of how they look and what they wear. I  
19 would like to encourage all of my colleagues on  
20 the Committee to vote aye for this Preconsidered  
21 Resolution. Thank you.

22 And now we'll have a statement from  
23 one of the sponsors, Melissa Mark-Viverito.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO:

25 Thank you, Madam Chair. And for expediting this

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2 hearing, I really want to thank the Speaker also  
3 for moving quickly on getting this Reso before  
4 this Council and that the Council weigh in on this  
5 issue.

6           It's just very sad and tragic  
7 event, and I think what haunts me is, as this case  
8 was coming to light--although this happened over a  
9 month ago--you know, hearing the 911 tapes in  
10 particular where you hear Trayvon terrorized, I  
11 mean, he was afraid, screaming for help, and  
12 wondering what his last moments were.

13           You know, so this investigation's  
14 been botched, you know, many of us are concerned.  
15 Obviously, it raises so many different issues, not  
16 only on the Stand Your Ground laws that are  
17 happening nationally, and those laws definitely  
18 have implications for safety in our communities,  
19 but the issue of, you know, race relations in this  
20 country, and that's the reality.

21           So I felt it was very important  
22 that this Council weigh in and take a position.  
23 This Council, as New York City, is viewed by many,  
24 you know, and there's a lot of influence and I  
25 think having a position on this matter was very

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2 critical. We have seen the outpouring of support,  
3 the outrage that has enveloped this country,  
4 thousands, you know, marching and going out. It's  
5 really an unbelievable case, and I'm glad that the  
6 Department of Justice is taking a look at it as  
7 well. But there is a lot of injustice that has  
8 occurred right now and this family deserves some  
9 semblance of justice, and the fact that we can  
10 express our position, I think, was important and  
11 hopefully it will be a little level of comfort to  
12 know that they're not alone in this.

13 So thank you, Madam Chair, and I  
14 look forward to us passing this in this Committee,  
15 in the full Council, and being able to be of  
16 continued support on this case. Thank you.

17 [Pause]

18 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Thank you.

19 [Pause] Would any of the other members of the  
20 Committee like to make remarks? Hearing none,  
21 we'll open up for the vote.

22 WILLIAM MARTIN: William Martin,  
23 Committee Clerk, roll call vote, Committee on  
24 Civil Rights Preconsidered Resolution. Council  
25 Member Rose.

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CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Aye.

WILLIAM MARTIN: Seabrook.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: I vote  
aye.

WILLIAM MARTIN: Ferreras.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Aye.

WILLIAM MARTIN: Chin.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Aye.

WILLIAM MARTIN: Van Bramer.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Aye.

WILLIAM MARTIN: By a vote of five  
in the affirmative, zero in the negative, and no  
abstention, item has been adopted. Members,  
please sign the Committee report. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Thank you so  
much, and we'll leave the vote open for--

MALE VOICE: Everyone.

CHAIRPERSON ROSE: No, everyone  
voted? Okay. Thank you so much, thank you all  
for voting. See thank you. [Pause] This meeting  
is adjourned.



C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Tammy Wittman, 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 *Tammy Wittman*

Date April 13, 2012