

Testimony of Nicole Doniger, Chief of Staff
Before the New York City Council's Committee on Health, Committee on Parks and
Recreation, and the Committee on Transportation
Oversight: Hart Island
May 30, 2019

Thank you Speaker Johnson, Chairs Levine and Rodriguez and members of the committees for the opportunity to testify today regarding Hart Island. My name is Nicole Doniger and I am HRA's Chief of Staff.

The New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA)/Department of Social Services (DSS) is the nation's largest social services agency. Each year we assist more than three million New Yorkers through the administration of twelve public assistance programs, including burial assistance. Every day, in all five boroughs, HRA provides essential programs and supports to low-income New Yorkers. We work to ensure that our services and benefits provide low-income New Yorkers the assistance they need, through a wide range of supports, including Cash Assistance and employment services, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/food stamps), Medicaid, eviction prevention and rental assistance. In administering these programs, HRA is at the forefront of this Administration's efforts to combat poverty and address homelessness.

Pursuant to the New York State Social Services Law and established eligibility criteria, HRA provides financial assistance to individuals to help meet funeral expenses. These funds are made available when an indigent resident of New York City dies who may have been in receipt of Supplement Security Income (SSI) or Cash Assistance (CA), or leaves no funds to cover their burial expenses, and there are no Legally-Responsible Relatives (LRR) able to pay such expenses. To access this assistance, the individual making the funeral arrangements can call 311 or find the application on our website.

This assistance is critical to many New Yorkers who lack adequate funds for their loved ones. As such, we are in the process of implementing changes to ensure grieving New Yorkers can easily access this assistance. For example, one barrier was overly burdensome documentation requirements causing applications for burial assistance to be denied. To address this, we will soon be streamlining our application process to reduce the documentation needed and clarify the instances where further documentation would be required.

As we look to the future, HRA will continue to play a significant role in burial assistance in NYC. We are authorized by the State of New York to ensure that the City of New York provides for the burial of the indigent dead. The first step will be releasing a Request for Information (RFI) this fall to collect information about the market for public cemetery corporations. Given the current state of unknowns, we anticipate this burial assistance procurement process to take up to several years with opportunity for input from this body and the public.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to the Committees' questions.



**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Health jointly with the Committee on Parks & Recreation and Committee
on Transportation
Oversight: Hart Island and the City's Public Burial Process
May 30, 2019**

Testimony By: Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations

Good morning, Chair Levine, members of the Health Committee, Chair Rodriguez, members of the Transportation Committee, members of the Parks Committee, and other members of the Council. I am Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations for NYC Parks, and I am joined here today by Nick Molinari, Chief of Planning & Neighborhood Development for NYC Parks.

NYC Parks is the steward of 14 percent of New York City's land mass and manager of nearly 4,500 individual properties, ranging from parks and playgrounds to community gardens and Greenstreets.

As our colleagues at NYC Human Resources Administration will outline in more detail shortly, after 150 years of using Hart Island as the city's public burial ground, primarily overseen and managed by NYC Department of Correction, the City is committed to finding another model for providing these services, and another location for future burials to occur. Concurrent to these efforts, the City will develop a plan to facilitate continued public access to Hart Island, as friends and family will continue to visit the gravesites of those buried on the island, even as new burials cease.

Once the City, led by HRA, has established and operationalized a process for burials to occur off-Island, facilitating the end of new burials on the Island, jurisdiction of Hart Island will be transferred to NYC Parks. This role is consistent with the agency's existing responsibilities, as NYC Parks already has jurisdiction over a small number of historic cemeteries.

Under NYC Parks' jurisdiction, we expect that public access to Hart Island will resemble the access currently provided by DOC, with a few key differences. Visiting opportunities will continue at a similar frequency to what is currently offered today, facilitated via ferry service which will continue to be provided by the Department of Transportation. NYC Parks will provide general maintenance on the Island,



NYC Parks

perform upkeep on the gravesites, and facilitate visitor services for family and friends of those buried on the island, as well as visits by the general public. In advance of this jurisdictional transfer, operational procedures will need to be clarified, and a great many questions will need to be answered, so the agency will work closely with the Mayor's Office and other agencies to fully examine the operational, logistical and budgetary implications involved with overseeing the site. In the meantime, DOC will continue to manage burials and public visitation until new processes are established.

Given all of the complexities that need to be discussed and examined, it is difficult at this time to forecast a precise timeline for this transition, or to identify the specific operational practices that will be put into place, but we will keep the Council updated, as we continue to discuss the importance of dignified public burial proceedings, and the future of Hart Island. As you will hear from our fellow agencies, this Administration is committed to preserving the dignity of those resting in public burial grounds, and to ensuring a meaningful visit experience for all visitors to those sites.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today, and for your broader support of NYC Parks and our ongoing efforts. I'll now defer to my colleagues at Human Resources Administration to provide you with additional background about this important topic.

**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
TESTIMONY FOR HEARING BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON
HEALTH, PARKS AND RECREATION, AND TRANSPORTATION REGARDING
INTRO. 909
May 30, 2019**

Good Morning Chairs and members of the Committees and thank you for the opportunity to testify today on transportation to Hart Island. My name is Nivardo Lopez and I am Bronx Borough Commissioner at DOT. I am joined here in attendance today by John Garvey, Director of Ferry Operations at the Staten Island Ferry. DOT currently provides ferry service, on behalf of our sister agencies, to support burials and exhumations, as well as limited access for families and the public, managed by the Department of Correction.

To determine public transportation needs, we would look to our sister agencies with jurisdiction over the island now or in the future, who would be appropriately charged with administering public access and facilities on the island. And we would look forward to partnering with them on assessing transportation options, costs, and effects of any increased visitorship on parking and traffic at the current ferry pier location on City Island, or any other potential departure points. This could include discussions of providing the services of our ferries division through an arrangement with one of our sister agencies.

When considering possible ferry departure locations, it should be noted that the boat DOT currently uses, which is due for replacement, the Cosgrove, with a passenger capacity of 143, is a passenger and vehicle type ferry. Any replacement would also need to be capable of transporting vehicles to service burials for as long as they continue, and the continued need for exhumations after burials cease, which we understand would be anticipated. This type of vessel requires a compatible docking infrastructure, such as currently exists at Fordham Street on City Island, which requires more extensive construction than the floating barge-type docking infrastructure used by NYC Ferry, for example.

DOT is happy to support our sister agencies' operations by assisting them with ferry service to and from Hart Island and to continue working in conjunction with them as the City transitions to a new model for burials and plans for the future of Hart Island.

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New York City Council
Public Hearing of Hart Island Legislation
May 30, 2019

Thank you Speaker Johnson and Councilmen Rodriguez, Councilman Levine, and Councilman Grodenchik for inviting me to speak. I am grateful that you are considering transferring jurisdiction of Hart Island from the Department of Correction to the Department of Parks and Recreation. This will greatly destigmatize the burials and help communities across the region to reconcile the deaths of their friends and family members.

I am a visual artist who began documenting Hart Island in 1991, at the peak of the AIDS epidemic in New York City. When I first visited Hart Island, I was surprised by the expansive beauty of this historic cemetery. I was expecting it to be a dark place. So many people my age in the arts community had died or disappeared as a result of AIDS. I was expecting to confirm the terrible stories I had heard about "Potter's Field," a highly stigmatized biblical name for the burial ground of strangers.

What I found instead, was a willingness on the part of the Department of Correction to let me explore the island. I was granted permission to photograph every location except for the interiors of buildings. I spent three years putting together a photographic book *Hart Island* with Joel Sternfeld published in 1998. I produced a film about Hart island a decade later. I developed interactive software to collect the stories of people buried on Hart Island known as *Traveling Cloud Museum*.

Correction Officers told me where to located the grave of the first child to die of AIDS in New York City. Until last November, when Speaker Johnson and Councilman Rodriguez visited this area, no one I know had since been permitted access. Sixteen adults who died from AIDS were buried there in graves fourteen feet deep, below the water table on Hart Island, and in an area formerly used for sewage treatment. I learned of these other AIDS burials from an 1985 Sanitation Report. My drone video *Loneliness in a Beautiful Place* produced last year revealed that the markers were still there. During his visit, Councilman Rodriguez called me to confirm that these graves are dated 1985, consistent with the Sanitation Report.

From my work with Hart Island families, I have learned that many whose loved ones died of AIDS did not initially intend to bury them on Hart Island. They recall trying to find a funeral director in New York City. Only a few directors would even collect the body of someone who died of AIDS. For most families, City Burial was the only option.

The last hearing concerning transferring jurisdiction of Hart Island was held on World AIDS Day in 2016, the same day that the AIDS Memorial in New York City was dedicated. It was two more years before the City Council could to visit AIDS graves on Hart Island. However, I feel we are now moving toward making this burial practice less stigmatized.

Today is May 30. This date is also important because Hart Island was a Civil War camp for Union soldiers and Confederate prisoners of war. The present burial process of 150 bodies laid out in a grid was first used during the Civil War for managing battlefield burials such that they could identify individuals within a common plot. This year marks the sesquicentennial of City Burials on Hart Island and paramilitary organization is still in charge. Even the National Cemeteries are now managed by the National Parks Service, not the military.

The reformatory on Hart Island closed in 1966. That same year Memorial Day became a National holiday and the Department of Correction tried to transfer jurisdiction of Hart Island to Parks. Instead, Phoenix House moved onto Hart Island in 1967 and DOC began busing inmates from Riker's Island to perform the burials. Then in 1976, New York City cancelled 24/7 ferry service forcing Phoenix House to move and depriving the City of New York State funding used to maintain and secure Hart Island. This led to City Cemetery becoming isolated. Mitch Rosenthal, the founder of Phoenix house remembers warning Mayor Beam before leaving Hart Island: "You're still going to have to bury the dead."

Vandals arrived almost immediately. On the last weekend of July 1977, arsonists set fire to the Warden's House destroyed decades of burial records. In a letter dated November 10, 1981, DOC Commissioner Benjamin Ward writes: "The Hart's Island burial grounds have been neglected for several years due to budget restrictions limiting access to the island by this Department....vandals invade Hart Island on almost a weekly basis for beer parties or worse."

From 1981 through 1991, New York City funded a small contingent of inmates to return to reside on the island to restore the war memorials and burial grounds. During this period, which ended months before I began visiting, DOC proposed building a new prison on Hart Island. However, an environmental lawsuit filed by City Island residents and decided in 1985 prevented the reopening of a prison. Now Hart Island can never return to being a city prison and there is no need for the Department of Correction to retain jurisdiction.

In response to a class action lawsuit settled in 2015, New York City finally agreed to limited public access for relatives of the buried. Now, if the mother of an infant wants to visit her baby's grave, she must enter a prison facility. Visits are limited to one morning per month. The mother must arrive at the City Island dock with government issued ID, a signed waiver agreeing not to sue the City and a willingness to relinquish her cell phone. She is then escorted to the gravesite on a prison bus, told when to get off and where to stand, which is either next to an open trench or in a vast field of numbered, anonymous markers.

Think about this experience of visiting a child's grave inside the prison system. People sign up and then have second thoughts. If they fail to show up, they are now waitlisted for six months. Nothing about prison control of Hart Island is culturally acceptable.

I am one of a growing number of people who have come to believe that un-embalmed burials in plain pine boxes known as "natural burials" are much better for the environment, especially in cities, than cremation. The system of burials on Hart Island is both natural and sustainable. But there is no need to dig gigantic trenches when burials number fewer than 1200 annually. Graves could be much smaller and closed within one month of being opened.

Unlike private cemeteries, which are quickly running out of burial space, Hart Island has plenty of space. Although the Department of Correction has stopped recycling graves, there is no reason the City cannot and should not recycle graves older than twenty-five years. This was the practice up until the 1977 fire. Recycling graves should be part of an overall reforestation plan that involves planting trees or other vegetation as part of closing graves in order to mitigate erosion.

Unclaimed remains that are released for city burial should be authorized. Bodies that are unidentified or where families have not agreed to a City Burial could be stored in vaults created for that purpose on Hart Island. Bodies stored in vaults can be more easily returned to families without disturbing the common graves. There needs to be a clear policy, maybe a statute of limitations on the number of years the city must hold unclaimed or unidentified remains in a vault before burial. It is important for burial process to be fair, consistent and transparent.

Because burial assistance does not cover the cost of even direct cremation, City Burial is the only option for many people. Helping low-income residents apply for burial assistance doesn't mean that funeral directors will accept \$900 for their services. The City should consider doubling burial assistance while also educating the public about natural burials. These two things will go a long way toward making Hart Island a culturally acceptable choice instead of dreaded necessity.

By law, every unclaimed body in New York State is entitled to a decent burial. It follows that a decent burial is not a prison burial. The City Council must act to end penal control over City Cemetery.

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**Testimony of Richmond County Public Administrator
Edwina Frances Martin, Esq.,
Before the New York City Council Committees on
Health, Parks and Recreation, and Transportation**

Re: Hart Island and the City's Public Burial Process

**Thursday, May 30th, 2019
City Hall, Committee Room**

Good morning. My name Edwina Frances Martin, I am the Commissioner and Public Administrator of Richmond County, and I thank you for scheduling this oversight hearing on Hart Island and the City's Public Burial Process. I testify today in support of Introduction 1559-2019, in relation to the establishment of an office to provide support to those in need of burial assistance, and Introduction 1580, proposing the creation of a task force on public burial and related issues.

The Office of the Public Administrator is a New York City Agency created under the NYS Surrogate Court Act, and every borough has one. The Office of the Richmond County Public Administrator is responsible for the administration of estates of persons that have left no will and where there are no qualified person(s) to administer the decedent's estate. Amongst other things, we provide for burial arrangements when no close relative is available to do so; protect the decedent's property from waste, loss, or theft; and, locate persons entitled to inherit from the estate. We are also a revenue generating agency for the City, garnering over \$1.2 million for the City from fees associated with estates managed by the office since 2014.

In Fiscal Year 2018, thanks in large part to member item funding allocated by Minority Leader Steve Matteo and Councilwoman Debi Rose, as well as donated services from Staten Island businesses, the RCPA arranged for the dignified burials of 71 Staten Island residents, including 32 still born infants, preventing the fate of their being buried on Hart Island as is the practice in the other four boroughs of New York City.

The Staten Island community supports, and indeed has come to expect, that all Staten Islanders, regardless of wealth and standing in life, deserve a burial (1) on Staten Island; (2) in a place that may be visited; (3) in an accurately-recorded gravesite; (4) from which the remains may be exhumed should a close family member subsequently come forward to do so; (5) by cemetery professionals; (6) in a quality casket; (7) in the thoughtful presence of those to whom care of their remains has been entrusted. Frankly, burial in a pauper's gravesite fails to ensure these elements of a dignified burial.

Honoring this long-time commitment requires the generosity of local funeral directors and cemeteries; the cooperation of area hospitals and care facilities and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner; and the talent and dedication of the staff of the RCPA's Office, which I am proud to lead. My office works closely with the Hebrew Free Burial Association and the Archdiocese of New York for decedents of the Jewish and Catholic faiths, respectively, neither of which charge an opening or other fees, and with Ocean View cemetery for all other faiths, for burials on non-titled land. For veteran decedents, we work with the Mayor's Office of Veterans Services to provide low or no-cost burials. The RCPA receives no budget allocation from the City of New York, nor is reimbursed, for the costs of burials. Indeed, the Human Resources Administration has stated that the Public Administrator may not access burial reimbursement funds, and while a designated "Friends of" organization, *The Foundation for Dignity*, was created to hopefully receive these funds towards indigent burial expenses on Staten Island, they have yet to be successful in receiving any from the Human Resources Administration.

In sum, we rely on annual member item allocations and donations of professional services, caskets and gravesites from business owners to provide these burials. The creation of a task force that would review and reconsider the operating framework for Hart Island, and the services the city provides in connection with the burial of the indigent, as provided for in Intro. 1580, would hopefully take into consideration the work of offices such as mine, and the Foundation of Dignity, and reconsider how burial arrangements are reimbursed. Likewise, the creation of an office to provide support to those in need of burial assistance, such as provided in Intro. 1580, will, I believe, not only further what has been my mission since assuming office on January 1st of dignity and compassion in connection with the burial and treatment of all, but will also be another avenue of support as we work to provide dignified burials for all Staten Islanders.

Please accept my appreciation and gratitude for all you do to improve and uplift all of New York City.

Once again, thank you for holding today's hearing, and I am happy to take questions.



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**TESTIMONY OF THE NEW YORK CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
CONCERNING PUBLIC ACCESS TO GRAVESITES
ON HART ISLAND**

May 30, 2019

The New York Civil Liberties Union submits this testimony in support of legislative efforts to increase public access to the gravesites on Hart Island, which is New York City's potter's field where about one million people are buried. As the New York affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union, the NYCLU is dedicated to protecting and advancing civil rights and civil liberties on a wide range of issues, including the right of individuals to associate with family members and others with whom they have close personal relationships. Restrictions on the ability of persons to visit the gravesites of their loved ones implicates this fundamental right of familial and personal association.

The NYCLU has a unique perspective on the legislation pending before the Council as a result of the NYCLU having legally challenged the New York City policy and practice of barring all visits to gravesites on Hart Island and having monitored gravesite visits that have taken place since 2016 as a result of our case. Specifically, in December 2014 the NYCLU filed a federal class action lawsuit (*Lusero v. City of New York*) on behalf of tens of thousands of family members – including children, parents, brother and sisters, grandparents, grandchildren, cousins, aunts and uncles, and nieces and nephews -- of those buried on Hart Island. Under a settlement the court approved in February 2016, the City is required to take various steps to permit and facilitate gravesite visits to Hart Island, including the following:

- Allow up to 70 people to visit to Hart Island gravesites one weekend day each month;

- Provide ferry service from City Island to Hart Island for gravesite visits;
- Maintain an online and telephone system by which individuals can reserve spots on the ferry to Hart Island for gravesite visits;
- Allow visitors to leave at gravesites personal mementos such as flowers, small stuffed animals, prayer cards, photographs, small flags, and blankets;
- Maintain a publicly accessible database for members of the public to locate persons buried on Hart Island.

In addition, after finalization of the settlement the Department of Correction agreed to the NYCLU's request to allow photographs to be taken at gravesite visits.

Meaningful as these reforms are, they fall well short of what the City should be doing to facilitate public access to a burial ground of around one million poor New Yorkers. Most significantly, it remains very difficult for members of the public to gain access to Hart Island because of the 70-person, one-weekend-per-month limit on visitors and because the only access to the island is via a ferry departing from City Island, which itself is far removed from convenient public transportation. Relatedly, while the Department of Correction has made a good-faith effort to fine-tune the reservation system that schedules the limited visits, that system has created an untenable situation in which people claim limited visitation slots but do not show up while those who wish to visit cannot do so because all slots have been reserved in advance.

A second major problem with the current visitation arrangement is that all gravesite visitors are subject to physical search by Department of Correction officers at the ferry and then must be accompanied by an officer to the gravesite, both of which result from Hart Island being under the jurisdiction of the Department of Correction and from the City using inmate labor to do Hart Island burials. While in our experience DOC personnel have been professional and courteous, no one visiting a loved one's grave should be treated as a prison visitor. Further

exemplifying this issue, gravesite photographs are restricted to those taken by corrections officers using a camera the department purchased.

Given this situation, we fully support fundamental reform to New York City's operation of Hart Island. Specifically, we call on the Council to do the following:

1. Allow members of the public to visit Hart Island gravesites throughout the week without numerical limits and without having to make advance reservations;
2. Provide regular ferry service to Hart Island, both from City Island and from other points around the city;
3. End the current regime of requiring gravesite visitors to be accompanied by city employees – be they Department of Correction officers or any other type of employee.

With respect to the proposed legislation now before the Council, Int. No. 906's transfer of Hart Island from the Department of Correction to the Department of Parks and Recreation presumably would be an important step towards eliminating the numerical visits on gravesite visits and eliminating visitors being searched and accompanied by armed law-enforcement officers. With that understanding, we support that bill.

As for Proposed Int. No. 909-A's requirement that the Department of Transportation develop within one year a transportation plan to increase ferry service to Hart Island, the NYLCU fully supports increased ferry access to the island. We see no reason, however, why it should take a year to develop such a plan and call on the Council to require that the plan to developed much more quickly, preferably within 90 days. We also believe the bill should be clearer in requiring not only the development of a plan but the actual implementation and maintenance of the plan.¹

¹On the related bills that would create a public burial task force (Int. No. 1580) and that would create an office of burial support (Int. No. 1559), the NYCLU takes no position because it has no particular expertise bearing on those matters.

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Towards the end of 2017, I was in the midst of finishing production on my first album of original songs, "Cast Fire," when I inadvertently stumbled across the forgotten words and legacy of my great granduncle Matt Valentine Huhta, a man who, unbeknownst to his family, was more widely known by the moniker "T-bone Slim." An irreconcilable revolutionary, hobo philosopher, songwriter, poet, and columnist for the Industrial Workers of the World, he was found drowned in the East River at pier 9 on May 15th, 1942. The medical examiners report refers to him as "Unknown White Male," "Probable name of Matt Valentine Huhta." The cause of death is labeled "Asphyxia by submersion, circumstances undetermined." There was little or no investigation, and his body was buried at Hart Island on June 5th, 1942. No funeral service or other remembrances were observed, and T-bone Slim quietly faded from memory. It is more than a little ironic that a political satirist whose articles were often printed beneath the heading, "From the boneyard," was laid to rest in the country's largest cemetery, where over a million persons are estimated to be buried.

In December of 2017 I discovered an unpublished archive of T-bone Slim's handwritten songs, letters, poems, and pictures stored at the home of my parents in North Carolina. Until that time no one in my family had any knowledge of "Uncle Matt's" alias as T-bone Slim. When I first read through the manuscripts, it brought me to tears, and sent chills through my bones. It was as though I was being gifted an intimate meeting with a wise and mysterious uncle, who had long been forgotten. According to his own words, he seemed to have expected nothing less.

"A word once spoken the fleetest horse cannot over take it. Fish see the bait, but not the hook; men see the profit, but not the peril. A dead man is terrible as a tiger, a dead tiger harmless as a lamb. The good are short-lived, the evil last a thousand years (I'll soon be forgotten, heh, heh, heh.)"- T-bone Slim, unpublished manuscript

Being a songwriter and musician myself, I was all the more captivated by the revelation of this mysterious hobo bard on the Finnish side of my family tree. I felt a longing to connect to "Uncle Matt's" words and music, and for the past year and a half, I've been researching his life, as well as performing his songs and poetry. He was a crusader for the liberation of the body, mind, and spirit of the working

class, the impoverished, and the homeless. So, it is perhaps fitting that he was buried in a paupers grave, along with untold numbers of unclaimed, and unsung human beings at Hart Island- for those are his people, the ones he sang and fought for throughout his life. And he would no doubt have some insightful and stinging remarks concerning the fact that to this day, inmates are still burying the city's poor and unclaimed dead, being compensated by the DOC at rates of 25-35 cents an hour. I would argue that the continued operation of the city cemetery by the DOC is a disgrace to the legacy of T-bone Slim.

The DOC's current management practices shroud the island from view, and deny the general public the right to visit and honor the dead. It will be a great service to the legacy of Slim and countless others, if legislation is enacted handing jurisdiction of Hart Island over to the parks department, who could manage and operate the island in a manner that allows families and the general public access to this historic cemetery.

One of T-bone's most well known songs, "The Popular Wobbly," which laments the plight of the poor and unjustly imprisoned, ends with the refrain:

"Will the roses grow wild over me? When I'm gone into the land that is to be?
When my soul and body part, in the stillness of my heart, will the roses grow wild over me?"

If the roses haven't already started growing wild on Hart Island, I think we should plant them ourselves, as a memorial to the hundreds of thousands of forgotten souls who slipped or were pushed through the cracks of society. We can start by transferring jurisdiction of the island to the parks department

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Testimony May 30, 2019
New York City Council Hearing

My son passed away March 9th 2017. I didn't know about his passing. I was too busy searching for him. He had been missing for four years! I had a missing persons report out on him, I had even asked for help from The Aware Foundation. They made flyers for me, which I was able to circulate on Social media. And I did every week!

Then I was notified by the Aware Foundation that a person had called saying they thought they had located my son. I can not express how happy I was. Until I was asked to do a DNA test, because that person was deceased! We finally identified the person who did turn out to be my son, I was devastated.

Then I was told since he was unidentified he was buried at Hart Island, (better known as NY's Potters Field), more devastation. He was buried as a number, no name, no identity! I wanted to visit his grave, but I'm told I have to get permission. Permission from who I ask? I visit my Moms grave & never once did I have to ask permission from anybody. I am then introduced to Melinda Hunt, (she truly is a Saint). Via phone conversation she explains I have to contact The Dept. of Corrections. Now, in my mind I'm thinking "oh my god my son who never had any trouble with the police must have committed some kind of crime before his passing". But I am quickly assured that is not the case. I am informed that The Dept. of Corrections runs Hart Island, which is completely off limits to the public, only by reservation & I can only visit once a year, with a limited amount of people! Im shocked! But I contact Dept. of Corrections they set up a date for me to visit almost a year later.

As the date gets closer for the visit they send me an email, letting me know parking is limited, there is no address to put in your GPS, don't bring anything metal, no cameras or cell phones, only 5 people per visit, there is rough terrain, not to mention a lot of walking, dress warm & there are wild animals on the property! Well if they were trying to scare me out of the visit they succeeded!

I was terrified! Everybody in my large Italian family wanted to go, how do I narrow it down to only 5? How do I explain this to my family? This is just not fair! To the deceased nor to the families. When I think of going to visit my sons grave I want to bring flowers, I want him to have a name not just a number; I want to sit by his grave in peace & talk to him. After all I have missed his last four years of life. I want privacy, I also want the support of my family. None of which I got with The Dept. of Corrections at the helm.

All I want for my son is to rest easy. He had a rough last 4 years of his life, being alone on a park bench. Although I know he thought he was fine, somewhere along his life's journey he got confused. I want to be able to visit him whenever I am in New York. I want to give him peace. I

don't want my son's life's journey to be just a number. He has a whole family that missed him very much, and want to visit with him.

In closing, I hope we can make this change, not only just for myself & my son, but the countless others buried on Hart Island who have loved ones that want nothing more than to be able to access to their loved ones.

Thank You

Susan Hurlburt

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Public Hearing on legislation to transfer Hart Island to Parks
May 30, 2019

My name is Kathleen Maher. In 1999, I moved to NYC from Southern California, where I grew up, for graduate school at Columbia University in Social Work. My first job out of grad school was at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center where part of my job was helping families with their burial options when a loved one died. The social workers referred to a list of resources and "NYC Burial" was on the last page. Even though most social workers and staff knew very little about it, it was an option for those who could not afford a burial. Unbeknownst to me, a few years later it would be much more understood.

I had a twin brother named Kenny. He had a tall, athletic body, loved mountain biking in the hills that surrounded us and surfing in the Pacific Ocean. When he turned 19, he was diagnosed with a mental illness. A year later, he was stable, working part-time at a bike shop and attending junior college. But he craved an adventure. Despite my parent's protests, he left home for New York City in early July 1991, with his favorite mountain bike. Once in New York, he secured a job in Queens. He had a phone line and called home often.

By late August, many days had passed without hearing from him. I called his work and got very little information. I called his phone and it was no longer in service. My heart sank. My parents filed a missing persons report with the NYPD, consulted a detective and opened a case with The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. Our family did not have the resources to fly to New York. We were told we did everything possible and now had the painful task of waiting.

Months turned into years. Holidays were often sad and stilted by his absence. I dreaded our shared birthday. When my mother, who suffered from depression after he disappeared, received a call from a wrong number, she imagined the silence before the dial tone was Kenny on the other end.

As the years went by, I feared the likelihood of finding him alive was slim and got smaller every passing year. But never knowing what happened to him was haunting. The missing persons reports gave me the false hope: if he were dead we'd be notified. Years went by -- our family split apart, grandparents died and we all struggled to live with the unknown.

Every few months, my mother continued to call The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. She created a close rapport with the caseworker, even sending him Christmas cards. He encouraged her to seek "closure" but she continued to call.

As the DNA advancements improved, this organization started gathering data from my family. Additionally, at this time, the now new caseworker called The Medical Examiner's in New York City to search for unidentified bodies with Kenny's physical description. He gave them a small two-week window, starting with the date we last spoke to him.

I was in my private practice psychotherapy office in the West Village when my older brother, Tom called to tell me the news. They found a match and Kenny was dead. He died sixteen years ago. Because he died without ID he was classified as a "John Doe", an unidentified body. He died five weeks after leaving home and just a few days after calling home. He was found unconscious from a fall on Reade Street in Tribeca and brought to St. Vincent's Hospital where he was pronounced dead from trauma to the head. The toxicology reports were clean. Learning this news, I was in disbelief, feeling as if he just died. A week later, on August 14, 2007, the anniversary of his death, I identified him by photo at The Medical Examiner's Office.

Back in 1991 when my mother opened a case, the caseworker my mother was in touch with all those years, egregiously never did a search with the Medical Examiner's Office. Sadly, and probably for many complicated reasons, we never did this search either.

Soon after we learned of his death, the Police Detective told me he was buried on Hart Island. I asked if I could visit the gravesite. Finally knowing where he was, although dead, was significant given sixteen long years of not knowing. I was told visiting Hart Island was not possible.

Thankfully, Tom did research about Hart Island and arranged for us to have a "closure visit". He flew out from CA and in late August 2007, we went to Hart Island on a D.O.C ferry with another family. Like any visit to a gravesite, it was tough. We walked the grounds with a guide and noted the barren, unmarked area where Kenny, amongst thousands (-??) was buried with the ominous buildings in the background. It was not a place I would have picked for Kenny as his final resting place. Without a memorial site, headstone or name, one can easily feel lost on Hart Island. I had an overall feeling Kenny didn't matter and stayed "missing" by way of burial in a mass grave. Before we left the island, I found a heart-shaped rock I keep next to Kenny's photo at my home in Brooklyn. Tom rubbed a half-smoked joint and a marigold together and scattered them into the air. It was hard, but we both found our own way to be close to Kenny on that visit.

The following week, in California, on the lake we grew up on, over a hundred family and friends gathered to remember Kenny and finally say goodbye. Our family and friends could finally start to grieve.

In January 2008, I received a call Kenny was successfully disinterred, as we had requested. I made over fifteen phone calls before finding a facility that would agree

to cremate him. Most funeral homes and crematories were baffled by the request and declined services. I eventually found a facility.

Following protocol, his remains were brought back to The Medical Examiner's Office before sent to the crematory. But for a few days, Kenny went missing - (AGAIN!) the crematory facility thought he was at The Medical Examiner's Office and The Medical Examiner's Office thought he was at the crematory! With all this confusion and my growing distrust of city agencies, I requested a confirmation the correct remains were disinterred. They sent a Forensic Anthropologist to the crematory to identify him and discovered half his remains were missing. The Chief of Staff at The Medical Examiner's Office explained this is likely caused by the way he was buried. Stacking many lye-coated pine boxes on top of one another promotes decomposing and often collapse upon one another. Also, most importantly, disinterment is by D.O.C prisoners instead of a professional. The Anthropologist returned to Hart Island to retrieve more of his remains but some were unable to be recovered.

Kenny was finally cremated in May 2008. I brought him to California where he was buried near his beloved mountains, ocean and family.

I whole-heartily support the four bills proposed. The management of Hart Island by the Department of Corrections is a Dickensian practice and must be transferred to the management to the Parks Service. No one should have to contact the prison system after suffering the loss of a loved one. The tragic missteps and misinformation peppered Kenny's case should not be repeated. The city must make Hart Island accessible to loved ones, remove the haunting crumbling buildings and restore the landscape for visitors. As a Psychotherapist who specializes in grief, milling around a barren landscape is a difficult way to feel connected with a loved one. Please create a space that is conducive for grieving and supports cultural practices for families.

The neglectful management of Hart Island should make this grand city ashamed of itself! It transcends a callous message: the dead are forgotten and do not matter. It is what I felt on my visit to Hart Island and was born out in how Kenny's remains were not given the attention and care every human deserves. The task force you appoint should work to build public trust in the burial and disinterment process. It is totally unacceptable to lose track of human remains, disinter only partial remains or let the skeletal remains wash into the Long Island Sound due to poor landscape management practices.

I hope this long and complicated story gives you an intimate look at the pain and suffering of those who are connected to the disenfranchised, missing and loved humans who finally rest on Hart Island. I am sure Kenny's story is no different than so many others. Part of Kenny still lives there with all of them. Thank you for listening.

Carol DiMedio
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Testimony submitted to New York City Council
in support of legislation to transfer jurisdiction of Hart Island
May 30, 2019

My name is Carol DiMedio. My Grandfather is Luigi Roma. He left Italy out of the port of Naples and arrived in this country in the 1920's. Months later his wife Carolina and their baby Pietro came to this country. They had 2 more children: my Mother, Annette, and a son, Gaetano. They lived in the Bronx. My Grandfather was a barber and a very hard worker. Although my Mom was just a little girl at the time, she remembers leaping into his arms hugging and kissing him when he arrived home from work every night. He would reach into his pocket to give her Hershey Kisses.... Soon my Grandmother became pregnant but she died during childbirth and so did the baby. Because my Grandfather worked many long hours and the children were alone the neighbors complained. Eventually, they were taken over by the state and were all placed in different orphanages. Pietro wrote letters to my Mother. My Grandfather visited my Mom at the orphanage every week, but one week he stopped coming.

Pietro wrote in a letter "something terrible happened to Papa, he died". There were only Pietro and my Mom. They did not know where baby Gaetano was. Peter kept pleading to go to his Father's funeral, he wrote to my Mom. He said in his letter he put his good clothes on and waited all day for someone to take him but that never happened. When my Mom became an adult, she got a copy of her Father's death certificate. The cause of death was listed as tuberculosis and pneumonia. Place of burial was left blank. We never knew what happened to my Grandfather. I searched my entire life. Before computers I called cemeteries and police departments. We were obsessed trying to find out what happened to him. He just disappeared. Recently my Mother started rapidly declining with dementia. As each day went by, she wanted to know what happened to her Father, Luigi Roma. She turned 95 in October. Every day I would call and she would ask if I found her father. My answer was always no.

I finally read about Melinda and Hart Island. I decided to email Melinda, never expecting a response. Although I wanted to find my Grandfather, I prayed he wasn't there. I knew it was maintained by the Department of Corrections....I had read about the trenches....Melinda found him. I was shocked after all these years and heartbroken to learn he was on Hart Island. I told my Mom I found her Father, Luigi. It was as if God allowed her to understand before she fell into the depths of Alzheimer's. I lied, telling her he was buried in the most beautiful cemetery with green grass, surrounded by water with birds flying overhead. She understood...she needed that peace.

I knew I had to go to Hart Island. I had ached to see my Grandfather my entire life. It's funny how you miss someone and love someone although you never met them. But he was a part

of me and I was part of him. If I could just get there. here were so many obstacles it seemed almost impossible. My husband and I contacted the Department of Corrections and waited months for our scheduled day and time. I remember thinking, there has got to be a better way. Others can go to a cemetery and just visit their loved one. Why can't we? We handed over our cell phones to the DOC and signed a waiver before we could get on the ferry. When we walked onto Hart Island, I remember watching my foot step onto the soil. It was a very emotional moment. This was the closest I had ever physically been to my Grandfather. Our guard took us to a spot on the island, but it wasn't his spot. I wondered exactly where he was. I sprinkled Holy Water and placed 3 roses on the ground. One for him and two for the others buried there who might never be acknowledged.

I think about how beautiful Hart Island could be if someone like the (cut) Parks Department could take it over. It was very difficult not knowing what happened to my Grandfather and then finding out he is buried on Hart Island. There is a type of stigma associated with the Island. First of all, you can't really share your grief with anyone because most people have never heard of Hart Island. How do I tell people my Grandfather is buried in a trench with many other people on an Island run by the Department of Corrections, buried by inmates and there are bones floating in the water...It is so painful. Other than Melinda, the families have no one to turn to. If the Parks Department took it over, I think it would be more comforting for the families and friends of those buried on Hart Island. People could visit their loved ones without waiting Months. The Island could be beautiful. The people like my Grandfather did nothing wrong...he came to this country for a better life for him and his family. He lost his wife; his baby and his 3 children were taken away. I just pray that one day the lies I told my Mother would come true.... That Hart Island would be a beautiful place with green grass and flowers and trees surrounded by water with birds flying above. I believe the Parks Department could make that happen. I believe we can make amends to those buried there.... that we could truly honor them and give them the dignity they deserve if the Parks Department was in charge. I watched a story on TV about a cemetery in the South that had become overgrown with weeds. Tombstones had toppled and there was a lot of deterioration. The community decided to change that. They raised money, people volunteered, landscapers donated plants their clients no longer wanted. After many challenges this cemetery is a Paradise where the people go to view the landscape and learn the history. It is a beautiful place. I kept thinking Hart Island could become that place if the Parks Department was in charge. This should not be up to the Department of Corrections. We have the opportunity to change this desecration now and to give the people of Hart Island the dignity and honor they deserve.

Daria D'Andrea
60 East Olive Street
Long Beach, NY 11561
516-426-3048

New York City Council
Public Hearing on Hart Island Legislation
May 30, 2019

I am writing in support of Intro 906, 909 and legislation to form a task force to review the burial process.

Almost a year ago to this day I was able to locate my father who was buried on Hart Island in 1978 in a now unmarked grave. My father was unknown to me my entire life. Through DNA testing I was finally able to solve the biggest mystery of my life of who he was.

As it turned out, my father also had a son, baby boy Johnson, who is my half-brother. This child was buried on Hart Island in 1945. His grave has now been recycled. I'm told I may be able to find his burial record at the Municipal Archives. Those records are not available online. I will attempt to visit the archive which only recently opened on Saturdays.

I've known about Hart Island since I was a little girl. My grandmother, an immigrant from Ireland, lived in mortal terror of being buried there and spoke of it often – referring to it as Potter's Field. I guess that planted a seed in mind my which led to a life-long fascination about this island, burial ground of the poor, the homeless and the unknown. With morbid curiosity, I read everything I could lay my hands on about Hart Island but my fascination began long before the internet so there was little I could find. That changed when I found the book Hart Island by Melinda Hunt and Joel Sternfeld. Seeing the photos and reading the stories about the burials haunted me for years.

I was able to connect with Melinda Hunt and learned about The Hart Island Project to catalog the names of the people buried on Hart Island as a way to identify them and to give relatives the ability to locate the gravesite of their loved ones. I volunteered to input data starting in 2010 even before knowing that I myself am a relative of someone buried on Hart Island. My heart ached for those that suffered the humiliation of having to essentially beg the City of New York for a chance to access the Island so that they might pay their respects to those they lost.

I was able to visit Hart Island twice in the past year. The first visit had to be scheduled six months in advance – that was the first appointment I could get. After the visit, I learned the gravesite I was taken to was not the correct one, a mistake was made. Without the benefit of grave markers and/or the ability to bring my cell phone with GPS capabilities, the Correction Officer assigned to me wasn't able to locate the correct grave. On my second trip, which was just two weeks ago, I was able to locate the correct site but only because the Correction Officer brought a map and counted the steps from a different but still standing grave marker to where

he believed my father's grave is located. This method of grave location is primitive at best. There has to be another way to visit the grave of a relative buried on Hart Island. I support legislation to have a task force review and advise on the burial process. I want to say that Hart Island itself is hauntingly beautiful and peaceful. It is perfectly serene. I not only felt tremendous gratitude for having found my father, I was grateful to be on that island praying for all the souls buried there. For whatever the reasons that led to their ending up on Hart Island, I don't believe anyone's final resting place should be cloaked in such shame and isolation. I don't think anyone would want to end up in a place that's off-limits to the average citizen, akin to a leper colony. It's just so incredibly sad I'm crying as I type this.

I'm asking Speaker Johnson and these committees to transfer control of the Island from the Department of Correction to the Department of Parks and Recreation. Allow the families the decency of mourning their loved one's deaths in a place free from stigma and shame. Allow free access to their graves. Allow the privacy to mourn that is afforded visitors of all other cemeteries. Utilize the beauty of the island for good, for healing, by eliminating the sense of visiting a penal colony instead of a cemetery. Consider the feelings of the families that mourn today and, as in my case, may come to mourn in the future. And please remember that until one year ago, I never would've suspected that I would find myself visiting not one but two relatives buried in such a lonely place.

Thank you.

Barbara Burn Dolensek
21 Tier St.
Bronx NY 10464

Hearing at City Council regarding

The New York City Council - File #: T2019-4401
transfer of jurisdiction to Parks Dept

I am a longtime resident of City Island and vice president of the City Island Historical Society. I also serve as an officer of the City Island Civic Association, which in 2014 voted to support a previous bill calling for the transfer of Hart Island jurisdiction to Parks from the Department of Correction; this support was followed in 2015 by that of Bronx Community Board 10, which voted unanimously, with one abstention, to support the resolution, which was also supported by the Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. and then Public Advocate Letitia James. Some residents of City Island have raised objections to this new bill, and I agree with their concerns about the additional burden that open access to Hart Island could cause for City Island. However, I support the current bill for the following reasons.

In 2018, I submitted an application to the State Historic Preservation Office to place Hart Island on the National Registry of Historic Places, and the state of New York confirmed that Hart Island is eligible for that designation. However, the Dept of Correction has made it clear that it will not support the application. Many do not realize that Hart Island has had a cemetery since the Civil War, and that after it was bought by the City of New York in 1868, it became a potter's field run by the Department of Charities and Correction. The department was divided in 1896 and the Department of Correction was left in charge.

Most of the island's historic buildings have been allowed to deteriorate; much of its natural landscape, including graves, has been damaged by storms; burial records have been destroyed by vandals, and the general public may not visit without special permission from DOC, which handles visitors in the same way they handle visitors to city prisons.

The Department of Parks and Recreation would be obliged by its mission to either restore or remediate the conditions there and to treat visitors in the same welcoming way that Woodlawn Cemetery and other city cemeteries do. Some of those who object to the Parks Department jurisdiction fear that the island would become a popular attraction for tourists like Orchard Beach, drawing thousands of visitors, but I believe that since Hart Island is a cemetery and an important historic site, the Parks Department would be obliged to treat it with respect as such.

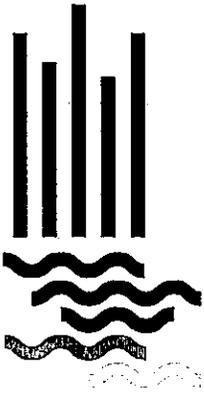
However, those who don't want Hart Island to become a tourist destination raise a serious concern that must be addressed, since City Island now offers the only access to the island and could not accommodate additional traffic or parking problems. I believe that anyone who wishes to visit a public cemetery should be allowed to do so, but I hope that the year-long study of transportation options offered by this bill will result in the conclusion that a ferry from City Island is not the only viable option. There is no space for parking, traffic onto the Island is already overwhelming on weekends, and City Island is a largely residential community that is

not suitable for access to a cemetery. Furthermore, there is no reason why ferry service conveying workers and coffins to Hart Island has to originate on City Island, a practice dating back to when the construction of the FDR Drive eliminated ferry service from Bellevue Hospital. The dock on City Island was used by residents who worked on Hart Island but that is no longer the case. Some combination of ferry service from other locations would be desirable.

After City Island residents went to court in 1985 to protest the presence of prisons on the island, it was resolved that state environmental restrictions would not permit the city to house inmates there and the prison that was there as recently as 1991 was closed as a result. So there is no justification for the Department of Correction to be present on Hart Island, let alone manage burials there.

Some who object to the bill explain that the Parks Department is already seriously underfunded, and this is true. FEMA has provided funds to restore the shoreline on Hart Island to address the problem of skeletal remains washing into the Long Island Sound. This work is now beginning and will provide a significant start to the landscape restoration, but there is a great deal more work to be done. Capital funding would enable the demolition and restoration of buildings, and a modest increase in the Parks operating budget would cover the cost of landscape maintenance. Burials can and should be managed and funded by the Medical Examiner's office or a related city agency.

As to the third section of the bill, the study of burial processes, I hope that the conclusion will be that burials should be managed by the Medical Examiner's office, not by the city's prison system. The Medical Examiner's office has over the years been responsible for releasing and delivering human remains to Hart Island; by law, unclaimed remains must be buried by the city, but there is no reason to involve the criminal justice system in any part of that process.

FOR THE RECORD**Public Testimony****May 30, 2019****New York City Council Hearing (Committees on Health, Parks and Recreation, and Transportation)****Re: Oversight - Hart Island****Submitted by Karen Imas, Senior Program Director
Waterfront Alliance**

Waterfront Alliance is a non-profit civic organization and coalition of more than 1,000 community and recreational groups, educational institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders. Our mission is to inspire and enable resilient, revitalized and accessible coastlines for all communities.

The transition of Hart Island to a more publicly accessible place is a sensitive and complex issue but one that merits further exploration and investigation.

We recognize that the demands on existing NYC Parks are great in terms of maintenance, operations and capital budget needs across the City.

At the same time, we hope this legislation – Intro 906 – can be a starting point to highlight the urgent coastal resiliency needs on Hart Island and what future potential open space access could look like.

A coastal resiliency plan with the appropriate capital investments is critical to preserving and respecting the history of the Island and those individuals buried there. As we all know, erosion is damaging the grave sites as continued extreme storms and precipitation create greater challenges for the local landscape – challenges which the Department of Corrections may not be best positioned to address. The Departments of Health, Parks, Environmental Protection are agencies better aligned to addressing the erosion issue and planning for the future.

From a public access perspective, we have seen the evolution of Governors Island from an unused military installation into an extraordinary open space destination; and we are in the midst of a potential radical transformation of Rikers Island. It is time to consider how to bring Hart Island into the 21st century. One way is to increase transportation services to and from the island for visitors and allow easier access for families to visit graves. Second is to take better

physical care of the Island through capital investments and resiliency adaptations.

Waterfront Alliance recognizes the sensitive nature of the issue and the budgetary implications of activating new open space. It is also important to recognize that cemeteries can be active parts of the city, even while they honor the deceased. Greenwood Cemetery is but one significant example. And farther afield, the 35-acre Congressional Cemetery in Washington, DC serves also as a grand city park with dog walking, jogging and community gatherings, as well as historic docent led tours.

We support the intent of the legislation and encourage the Council and the City to further examine what the future of Hart Island holds.

Thank you.

Testimony – May 30, 2019
Elsie Soto
116 W 197th St #3B
Bronx, NY 10468

My name is Elsie Soto. I grew up in public housing near South Street Seaport. My family is from Puerto Rico. I am here today because my dad, Norbert Soto, was buried on Hart Island in March 1993. He died of complications from AIDS.

I began visiting his grave, Plot 231, Section II, last year. The ride over was actually very nice. It was kind of relaxing, calming. Then we got to Hart Island. It was, I feel very harsh. Just the whole demeanor of the Department of Correction because you have to get into this bus. And you're bused around. It just doesn't feel like you're going to visit a family member who is buried. You don't feel a sentimental connection.

Where my father is buried specifically is at the foot of the island. As you know most of the AIDS patients are buried there. A lot of the headstones were knocked over, broken down. They couldn't tell me exactly where he is buried. He's just in this big area and you just kind of like lay your flowers here. I felt like I needed a more personal connection to him versus "Oh, just stand here. He's just buried here." Like they're looking at a paper. I'm like, "That's my dad. You know, he's a person. He's loved. He's always loved. Never forgotten.

My father, Norbert was always present in our lives. Even though his relationship with my mom was not always the greatest, he still was very present in our lives. I always knew who my father was. I knew my dad loved me. I knew he was around for us.

I remember one day that he took me, my brother and my best friend to the park. Even though my best friend's father was very present, they lived together, she told me: "You're so lucky because your dad takes you to the park cause my dad is there every day, but he doesn't take me to the park."

The thing was that I never had any documentation on him. I never had his social. If it wasn't for his death certificate, I wouldn't have known half the information. I believe I was around nine years old when he got sick. My mom didn't divulge AIDS until after the fact. He didn't speak of AIDS. He just mentioned that he was very sick and that he did not know if he was going to get better or not. Within two years he passed. He passed very rapidly.

I know my mom was having a hard time finding a funeral home to take him. We had one that right next door to my school. Like literally connected, and we spoke to them about it and they were very hesitant about taking him once they found out that he had AIDS. And then they started telling her: "Oh you know, because he was sick, we have to handle his body differently and it's going to be extra money. And my mom's just like: "I only have so much." She had seven children at the time and we had very limited help. It seemed like the only choice we had, at the end of the day, was to have him buried on Hart Island. Ultimately, that's where he went. They

held on to him for a month and a half. He died on February 1st and they buried him on March 23. And I don't know if they used him for studies or if they took his organs. I don't. I have so many questions that I feel are unanswered.

I would really like to have Hart Island become a public park because that is how I wish his burial site to be remembered by my children. A place where I can tell them about my dad taking me to play.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Harriet Cohen
The Road Ahead
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theroadahead.nyc@gmail.com

FOR THE RECORD

Statement of Harriet Cohen before the Joint Committee on Parks and Recreation and the Committee on Transportation. May 30, 2019, 10:00 AM Committee Room, City Hall, Oversight on Hart Island and the City's Public Burial Process (T2019-4401); Transfer of Jurisdiction of Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to Department of Parks & Recreation (Int 0906-2018); Development of Department of Transportation Plan for Public Travel to and from Hart Island (Int 0909-2018); Creation of Task Force on Public Burial and Related Issues (T2019-4404).

My name is Harriet Cohen. I have a long track record in providing housing and services for people who are homeless and living with additional challenges. I speak to you today as a private citizen who has an End of Life practice, and someone who 2 years ago began a project to identify and assess the obstacles that prevent dignified burials for people who are homeless and disconnected. I wanted to know whether there could be a more comforting and accessible resting place than Hart Island where the indigent are buried. At the time I and others came to believe that as operated by the NYC Department of Corrections, this burial ground was the last remaining indignity that people who are homeless and disconnected face: buried in large unmarked graves of 155 adults in 3 layers of pine boxes marked solely with numbers; in a place not readily accessible by public transportation; with restrictions for visitors concerning accessible days and times; limits on who can attend based on connection to the deceased; mandatory security checks at entry and cell phone confiscation.

My project involved research, meetings and interviews with individuals including people who at the time were homeless or recently housed. One of them coincidentally had been previously incarcerated at Rikers' and had been on the burial crew at Hart Island.

I do not know whether the Parks Department is the best suited agency to manage Hart Island and its burials. But what I do know is that there is an urgency to transfer it out of the NYC Department of Corrections and in the long term locate another site. What is needed in a laser focused and serious effort to find an alternative agency or entity that can be given the authority to bury with dignity the dead of our City who were indigent and/or homeless and disconnected, and to find a more fitting and appropriate place.

A funeral director requires permission from the next of kin in order to attend to a dead body. Without such consent, a funeral director cannot proceed. This is the primary reason why most homeless and disconnected individuals wind up with a borough-based NYC Medical Examiner and are then headed to Hart Island. To find alternative trajectories and by-pass Hart Island, I have looked into and recommend the use of the NYS Form “Appointment of Agent to Control Disposition of Remains”, where the individual names a person to handle the disposition of his/her remains. This might be included in the regular intake paperwork at a homeless shelter, or as part of opening a public assistance case. I was recently contacted by someone from one of the City’s homeless outreach teams – inquiring as to how one of their deceased clients could be buried at other than Hart Island. They had hit a brick wall because they are not the next of kin and did not have permission to dispose of the remains. Another possible pathway out is a signed agreement to donate one’s body to science through the Associated Medical Schools of NY — a consortium of medical colleges that can receive deceased bodies. After their research purposes are complete, they will cremate or bury the body on land they control.

I note also that there is funding available through various not-for-profit agencies, often faith based, for private burials. This needs further investigation and updating as to requirements and costs. Locating burial sites is an important concern here, as is a replacement for Hart Island in order to create a more suitable and ecologically sound resting place. The current overheated NYC real estate market makes this a big challenge, but not one that is insurmountable. We have to think creatively and not be deterred. And we need to also explore cremation, which is not currently legal in NYC for this purpose, although several other US cities – Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco – do allow for cremation of unclaimed bodies after a good faith effort has been made to locate next of kin. And we should think Green and explore flameless cremation, as well.

How we treat and bury the dead that were indigent, homeless and disconnected is a measure of our collective humanity. Much more is required for us as a City to reach a respectful and admirable place in this regard.

Appointment of Agent to Control Disposition of Remains

I, _____
(Your name and address)

being of sound mind, willfully and voluntarily make known my desire that, upon my death, the disposition of my remains shall be controlled by

(name of agent)

With respect to that subject only, I hereby appoint such person as my agent with respect to the disposition of my remains.

SPECIAL DIRECTIONS:

Set forth below are any special directions limiting the power granted to my agent as well as any instructions or wishes desired to be followed in the disposition of my remains:

Indicate below if you have entered into a pre-funded pre-need agreement subject to section four hundred fifty-three of the general business law for funeral merchandise or service in advance of need:

- No, I have not entered into a pre-funded pre-need agreement subject to section four hundred fifty-three of the general business law.
- Yes, I have entered into a pre-funded pre-need agreement subject to section four hundred fifty-three of the general business law.

(Name of funeral firm with which you entered into a pre-funded pre-need funeral agreement to provide merchandise and/or services)

AGENT:

(Name)

(Address)

(Telephone Number)

SEE OTHER SIDE 

SUCCESSORS:

If my agent dies, resigns, or is unable to act, I hereby appoint the following persons (each to act alone and successively, in the order named) to serve as my agent to control the disposition of my remains as authorized by this document:

1. First Successor: _____
(Name)

(Address)

(Telephone Number)

2. Second Successor: _____
(Name)

(Address)

(Telephone Number)

DURATION:

This appointment becomes effective upon my death.

PRIOR APPOINTMENT REVOKED:

I hereby revoke any prior appointment of any person to control the disposition of my remains.

Signed this _____ day of _____.

(Signature of person making the appointment)

Statement by witness (must be 18 or older):

I declare that the person who executed this document is personally known to me and appears to be of sound mind and acting of his or her free will. He or she signed (or asked another to sign for him or her) this document in my presence.

Witness 1: _____
(Signature)

(Address)

Witness 2: _____
(Signature)

(Address)

ACCEPTANCE AND ASSUMPTION BY AGENT:

- 1. I have no reason to believe there has been a revocation of this appointment to control disposition of remains.
- 2. I hereby accept this appointment.

Signed this _____ day of _____.

(Signature of Agent)



Albany Medical College

Albert Einstein
College of Medicine of
Yeshiva University

Columbia University
College of Physicians &
Surgeons

Hofstra North Shore-LIJ
School of Medicine
at Hofstra University

Icahn School of Medicine
at Mount Sinai

New York Institute of
Technology College of
Osteopathic Medicine

New York Medical College

New York University
School of Medicine

School of Medicine and
Biomedical Sciences at the
University at Buffalo, SUNY

Sophie Davis School of
Biomedical Education
at CCNY

Stony Brook University
School of Medicine

SUNY Downstate
Medical Center

SUNY Upstate
Medical University

Touro College of
Osteopathic Medicine

University of Rochester
School of Medicine
& Dentistry

Weill Cornell
Medical College

(Please print or type name of donor)

Address:

Phone Number:

In the hope that my gift may help others, I hereby express my wish to donate my body – neither embalmed nor autopsied – immediately following my death for the purpose of medical research or education.

PLEASE INDICATE PREFERENCE BELOW:

I would like to donate my body to the following institution:

(Please print or type name of Institution)

As a way of providing an even distribution of pledges, I would like the Associated Medical Schools of New York to select one of the participating institutions to receive my pledge.

Signed by donor:

If you are signing on behalf of donor, please indicate your relationship: _____

Date: _____ Where did you hear about our organization? _____

City Council Testimony Thursday, May 30, 2019

Good Morning City Council Members,

My name is Elaine Joseph. I am testifying again on behalf of the million souls buried on Hart Island and the many relatives and friends that have been restricted to visiting their resting places due to the very strict and minimal visiting days provided by the Department of Correction. Back in March of 2014, I was the first person to be granted permission to visit the gravesite of my infant daughter who died in 1978, her body lost during a snowstorm between the hospital and ME's office. I was unable to locate her whereabouts till 2009 through the Hart Island Project. For the past five years, I have had to endure scheduling a visit to Hart Island through the penal system. Visits are only 1 day per month and had to sign up many months to a year in advance. It is a humiliating experience to have to list my guests names so far in advance and up to 4 guests only. Schedules change over time and even up to the last minute, people have to make changes. This has now become so stressful because if you don't notify the Dept of Correction in advance, you are a "No Show". After 2 of these "No Shows", you are punished by only being able to visit if there is a cancellation and are placed on a waitlist. There is no way to contact them if due to illness, you can't make it on that day. Because it is a DOC property, our cell phones are confiscated or you may leave them in your vehicle. Our ID's are checked. We have to sign in and sign a waiver. A CO accompanies every family to the gravesite and stands there while the family is grieving. There is nowhere to sit or seek shelter from the weather. We stand for 1 1/2 hours. Hart Island is a public cemetery and therefore should be open to the public as any other cemetery is. I am a 23 year veteran and officer of the US Navy and it would also be very important to me to be able to visit the Civil War Memorial on the island and pay respects to the many military members buried on Hart Island. Please, please understand that grieving the dead is a human right,

Please place the jurisdiction of Hart Island in the hands of the Dept of Parks or other department which can be made open to the public. Think about the last time you visited a loved ones grave; I am certain we did not share the same experience.

Thank you

**New York City Council Meeting
The Hart Island Project
Thursday, May 30, 2019**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

My name is Tami Martino. I am here today for my brother, Joseph Martino, who is buried on Hart Island. I am also here for all the others buried there as well and their families. About 26 years ago my brother died of AIDS at Beth Israel Hospital in Manhattan. He was 30 years old and a heroin addict who shared needles. When my mom and dad found out about it they refused to claim his body and give him a proper burial with the family present. I protested their decision and decided to call funeral directors on my own and found out that even they wanted nothing to do with burying my brother. At the time I felt extremely paralyzed because I couldn't claim my brother nor bury him. This was a very trying time for myself and my parents and caused a huge divide amongst my whole family. My mom and dad are divorced and we have not spoken in years. My brother was probably the most brilliant human being I have ever known. My parents were ashamed of him and couldn't deal with the fact that he had AIDS. In 1993, AIDS was a bad word. You couldn't even talk about it. In fact, my in-laws at the time wanted to quarantine my husband and I for 6 months because even they couldn't deal with the fact that my brother had AIDS.

I am here today to say that I am not ashamed of my brother or anyone else buried on Hart Island whether they are there for AIDS or whatever the reason may be but what I will say is that I believe that all of the human beings on Hart Island deserve dignity and honor. The Department of Corrections has its place in the world but it is not a funeral home nor a director of cemeteries and it certainly cannot provide people with the honor and dignity that every human being deserves when it comes to death and burial and maintaining a resting place for those souls. My hope is that all of you can see the importance of this project and how it will be a blessing to the families that have loved ones buried there now, and, for the families to come, and, also for the City of New York.

Thank you for your listening to me today and for your consideration to this project. May God shower his grace on the Hart Island Project.

Tami Martino

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted". (Matthew 5:4)

FOR THE RECORD

- T2019-4401 Oversight – Hart Island and the City's Public Burial Process**
Int 0906-2018 Transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island from the DOC to the dept of parks and recreation.
Int 0909-2018 Hart Island transportation plan.

As a resident of City Island for over 50 years, I am writing to voice my objection to the above transfer. This bill has no parameters, and the thought of open access to Hart Island when the only access is through a narrow, two way residential street with limited parking, would be an accident waiting to happen. The DOC website and the NYCLU both cite limited parking and suggest using mass transit. In the 1960's and '70's there was limited access to Phoenix House, which was on Hart Island, it was mayhem every weekend people could go visit. In fact, my parents did not buy their 'dream' home on Fordham Street because of what went on. Sound travels over water, and in addition to the residents of Fordham Street, the quality of life for residents on the east side of City Island would be adversely affected by a public park on Hart Island.

I am in no way opposed to relatives, homeless groups, veterans and AIDS activists visiting the gravesites in respectful remembrance. I, too, have visited to pay my respects to a great uncle buried there. The process was not difficult and everyone from the DOC was kind, considerate and caring, the lawns manicured and the island serene and peaceful. There is greater access for relatives as a result of the NYCLU lawsuit, and my feeling is both the information regarding a Hart Island burial and the visiting process should be refined.

There is no need for a transfer to Parks Department with the potential of a full-fledged public park, which would inconvenience residents and cost the city millions of dollars. There are 1700 parks in NYC, many in need of repair and upkeep; the cost to make Hart Island public would be astronomical - toxic waste remediation, building razed, Nike missile silos would need to be secured, the infrastructure for water and sewer installed – monies would be better spent on the existing parks.

Respectfully submitted,



Theresa Kurtz
49 Schofield Street
City Island, Bronx, NY. 10464
917-902-6904

FOR THE RECORD

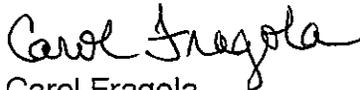
- T2019-4401 Oversight - Hart Island and the City's Public Burial Process**
Int 0906-2018 Transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island from the DOC to the dept of parks and recreation.
Int 0909-2018 Hart Island transportation plan.

As a resident of City Island for over 40 years, I am writing to voice my objection to the above transfer. This bill has no parameters, and the thought of open access to Hart Island when the only access is through a narrow, two way residential street with limited parking would be an accident waiting to happen. In the 1960's and '70's there was limited access to Phoenix House, which was on Hart Island, it was mayhem every weekend people could go visit. Sound travels over water, and in addition to the residents of Fordham Street, the quality of life for residents on the east side of City Island can be adversely affected by a public park on Hart Island.

I am in no way opposed to relatives, homeless groups, veterans and AIDS activists visiting the gravesites in respectful remembrance. There is greater access for relatives as a result of the NYCL lawsuit, and my feeling is both the information regarding a Hart Island burial and the visiting process should be refined.

There is no need for a transfer to Parks Department with the potential of a full-fledged public park, which would inconvenience residents and cost the city millions of dollars. There are 1700 parks in NYC, many in need of repair and upkeep; the cost to make Hart Island public would be astronomical - toxic waste remediation, buildings razed, Nike missile silos would need to be secured, the infrastructure for water and sewer installed -- monies would be better spent on the existing parks.

Respectfully submitted,



Carol Fragola
46 Winters Street
City Island, Bronx, NY. 10464
646-522-7426

TO: Ydanis A. Rodriguez
Mark Gjonaj

DATE: May 30, 2019

**Subject: Into Bills 0906-2018 & 0909-2018 (Formerly Intro Bills 133 & 134)
(Transfer of jurisdiction of Hart Island from DOC to the dept of Parks & recreation; Hart Island transportation plan)**

We, the residents of City Island, are opposed to Intro Bills 0906 & 0909, which would transfer Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department.

While we agree that families should be able to visit the gravesites of their loved ones, the Bill has no parameters and in various interviews proponents of these Bills are advocating for the creation of a public park comparing it to active parks such as Madison Square Park and Governor's Island to name a few. It would be attractive to many and City Island cannot handle more visitors and traffic.

Currently, the only access to Hart Island is through Fordham Street on City Island in the Bronx, which is a narrow two-way residential street with limited parking. City Island also has a tremendous amount of traffic, especially during summer months. There is only one access route, making it difficult for Police and emergency services to respond quickly. The additional traffic a public park or National Monument would create would exacerbate the problem significantly, further limiting quick access to the island by emergency responders, which in turn will present further risk to the public safety of both City Island residents and visitors.

In addition, the amount of funds necessary to clean up and basic requirement to prepare the island for public access would be enormous. It would include toxic remediation, the elimination of abandoned Nike Missile silos and the razing of existing buildings. Parks can be annexed for any number of reasons. This cleanup would come at the expense of the taxpayers and existing parks (such as Pelham Bay Park, the city's largest, which is already in the area of Hart Island).

Thank you for your consideration,

The undersigned Residents of City Island
catc921@yahoo.com
resa.resak@verizon.net

Attach.

FOR THE RECORD

The New York City Council – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 10AM

T2016-3942

Int 0134-2014

**Oversight – Examining the Future of Hart Island
A Local Law to amend the administrative code of
New York, in relation to a transfer of jurisdiction
over Hart Island from the Department of
Corrections to the Department of Parks and
Recreation.**

I am speaking to you regarding transferring Hart Island to the Parks Department. As a City Island resident, member of the Civic Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and a long time volunteer in the community, and visitor to Hart Island in June of 2015. The process for visiting was not daunting and a response and date to visit was given in 2 days. The Island was well manicured at the time of my visit; it was peaceful and serene as it should remain to show respect for those buried there. Therefore, I am opposed to Hart Island becoming a public park. I realize, the community board and 44 members of the Civic (1% of the City Island population) have approved of this; however, most of City Island residents are not in favor of this. I am here representing the people who have signed the petition in opposition to a public park. The City Island community, became aware of the proposal to transfer Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department when we were urged to write to Community Board 10 in support of the transfer to prevent the city from using the land for prisons/homeless shelters/incinerators. We are a small community, when there is major shift, which would impact the community we have large public forums, such as the City Island Bridge, the firehouse, etc., for this we did not, and most City Islanders were caught unaware, with this having already been passed by the Civic Association and the Community Board 10.

Since that time, many articles have be published after these votes, advocating for a public park or National Monument, comparing what could be to other former potters fields that are now successful public parks, such as Madison Square Park and Governor's Island, which was also referred to as a Sunday picnic in the park. No, we do not want this which would lead to full public access to Hart Island. This is what led to the petition opposing the transfer to Parks Department since the bill has no parameters.

Potter's Field is a burial ground, which should be considered sacred and not turned into a public park. We have no problem with access granted to the site for respectful remembrance, but we have not heard how the Parks Department plans to guarantee the maintenance of the due respect that we owe to these buried souls.

The only viable access to Hart Island is via the Fordham Street Ferry Terminal on City Island in the Bronx. Fordham Street is extremely narrow with no room for constant two-way traffic and no space for public parking in the immediate vicinity of the Ferry Terminal. Adding traffic will on jeopardize the public safety of island residents and visitors alike, as emergency access to the island is further dangerously compromised. Even the NYCLU Lawsuit against the city for family access that the plaintiffs won, cites "Because of the extremely limited street-side parking available in the vicinity of the Hart Island Ferry Dock - bordering a private residential area - each group of visitors will be requested to coordinate travel to the City Island dock so as to bring as few vehicles to the site as possible."

The amount of funds to clean up the island and prepare it for public access would seem to be enormous. It would include toxic cleanup, the abandoned missile silos and buildings razed. Why not put those funds into Pelham Bay Park, which is adjacent to City Island and Hart Island. City parks can be used for a multitude of activities (skating rinks, concert venues, ball fields, etc), which are all good things, but not needed here, next to the largest park in New York City. In addition, parkland can be alienated for a multitude of reasons, Rodman's Neck is an example of alienated parkland.

For such a small amount of residents in favor and few requests to visit Hart Island, why would the City or our community take on such burden and expense of another public park.

Thank you,

The Petitioners of City Island

TÓ: Melissa Mark-Viverito, Speaker, NYC Council

DATE: September 1, 2015

cc: Elizabeth Crowley
James Vacca

Subject: Intro Bills 133 & 134

(Transfer of Hart Island to the Parks Department & changes in Ferry Service from Fordham Street in City Island to Hart Island)

We, the residents of City Island, are opposed to Intro Bills 133 & 134, which would transfer Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. While we agree that families should be able to visit the gravesites of their loved ones, the Bill has no parameters and in various interviews proponents of these Bills are advocating for the creation of a public park.

Currently, the only access to Hart Island is through Fordham Street on City Island in the Bronx, which is a narrow two-way residential street with limited parking. City Island also has a tremendous amount of traffic, especially during summer months; There is only one access route, making it difficult for Police and emergency services to respond quickly. The additional traffic a public park or National Monument would create would exacerbate the problem significantly, further limiting quick access to the island by emergency responders, which in turn will present further risk to the public safety of both City Island residents and visitors.

Thank you for your consideration,

The undersigned residents of City Island

attach.

New York City Council Hearings on Hart Island, 5/30/19

Testimony of Rabbi Regina L. Sandler-Phillips, MSW, MPH WAYS OF PEACE Community Resources

www.waysofpeace.org/sacred-undertaking Voicemail for time-sensitive inquiries: 347-526-5168

I'm Rabbi Regina Sandler-Phillips, executive director of WAYS OF PEACE Community Resources. I have worked as an advocate for the past twenty years to reclaim traditional, sustainable burial practices as quiet acts of justice and kindness. Often identified as "green" today, these practices are upheld with minor variations by both Jews and Muslims throughout the world. I dedicate this testimony to the memories of two community burial leaders whose lives were cut short over recent months, but whose legacies of lovingkindness shine on across our lines of diversity: Dr. Jerry Rabinowitz of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Ms. Husna Ahmed of Christchurch, New Zealand.

A Jewish funeral is called *levayah*, which literally means "accompanying." Traditionally, *levayah* begins at the time of death, as a process that honors and protects both the human body and the earth. We watch over, cleanse, dress, and lay out the dead in simple, biodegradable garments and coffins. We accompany the dead to their graves, and we pick up shovels ourselves to participate in their burials. We return later to mark the graves, visit, and remember.

Accompanying the unclaimed dead is a supreme Jewish imperative. Long committed to providing the honor and protection of *levayah* in New York City, the Hebrew Free Burial Association has buried nearly 60,000 indigent Jews since 1888. Today my support for Hebrew Free Burial and my support for Hart Island are integrally connected.

The same time-honored ethical principles that call for sustainable, egalitarian, participatory Jewish burial—*mipnei k'vodam shel aniyim*, "for the honor of the poor"—also call for cooperative mobilization of resources in our cities of diversity, so that neighbors of all backgrounds can be buried with honor—*mipnei darkhei shalom*, "for these are ways of peace."

The most integrated solutions to the challenges of Hart Island actually point toward the most equitable and sustainable choices facing all of us at death. This is reflected in the City Council bills now under consideration: for public access, with adequate budget provisions; for transportation planning; for a municipal office that will support and assist all New Yorkers to access vital funeral resources; and for an inter-agency task force on issues related to public burial.

The honor of the dead is not an isolated funeral product, but rather an ongoing process of building community across all the lines that too often divide us.

I was privileged to visit Hart Island in September 2017, and I want to express my gratitude for all that has brought us to this point: for the solidarity of anonymous prison inmates who built monuments to honor those they buried; for the loving courage and tenacity of Hart Island family members, friends, and community activists; for the stewardship and accompaniment of supportive municipal representatives through decades of challenge and change.

All of these have brought us to this historical moment of opportunity for justice and kindness to come together—off the coast of the Bronx, and beyond. Thank you all.

Christie Abraham
Shirley, NY 11969
Christie.abraham@gmail.com

Testimony May 30, 2019
New York City Council

Hello, my name is Christie Abraham. I am 70 years old now. I met Ronny in October 1965. He was my first boyfriend. We dated for about two years. He tattooed my name on his arm after we broke up. He spelled it wrong.

I found out about Ronny being buried on Hart Island from my older brother, who found out via an ex-neighbor of Ronny. She had been in contact with the Medical Examiner office. How she got involved I do not know.

She also told us about the fire he was killed in. I was saddened and shocked. I looked up Hart Island and found out it was where the unclaimed dead go. I knew both of Ronny's parents were dead but he had a sister and brother. It was more horrifying to learn that he died from being in a house fire in Far Rockaway. I might have seen that fire on the news never knowing that was Ronny.

Please let the Park Service take over management of Hart Island. First, this will enable people with loved ones buried there easier access. Second, being buried in a potter's field is ignominy enough, having it managed by the Department of Corrections is so cold and unfeeling.

If City Cemetery were managed by Parks, I and people who knew Ronny could visit his grave and pay our respects.

Ronald Thomas Hyne 1/12/50 - 8/23/15

FOR THE RECORD

Omnia El Shakry
55 Pearl St.
Oakland CA 94611
oselshakry@ucdavis.edu

New York City Council Testimony
March 30, 2019

My name is Omnia El Shakry and I write to provide testimony in support of INT-906 (transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island from department of corrections to department of parks and recreation) and INT-909 (Hart Island transportation plan).

On October 20, 2015 I received confirmation of the death of a beloved friend, colleague, and fellow traveler: Michael (Todd) Dreyfus who was born in September of 1968 in Tulsa, Oklahoma and who died by suicide in the borough of Manhattan on September 27, 2005. After a painful and protracted search for Dreyfus—who had been missing for a decade and whose body was unidentified—I was able to confirm his death and, thanks to Melinda Hunt, determined that his final resting place was on Hart Island.

Dreyfus was estranged from his family and indeed his living biological relatives made no efforts to ascertain his whereabouts or to declare him a missing person. As such, I personally oversaw the investigation that led to the confirmation of his death. My husband and I were his closest friends and the last to see him alive. It therefore pains us deeply to be unable to visit his gravesite on Hart Island—due to current restrictions that stipulate that only biological relatives may visit gravesites and due to fact that there is no regular ferry service open to the public between City Island in the borough of the Bronx and Hart Island. We were further saddened and distraught to learn that his burial was a prison burial. As a historian, I believe that a society may be judged by the respect it affords to its dead—regardless of whether they are impoverished or estranged from family. After 150 years it is high time to end penal control of Hart Island.

Written Testimony of Dana E. Heitz, Esq.

**Submitted to the New York City Council Committees
on Health, Parks and Recreation, and Transportation
Hearing on Hart Island and the City's Public Burial Process**

May 28, 2019

Introduction

I am an attorney who has practiced law in New York State for ten years, with the last four as a solo appellate practitioner at Heitz Legal, P.C.

Issues surrounding the care of the dead have been part of my professional interests for several years, and in 2018 I began a closer examination of rights related to dead bodies. For example, in November 2018 I taught a CLE course entitled *From Britannia to the Autopsy Table: The Right of Sepulcher in the US*. And in February 2019 the *New York Law Journal* published my article *The Law of the Dead and the Rights of the Living: New York Needs Reform*. This article addressed several of the injustices targeted by four bills pending before the City Council, i.e.:

- Int 906 - In relation to a transfer of jurisdiction over Hart Island from the department of corrections to the department of parks and recreation.
- Int 909 - In relation to a Hart Island transportation plan.
- Int ___ - In relation to the establishment of an office to provide support to those in need of burial assistance.
- Int ___ - In relation to the creation of a task force on public burial and related issues.

I regret that I'm out of the country and can't attend the May 30 meeting in person to support these bills. And, though the Council will hear many stories that are far more compelling than mine, I ask that the Council please consider my testimony in the course of its deliberations.

Testimony

The 21st century has seen social justice concerns penetrating areas of life where they were never considered before. It's a shift that's welcome and overdue—and incomplete. People on society's margins continue to be vulnerable, including in matters concerning the dead.

Hart Island in particular gives rise to several concerns of fairness and justice. One is the short period for notification. Public Health Law 4211 allows only 48 hours for

relatives to claim a body before it is released to a medical facility for study—whence it will often be sent to the potters' field. PHL 4211[3][c] prohibits release if the decedent had a relative whose location was ascertainable after “reasonable and diligent inquiry,” but hospitals may fall short of even this amorphous standard, as in *Melfi v. Mt. Sinai Hosp.*, 2009 NY Slip Op 03404 (1st Dept. 2009).

Another concern is court appointment of apathetic guardians on behalf of the dying, who perceive no benefit to keeping their wards out of a potters' field. This breach of fiduciary duty by individuals who will probably never be held to account is heartbreakingly described in an article by Nina Bernstein, *Unearthing the Secrets of New York's Mass Graves* published in the *New York Times* on May 15, 2016, which is doubtless already before the Council's attention.

Council Member Rose's proposed "Local Law in relation to the creation of a task force on public burial and related issues" includes provisions that directly target both these points. This bill represents an excellent opportunity for a City organ to assert oversight of burdens that fall most heavily on those who are already carrying more than their fair share.

A further concern of social justice arises from families' inability to access their loved ones' resting places on Hart Island. As the Council well knows, the island is accessible only after clearing numerous bureaucratic hurdles, and subject even then to a plethora of restrictions. Because of Department of Corrections security, visitors are prohibited from physically approaching even a mass grave, let alone the precise area where a specific person was laid to rest.

The emotional cost of the circumstances on Hart Island is highest for the families of souls on society's margins. As Ms. Bernstein's article described, Hart Island “obscures systemic failings, ones that stack the odds against people too poor, too old or too isolated to defend themselves. In the face of an end-of-life industry that can drain the resources of the most prudent, these people are especially vulnerable.”

Access to the graves of Hart Island, which Int 0906-2018 and Int 0909-2018 would facilitate, would be a decisive step towards protecting these vulnerable people.

Conclusion

Since 1856, when a New York court became the first in the nation to articulate the right of sepulchre,¹ this state has acknowledged the anguish of litigants who are blocked from appropriate access to the last physical remains of those they love.²

1 *In re Widening of Beekman Street*, 4 Bradf.Sur.R. 503 (Sur.Ct. N.Y. Co. 1856).

2 See e.g. *Shipley v. City of NY*, 25 NY3d 645, 658 (2015); *Melfi v. Mount Sinai Hosp.*, 64 AD3d 26, 39 (1st Dept. 2009); *WTC Families for a Proper Burial, Inc. v. City of NY*, 567 F

But there is only so much courts can do without legislative will. I commend the members of the Council for taking on a subject which itself is often relegated to the margins, perhaps because death itself is not considered a suitable matter for public discussion. But the public is key: “Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals,” said the Right Honourable Sir William Ewart Gladstone. These bills are a chance for New York City to better care for its dead—and with them, the living.

For these reasons, I support the passage of the four bills related to public burial which are before the Council.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana E. Heitz

Dana E. Heitz
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New York, NY 10036
212.804.5706 | dana@heitzlegal.com

Supp 2d 529, 531 (SDNY 2008); *Finley v. Atl. Transp. Co.*, 220 NY 249, 252 (1917).

James Beck
Patton Court
Wayne, New Jersey, 07470 9
beckje1@icloud.com
May 29, 2019

Dear Members of the NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation and Members of the Committee on Transportation:

I write this letter to convey my sadness in knowing that my great-great-great grandfather, Peter Gottlieb Ernst Mantz, is laid to eternal rest within a burial ground that is maintained by the NYC Department of Corrections. Having visited Hart Island several years ago, I can attest to how a visitor is treated as if planning the escapes of those tending to grave sites, rather than visiting a loved one resting within (what some may consider) hallowed ground. It's ironic, in a way, since Peter and his family immigrated to America to be free of such treatment.

Fifty-eight-year-old, Peter Mantz, arrived in America in 1872 as an immigrant from Schleswig-Holstein, Denmark. He was accompanied by his forty-nine-year-old wife, Dorothea, and his 2 daughters, Helene (24 years old) and Dorothea (16 years old). Four years earlier, his twenty-two-year-old son (my great-great-grandfather), Johan Friederich Anton Mantz, escaped the aggressive German ruled region of Denmark to avoid the fate of having to forcibly serve within the German Military, even though he was a Danish born citizen. Johan, having gone through the legal process to immigrate to America, was forcibly removed from his departing ship and ordered to report for military service within the German Military.

Fortunately, while standing on the dock and being mocked by the departing German Military men, he was persuaded to board a tug boat by sympathetic seamen who witnessed the entire event. The tug boat reunited him with his departing ship, which carried him to America. There are historical records indicating that the German Government later ordered his arrest for not reporting for service within the German Military, but Johan Mantz would never return to Germany or his beloved Denmark to serve his time.

So as Johan worked as a NYC Fireman and built a future as a locksmith and a machinist in America, his father, Peter, was determined to reunite his entire family and live within the freedoms of America. So, he immigrated to its shores with his wife and 2 daughters and reunited the entire family. Unfortunately, several years after settling in New York City, Peter contracted small pox in 1875. As a result, he was quarantined to the Renwick Small Pox Hospital on Roosevelt Island where he died on the 17th of January, 1875. He was buried a short time later on Hart Island on the 25th of January, 1875.

I had the pleasure of visiting Hart Island several years ago, accompanied by members of the Hart Island Project and New York City Historical Society. Although touched by the entire experience of being able to visit the final resting place of my great-great-great-grandfather, I was disheartened by being treated as if I was visiting a DOC managed institution where a prisoner resides, rather than a loved one who sacrificed his life to allow his family to live within the freedoms of America. This is NOT a fitting tribute for one who made such a sacrifice and loved America in the short time he lived on its shores.

As a result, I am requesting the care of this hallowed ground be transferred to the New York City Parks and Recreation Dept., and access to the island be managed by The Committee on Transportation to assure that the souls that are buried here are properly respected as immigrants and citizens of the United States of America, rather than being part of the captive inmate population that is taken care of by inmates and corrections officers of the NYC Department of Corrections.

Very Respectfully,

James E. Beck

From: Thomas Jack Hockett, 1307 Wharton Drive, Newark, DE 19711; tlas101@aol.com; 302 294 1184

Subject: Martin Joseph Loder Jr., 29 March 1947, Buffalo, NY – 13 Dec 1993, NYC, NY; buried at Hart Island, City Cemetery, Bronx, NY, Plot 239, Section II, Grave #33; disinterment and reburial

Martin Loder Jr. and I met during our time in the US Army, both serving 1969-1970, and both stationed at Fort Dix, NJ. He was an unusually perceptive, good hearted if not occasionally impetuous person who served as a much needed, supportive friend and confidant on both a highly personal level and a commiserative one. This was during the Vietnam era, which was a time of conflict and turmoil. He had been raised in inner city Buffalo, NY. We met near the USO in Manhattan and although our association ended far too prematurely by our losing contact, he was never forgotten by me. I tried repeatedly through the years to find him to no avail.

As cyber became more advanced, to my stupefaction and distress, by way of the Social Security Claims Index and the information from the Hart Island Project database kindly provided by The Hart Island Project, it was discovered that he had died of multiple causes brought about primarily from AIDS, Monday, 13 Dec 1993 at St. Clare's Hospital and Health Center, Manhattan. Further compounding grief and sadness were the facts that his body had gone unclaimed and had been stored, likely in an (unnamed) morgue, until burial on Hart Island 15 March 1994 and that he had been buried under the alias "Luder".

Without further reflection there was no doubt as to what I should do for someone I have always considered a brother. I want him to "live again" and have what he decently deserves by leaving a memory and footprint upon the earth; to have a grave that can be easily visited; a monument that can be read and also a history which tells his "story" and confirms that he was present among us. With the approval of his next-of-kin (sister), I am presently engaged in the effort to have his remains relocated to rest near those of his mother and other relatives at St. John's Cemetery, Cheektowaga, New York; a disinterment permit was just issued 15 May 2019 and disinterment scheduling is now in the hands of the Department of Corrections, NYC.

The pathway to arrive at the point I am at now was tortuous. Firstly, not being a next of kin, the obtaining of vital documents (death certificate; DD-214; statement of approval of next-of-kin to move the remains) necessarily involved locating a next of kin in FL, and working with her through the kindness of her caregiver; then the location of a Buffalo area funeral home which eventually proved inadequate to achieve the early stage goals, i.e., obtaining of the disinterment permit necessary to advance the effort (despite the multiple attempts of the funeral home contact to find responsible parties and define the process through his phone calls to NYC). The Buffalo area funeral home was at a disadvantage to negotiate the various stages necessary for disinterment. They attempted to engage the service of a mortician friend in Manhattan who, in the end, failed to act, causing a loss of approximately nine months. I then initiated a search myself for a Manhattan funeral home with experience in this area, which has now been found and has quickly produced results. The effort to obtain guidance or help with the disposition of his remains from the US Army eventually proved unsuccessful apparently due to the nature of his discharge. The amount of effort expended in locating next of kin at his death in order to claim his body, exact location of storage of the remains for 3 months prior to burial (and any records pertaining thereto), probing for details on who in the city government actually handled the case and authorized the burial, as well as the situation regarding DNA sampling for comparison of results to the remains were but a few of the hurdles encountered during this process. Presently, the amending of the

death certificate to reflect his actual surname (a change from the alias listed on certificate) and correcting other errors on the certificate are in process with prospect of dubious outcome. One may add to that the many hurdles involved in personally trying to piece together a trail of his life to construct his personal history. In all of this, the financial burden has and will be borne solely by me.

Many persons first locate a missing person on Hart Island via "Find a Grave" and the lingering and somewhat foreboding term "Potters Field" (although officially dropped from association with Hart Island) is prominently displayed on each entry. This sets a rather ominous tone that can be somewhat alleviated by improving conditions on Hart Island. To this end, I think the present situation in NYC, would be benefitted and promoted by a transfer of management to the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, bringing about perhaps greater access to graves, more care in tending the burial areas, improved record keeping and efficiency, and giving more dignity to the handling of the remains of persons who are in death, as they were in life, in the most need of our help.

Thank you for the privilege of being able to submit this testimony.



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Department of Social
Anthropology

Sally Raudon
St John's College

29 May 2019

To whom it may concern

I am a social anthropology researcher with a focus on death and disposal; in short, what people do with their dead.

Local governments in all nations struggle with how best to offer disposals of last resort. I offer this brief submission in the hope that it will aid parties' understanding of the practices at Hart Island by contextualising them against practices in two other locations.

In the United Kingdom, under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act (1984), when someone dies without any friends or family, a council can arrange a public health funeral for the deceased. This includes registering the death, instructing undertakers and organising a simple funeral. In this circumstance the council will attempt to establish the deceased's faith (if any) and arrange the funeral accordingly. Disposal can be by burial or cremation. However, this is less common than families who cannot afford a funeral. Families can apply for funding up to GBP£700 including burial or cremation and other funeral costs under the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Regulations (2005). The expenses may include undertakers' fees, casket, church or crematorium fees and even flowers. This is not expected to be repaid.

By way of comparison, in New Zealand, if a family cannot afford a funeral they apply for additional funds from government social services, for up to NZD\$2,093.31. This will furnish a simple cremation (or burial in areas where cremation is not offered, such as remote rural locations). Funeral directors are used to working within this budget as required and will explain to families that it covers the costs of handling the body and providing a basic ceremony to accompany the cremation (or burial). This includes professional services for handling and preparing the body (including embalming), casket, newspaper notice, hearse, burial plot and cremation. It will not include the catered event which is common after New Zealand funerals. The grant is income and asset tested for next of kin but again, this is not expected to be repaid. It can also be applied on behalf of someone who has no survivors, but this is very uncommon. Alternative sources of social funding may be available from the Accident Compensation Corporation or Veterans' Affairs. However, the family remains responsible for caring for the dead, who will be buried or have their ashes disposed of in the same cemeteries as other community members.

In both countries, local governments are integral to providing funeral services, as they operate crematoria and burial grounds, as well as many crematoria. Further, in both countries, the industry has expressed concern about insufficient funding and other concerns, such as the increase in publicly funded funerals.



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In both these examples of publicly funded funerals, families have the opportunity to participate in funerals which have been publicly funded, and the deceased will be disposed of in the same cemeteries as other citizens. Families may visit and mourn as they wish, including acts of memorialisation.

Please let me know if you would like further information, I would be pleased to help.

Yours faithfully

Sally Raudon
PhD candidate
Nsr33@cam.ac.uk

My name is Marisol Cruz. I am writing this testimony to this committee on behalf of the silent voice and voices which rest in peace on what is known as “Hart Island”.

Good day to everyone here today, the Hart Island representatives, the committee, and the general public.

My position here today is as a parent, whose baby lies for the past 36 years in Hart Island.

I am also for this bill that will transfer the jurisdiction and control over Hart Island. The city’s “Public Burial Ground”, from the Department of Corrections to the Department of Parks and Recreation. This bill will be a great help to others whom have loved ones buried in Hart Island, to not have to endure a long journey of years of anguish while searching for their loved one and only finding a dead end zone with no one there to help as was my case, if the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene provides an office for support and assistance to individuals who have lost a loved one, it would make the loss less painful, especially during the mourning process, which is very sad to at least know where and when their loved ones would be buried. Thirty-six years ago, come this October of 2019, while being a teenage mother, like every mother full of dreams, and the joy of birth and labor, I went into premature labor.

Unfortunately, that October day, as soon as I had an emergency C-section at Bellevue Hospital, and it did not have a special incubator my little baby boy needed. Immediately, a transfer was made to a special neo-natal unit, at St. Vincent’s Hospital in Manhattan. I was very sad, because I remained in one hospital while my baby was in another. As soon as I was discharged, I went to visit my baby. He was very small and fragile; however he gave me strength to never lose hope. As the days progressed, my baby fighter to live. Fourteen days he survived, he had a 50% chance of living, stated the doctors. Yet sadly, his tiny lungs collapsed, and his struggle to live ended in an unfortunate death. All my dreams and future goals as a new mother were crushed with his passing. Going home to see his empty crib and baby items were a heartbreaking agony. Being eighteen, and losing my firstborn son, was only made worse with me reaching out to the hospital and nobody giving me any information relating to my child. Going to the birth and death certificate department was a terrible ordeal, because the various times throughout the years, the only information I ever received was not registered in their system, and without a birth certificate, a death certificate would be unable to be issued. I never lost hope and as modern times move forward, with the Internet, I remain focused on my search, until I

came across an audio book written about Hart Island. From there, I went to the Hart Island Project site, where three days later, exactly on Good Friday of 2019, I finally found where my baby boy's remains were at. From my painful and personal experience, if the City would have had an office to assist me in 1983, I believe in my heart that my long journey of thirty-six years would have been lessened.

Today, by making this bill possible, for other families in poverty, to have an office to go to would make a big difference.

I would like to thank very much the Hart Island Project for their help in assisting me find my baby boy, and thank this committee for their time in allowing me to write about my testimony.

God bless.

Alex Fialho
Troutman Street
Brooklyn, NY 11237
858-761-1668
alex.fialho@yale.edu

I wish to testify in support of Intro 906 to transfer jurisdiction over Hart Island from the Department of Correction to the Department of Park and Recreation; in support of Intro 909 in relation to a Hart Island transportation plan; in support of T2019-4405 in relation to the establishment of an office to provide support to those in need of burial assistance; and in support of T2019-4406 in relation to the creation of a task force on public burial and related issues.

Since 2014, I have worked as Programs Manager / Director of Visual AIDS, a nonprofit that utilizes the power of art to fight AIDS by provoking dialogue, supporting HIV+ artists, and preserving a legacy, because AIDS is not over. At Visual AIDS, I facilitate projects around both the history and immediacy of the ongoing HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In November 2018, I attended an event at Jefferson Market Branch Library that featured a drone video showing mass burial locations on Hart Island of people who died of AIDS-related complications during the early days of the epidemic in New York City. The video included the location of a child who died of AIDS-related complications as early as 1985 and sixteen anonymous adult individual AIDS-related burials from that year. During this event, I began to understand the widespread ramifications of the city's policies around burials on Hart Island and the harmful impact this policy has had on those who were lost to AIDS and their legacies.

The importance of Hart Island as a site of reckoning about the ongoing AIDS crisis is significant. Creating the possibility to right the historical wrong of these mass burials without visitation rights would support a process of returning the legacies of the many lost to AIDS buried on Hart Island to forms of dignity we all deserve. This includes thoughtful treatment of our remains and the ability of those connected to us to honor our memory, among other meaningful considerations.

The historic negligence of governmental agencies and officials to support and uplift communities affected by HIV/AIDS has been and often continues to be profoundly painful in this country and city. Supporting these legislations is a step towards reckoning with this past and present.

Speaker Johnson was the first public official to visit the location on Hart Island of those lost to AIDS in honor of World AIDS Day 2018. Someday soon, I would like to visit these graves of people who disappeared. In the Fall of 2019, I will begin a PhD program at Yale University in the History of Art and African American Studies. The legacies of those lost to AIDS buried on Hart Island could be a site of research and academic inquiry for me. In the future, I hope to work with colleagues and collaborators including Melinda Hunt and The Hart Island Project to better understand the histories of those lost now buried on Hart Island in order to consider how their stories reflect our political present and future possibilities. Currently, because I am not a family member of those lost, I cannot visit Hart Island because it is controlled by the Department of Correction. I hope steps will be taken today by supporting these legislations to soon change that.

FOR THE RECORD

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Signature

Address

Josephine Brennan	110 Pilot St Bx 10461
Martha Meskan	1100 Pilot St. Bx 1046f
Loe Scott	160 Peld St. 10461
Sarah Morgan	160 Pilot St. City Island Apt. 328
Paul Salkoff	110 Pilot St
Ann Connolly	160 Pilot St
Barbara Hennessy	140 Pilot St
Julia Ravello	16 Pilot St.
P. Kuleva	
Mariano Cerasimo	160 Pilot St

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Address

MICHAEL E. JAWSKI 981 EARLE ST BX NY 10464

Larry McGreevy 80 Eury St Bronx, NY 10464

Bernard Galis 9 Pell Place BX NY 10464

Robert Dancy 31 BAY ST., BRONX, NY 10464

Joseph Hurty 49 Schafeld St Bronx, NY 10464

Sal P. Combs 89 Hoctor St. Bronx NY 10464

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Signature	Address
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	570 CITY ISLAND AVE apt 2R
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	37 CENTRE ST 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	92 WINTERS ST 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	78 DEER PL BX NY 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	19 Bell PL Bx 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	

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Address

<i>Orville Dwyer</i>	<i>49 Winters St.</i>
<i>Hilda L. Dwyer</i>	<i>49 Winters St.</i>
<i>Betty Jordan</i>	<i>551 Minnieford Ave</i>
<i>Ann Sullivan</i>	<i>551 Minnieford Ave</i>
<i>Grace Dwyer</i>	<i>558 Minnieford</i>

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Address

	403 City Island Avenue Bronx, NY 10468
Robert M. ...	297 William Ave Bronx NY 10468

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Signature

Address

Ann E. Livingston

4 Pell Pl.

John E. [unclear]

6 Pell Pl.

Steve Ragan

84 Schofield St., BX 10464

Patty Kelly

84 Schofield St, BX 10464

Jessica Malanowski

84 Schofield St, BX 10464

John Malanowski

84 Schofield St BX 10464

Susan Zima

30 Schofield St. BX 10464

Vicki Truontana

168 Reville St. 10464

MJ Lenz

77 Pell Pl. BX 10464

Ruth

90 Northin BX 10464

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Address

Chad King 92 WINTERS ST, BX. N.Y. 10464

[Signature] 95 Winter St. Bx NY 10464

[Signature] 25 Winters St.

[Signature] 25 Winters st. Bronx, NY 10464

[Signature] 25 Winters st

[Signature] 35 Carwell St Bx

[Signature] 306 Carwell St.

[Signature] 227 William Ave

[Signature] 227 William Ave

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<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	180 CARROLL ST Bx NY 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	20 Roll St Bx NY 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	50 Schofield St Bronx NY 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	85 Bay St Bx NY 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	144 Bowser St Flr 2 Bronx NY 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	415 Monmouth Ave NY 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	276 Monmouth Ave NY 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	24 Schofield St NY 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	29 Schofield St NY 10464
<i>[Handwritten Signature]</i>	37 Schofield St 10464

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Address

Joseph Marchini - 63 FORDHAM ST. 10464

Michael J. O'Connor 345 CITY AVE 10464

Michael J. O'Connor 215 KIRBY ST 10464

Robert Tribuzio jr. 389 City Island Ave 10464

Robert Tribuzio jr. 31 Centre St 10464

John A. Schaff 490 ~~W. 114th St.~~ N.Y. 10801

John Conza 249 City Is. Ave 10464

Joseph Conza 31 Centre St 10464

Alton E. Conza 114 Pilot 10464

Bill Conza 56 W. 114th St. 10464

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Address

Frances Maturro 458 Minnieford Ave BxN/1046

Lauren Calta 458 Minnieford Ave BxNY 1046

Nicole D'Erasmus 226 Minnieford Ave NY 1046

~~Chris Cullen~~ 172 3rd St 10464

Chris Cullen 469 Minnieford Ave 10464

Cory Fontana 525 Minnieford Ave

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<u>Leatherneoney</u>	<u>563 Minnieford Avenue</u>	<u>City Island NY 10466</u>
<u>Bonnie Esposito</u>	<u>553 Minnieford Ave.</u>	<u>Bronx Ny 10464</u>
<u>Michelle Esposito</u>	<u>327 King Ave</u>	<u>BRONX, NY 10464</u>
<u>Yvonne Esposito</u>	<u>327 King Ave</u>	<u>BRONX, NY 10464</u>
<u>Factor J. Esposito</u>	<u>553 Minnieford Avenue</u>	<u>Bronx, New York 10464</u>
<u>Diane Latta</u>	<u>84 Carroll St.</u>	<u>Bx Ny 10464</u>
<u>Gerald W. Conant</u>	<u>412 HUNTER AVE</u>	

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Signature

Address

Ed Howard 160 Pilot St. Bx N.Y.

Javier Lopez 136 FORDHAMst Bx NY

Rotaw I. Waters 326 King Ave Bx NY 10467

FOR THE RECORD

Dear Mr. Vacca and New York City Council Members:

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Signature

Address

Anne Spaulding	285 Fordham Place CT NY 10464
Bill Zand	289 Fordham Place CT NY 10464
Rosalie Randazzo	283 FORDHAM PLACE CT NY 10464
Tim McGuire	31 Hawkins St BX 10464
Maissa Corti	36 Hawkins St BX 10464
Donna Kaplan	3220 Lerry Pl. BX NY 10465
Nancy Martin	59 Main St BX 10464
Colleen Perrow	403 City Island Ave BX 104
Ullana Ullman	190 Schofield BX 10464
John Larson	275 FORDHAM PL. BX 10464

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Signature

Address

Robert T. Schuch 9-Division St APT A New Rochelle NY 108

John Mandelman 273 City Isl. Ave BX NY 10464

John W 48 Marine St. BX. NY. 10464

Frank Kawende 88 HORTON BX NY 10464

ROBERT SEAMAN 52 SCHOFIELD ST BX NYC 10464

Thomas Booth 157 Schofield St BX NY 10464

Joseph Louis Salomito 181 Early St BX NY 10464

John Brongman 650 CI AV BX NY 10464

John 484 BEACH ST BX NY

Cyril Ecklan HCIA 10464

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Signature

Address

Michael Burjan	85 Farley St Bronx 10464
Bridget McKeena	37 Schofield Bronx NY 10464
Wanda K... M. Ouedlikhe	413 City Island Ave Bx NY 10464
204 Brielle	604 City Island Ave Bx NY 10464
Sandra O'Donnell	10 Bay St Bx NY 10464
Katrina J. ...	185 FORDHAM ST BRONX NY 10464
Ann M... Pete ...	175 Fordham St Bx NY 10464
Richard Mercedes	450 City Island Ave. Bx NY 10464

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Signature

Address

<u>David C. Bowers</u>	<u>281 Fordham Place, City Island, NY 10464</u>
<u>David C. Bowers</u>	<u>281 Fordham Place, City Island, NY 10464</u>
<u>Louises M. Bowers</u>	<u>281 Fordham Place, City Island, NY 10464</u>
<u>Mary Lou Laclumaw</u>	<u>324 King Ave City Island NY 10464</u>
<u>Robert Laclum</u>	<u>324 King Ave City Island, NY 10464</u>
<u>Francois Hoffman</u>	<u>468 King Ave City Island NY 10464</u>
<u>Caroline Verleyer</u>	<u>82 Pell Place, Ex. NY 10464</u>
<u>William Verleyer</u>	<u>82 Pell Place, Box N.Y. 10464</u>
<u>Ray T. Kelly</u>	<u>52 Scholfield St</u>
<u>Mary Dupani</u>	<u>190 Scholfield St. B.N.Y. 10464</u>

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Signature

Address

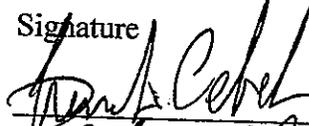
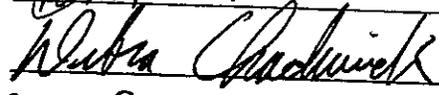
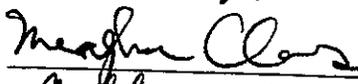
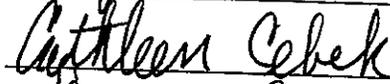
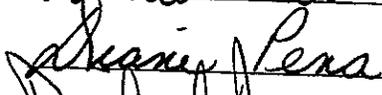
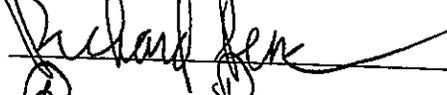
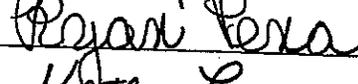
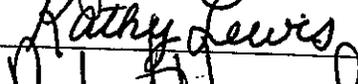
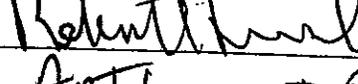
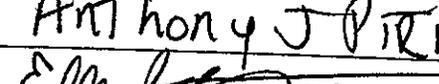
<i>J. S. C. J.</i>	89 Hart St. Bx, NY 10464
<i>John P. J.</i>	93 WINTERS ST NY 10464
<i>Martin J. Mueller</i>	60 Pell Place N.Y. 10464
<i>Angela M Mueller</i>	60 Pell Place N.Y. 10464
<i>Margaret A. Sanchez</i>	89 Pell Place, NY 10464
<i>Carmen Plaza</i>	- 190 Schofield St. Bx 10464
<i>Carol A. Reid</i>	- 190 Schofield St Bx 10464
<i>Lorraine Sabra</i>	457 City Island Ave
<i>Robert Edick</i>	- 160 Pellet St. Bx - 10464
<i>John M. Gleason</i>	160 Pellet St.

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Signature	Address
	98 Winters St
	39 Fordham St
	69 Centre St
	98 Winters St
	211 Kirby St
	211 Kirby St.
	211 Kirby St.
	28 Fordham St
	71 Fordham St
	76 Fordham St.
	76 Winters St. #A1

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Signature	Address
<i>Picnie Rosa</i>	152 Fordham St.
<i>Jimmy Norrie</i>	176 Bay st
<i>Joan & Scott</i>	1 CARROLL ST
<i>Phyllis Bell</i>	316 City Island
<i>Art</i>	242 Barne St #13
<i>Joe Gull</i>	30 PELOT ST #5K
<i>Ki Man</i>	99 Carroll St BKLY
<i>Steven Michael</i>	97 Fordham St.
<i>[Signature]</i>	321 City Island
<i>Anthony Madri</i>	34 Crown Street
<i>Mary Casey</i>	99 Winter St.
<i>Margaret Hoisik</i>	160 Pelot St apt 111 Bx NY 10464

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Signature	Address
<u>Gregory Casey</u>	<u>69 Centre St, Bronx NY 10464</u>
<u>Michael Pappas</u>	<u>96 Tier St Bronx NY 10464</u>
<u>Aimee Breen</u>	<u>25 Centrest Bronx NY 10464</u>
<u>J. Murray</u>	<u>73 Hawkins Bronx NY 10464</u>
<u>Nicholas Belter</u>	<u>73 Hawkins Bronx NY 10464</u>
<u>Mark Jones</u>	<u>69 Carroll St NY 10464</u>
<u>Peter Huston</u>	<u>168 Schofield St. NY 10464</u>
<u>Tony Huston</u>	<u>168 Schofield St. NY 10464</u>
<u>Patricia Leeman</u>	<u>105 Pell Pl. Bx NY 10464</u>
<u>Rita Kelly</u>	<u>52. Scherfield St Bx 10464</u>
<u>Jon Casey</u>	<u>99 Winters Street 10464</u>

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Signature

Address

Edward Espinoza 88 WINTERS ST

Wesley H. Casey 99 WINTERS ST

John O'Sullivan 91 WINTERS ST.

Deanne D'Alfonso 91 WINTERS ST 10464

Julia Paulson 48 WINTERS ST 10464

Diana Paulson 48 WINTERS ST 10464

Elizabeth L. Parman 175 SCHOFIELD ST. 10464

John Parman 175 SCHOFIELD ST BX 10464

John Calabrese 474 CITY ISLAND AVE BX 10464

Spencer 41 TIER ST BX 10464

Walter Ott 61A REYNOLD ST BX 10464

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Signature *Marilyn Luber* *John Connolly*
Address 160 Pilot St. Do NY 10464

Celine Stewart 160 Pilot St. BX NY 10464

Donna Dunn 160 Pilot Street Bronx 10464

John Dominico 160 Pilot St BX NY 10464

Mary C. Kavanagh 160 Pilot St. BX N.Y. 10464

Harold Fahn 160 Pilot St. BX, N.Y. 10464

Miriam J. Jull 160 Pilot St BX NY 10464

Leonard 160 Pilot St. " " "

John J. Jull 160 Pilot St. BX., N.Y., 10464

Mary Conery 160 PILOT ST. BX N.Y. 10464

Nelson J. Jull 160 PILOT ST BX NY

James J. Jull 160 Pilot St BX NY 10464

Patricia J. Jull 160 Pilot St BX NY 10464

Coranne J. Greenspan 160 Pilot St BX NY 10464 - B03

Kathy J. Jull 160 PILOT ST BX NY 10464

Edlyn Curvello - 160 Pilot St.
John J. Jull - 160 Pilot St. BX 406

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Signature	Address
Linda A. Ulmer	73 Carley Street, City Is. N.Y.
Ratti Sawski	98 Carley St, C.I. NY
Jim Juppert	19 Pell Place CI NY
Pete Booth	571 MINNIFORD AVE CI NY.
Pete P. Fran	425. KING. AVE C.I. N.Y.
Jim Max J. MUSTO	270 Fordham Pl Bx NY
Tony Reilly	390 City Island Ave NY
Bruno Saperstein	152 Hawkins St NY 10464
Christina Lappone	152 Hawkins St Bronx N.Y. 10464
BRENDAN MURPHY	69 Winters St BL NY

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Address

Madeline Palladino	160 Pilot St Bx
Linda Tiobro	66 Buckley St Bx
NYeh Samba	160 Pilot St, Bx
PHIL MANGINE	166 Pilot St. FX. NY
RAY REYES	160 Pilot ST Bx, NY
Elvira Pellerano	160 Pilot St Bx n.y.
Jeanette Gambetta	160 Pilot St. Bx. n.y.
Mary Rood	160 Pilot St, Bx NY
Rachel Gonzales	160 Pilot St, Bx
Barbara Dixon	160 Pilot St - Bx Apt 207

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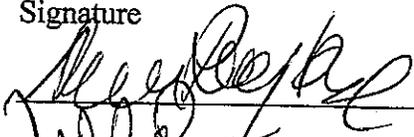
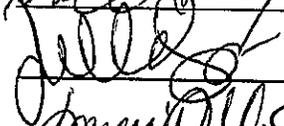
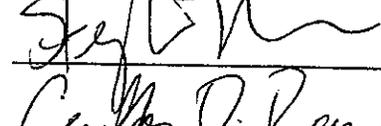
Signature	Address
Jean Schneider	160 Pilot St.
Edith Porcelli	160 " " "
Jesse Pearl	160 Pilot St.
Laura Linneman	" " "
Phyllis Armonia	160 Pilot St.
R. Vandenberg	160 Pilot St.
Marlene Neuge	160 Pilot St. 10464
Eugene De Lucia	160 Pilot St. 10464

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We the undersigned therefore respectfully suggest your serious consideration of these concerns and our request for our voices to be heard.

Signature	Address
	105 Otherland St, Bx NY 10464
	422 MINNIEFORD AVE Bx NY 10464
	105 Carroll Street, Bronx NY 10464
	54 Carroll Street Bronx NY 10464
Carlos D. Ramos	54 Carroll Street Bronx NY 10464
Phyllis Sipas	171 Reville St 10464
Sally Zochman	75 Pell Place Bx NY 10464
Paul Zochman	75 Pell Place Bx NY 10464
Stacy Hays	9 Fordham St 10464
Greg Martin	9 Fordham St 10464

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Address

<u>Ann Penny</u>	<u>81 Marie St. Bronx 10469</u>
<u>Greg Penny</u>	<u>81 Marie St. Bronx 10469</u>
<u>Rick G.</u>	<u>68 Centre Street Bx NY 10464</u>
<u>Michelle Kenny</u>	<u>68 Centre Street Bronx, NY 10464</u>
<u>Cindy Lombardo</u>	<u>166 Bay Street Bronx NY 10464</u>
<u>Robin Romano</u>	<u>166 Bay Street Bronx NY 10464</u>
<u>Kim McEldon</u>	<u>306 William Ave Bx NY 10464</u>
<u>Jan McEldon</u>	<u>306 William Ave Bx NY 10464</u>
<u>John McEldon</u>	<u>187 City Island Ave Bx NY 10469</u>
<u>John</u>	<u>151 Tien Street ^{APT 21} Bx NY 10464</u>

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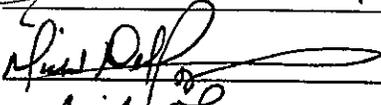
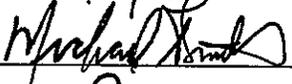
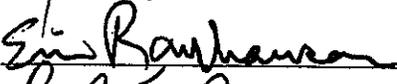
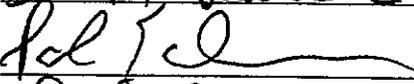
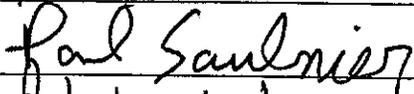
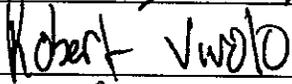
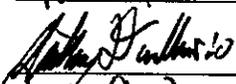
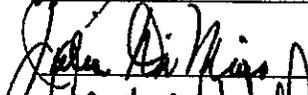
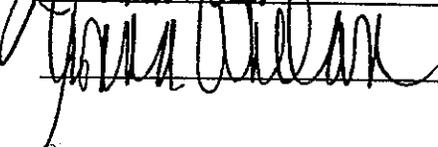
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Signature

Address

	15 WINTERS ST.
	60 Bay St.
	215 KIRBY ST.
	97 HORTON ST.
	40 schofield st
	40 schofield st
	53 Centre
	239 city Island ave
	55 Buckley St.
	651 King Ave

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Address

Benadette Pini 46 Fordham Street Box NY
Bobb Howard^{sr} 186 Fordham St Bx 10464 N.Y.
Susan Vaughan 152 Tier St 202A Bx 10464
Celia Spina 308 William Ave Bronx NY 10464
Stephanie 55 Winters St Box NY 10464
Lisa Mazzella 94 Winters St Bronx NY 10464
John Cellero 69 WINTERS ST BX NY 10464
Demetrius 306 ~~William Ave~~ Bx NY 10464
Robert Wheeler 64 Winters St City Island 10464
Ramon 403 CITY ISLAND AVE BRONX NY 10464

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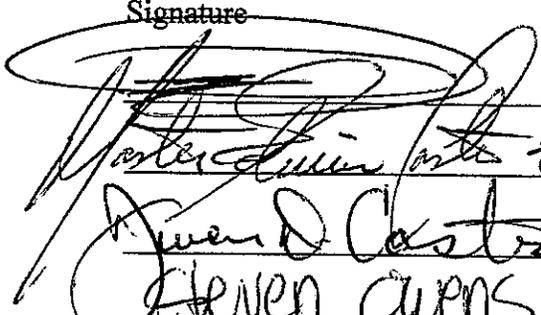
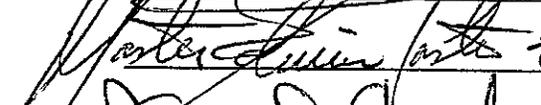
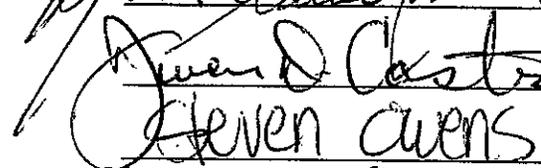
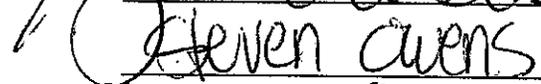
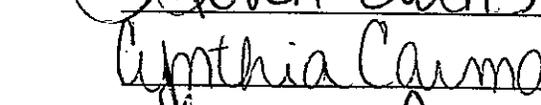
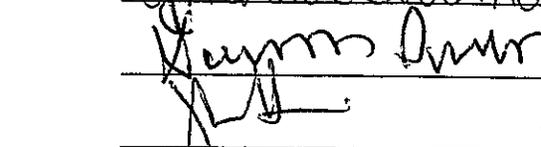
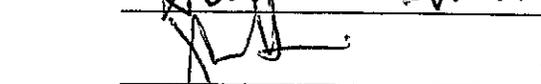
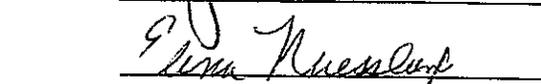
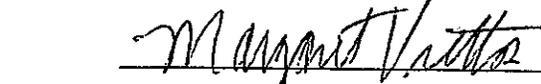
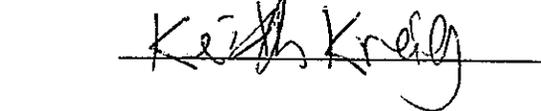
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Address

	205 City Island Ave ^{#7} Bronx NY 10464
	Dragon Academy 229 CI Avenue
	528 City Island Ave P.H.
	528 City Island Ave
	116 Schfield St BY NY 10464
	11 Pell Pl Bx NY
	61A Reynolds St. Bx NY 10464
	208 Lutherland St Bx NY 10464
	244 City Island Ave Bx N. Y. 10464
	92 Winters St. Bx N. Y. 10464

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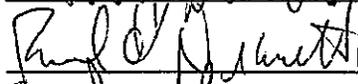
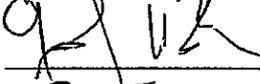
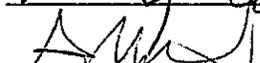
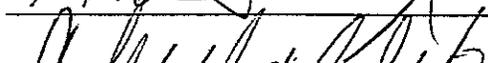
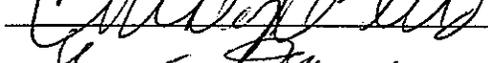
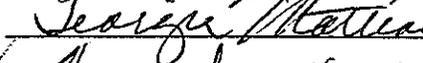
<i>Edmund Lombardi</i>	97 Earley St Bx 10464
<i>Walter J. Turk</i>	97 Earley St Bx 15464
<i>W. J. Turk</i>	31 Earley St Bx NY 10464
<i>Chris Hauptner</i>	92 Tier St Bx NY 10464
<i>Ann Butterworth</i>	78 Marine St. CD NY 10464
<i>W. J. Turk</i>	93 Marine St. Bx 10464
<i>Juan M...</i>	93 Marine St Bronx 10464
<i>MICHAEL DIAGGIO</i>	205 CITY ISLAND AVE BX 10464
<i>Florence Ann Mulvan</i>	185 City Island Ave Apt 6 10464
<i>Robert Cannon</i>	81 Howkins St Albany NY

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	78 Marine St. Bx NY 10464.
	78 TIER ST BX NY 10464
	106 Pelham Street Bx NY 10464
	499 MINNIEFORD AVE
	96 Schofield Street
	46 WINTERS ST.
	46 WINTERS ST
	64 WINTER ST C.I. NY 10464
	76 WINTERS C.I. NY 10464
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Address

Peter Delella

47 HAWKINS ST BX N.Y. 10464

RAW ROSALO

405 City Island Ave BX 10464

Joey Battello

415 City Island Ave BX 10464

Gregory Perry

215 City Island

Peter Perry

215 City Island

Pet Lopez

39 Fordham St, Bronx, NY 10464

Vedat Akhemi

163 Rockwell St NY 10464

Michelle DeBella

9 Deepwater Way 10464

Stephen Canell

112 PILOT ST. BRONX N.Y. 10464

Alexis Anzini

63 Tier Street BX NY 10464

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SAIA 43 Schofield Street, Bronx, NY 10464

[Signature] 43 Schofield St. Bronx, N.Y. 10464

[Signature] 34 Schofield St Bronx, NY, 10464

Jane Pa Paolo 19 Schofield St Bronx, NY 10464

Stephen Branning 51 Schofield St Bronx, N.Y. 10464

Field Ken 189 Schofield St Bronx 10464

[Signature] 50 Schofield St. Bronx, NY 10464

[Signature] 85 Carlyst St Bx N.Y. 10464

Factor J. Esposito 553 Minerva Ave Bronx New York 10464

Jorge Sagard 181 City Island Ave Bx 10464

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Address

Theresa Kutz 49 Schofield St. Bx NY 10464

Michal A. Jan 62 Schofield St. Bx NY 10464

Raquel Ortiz 62 Schofield St Bx NY 10464

Michelle Z 48 Schofield St. Bx NY 10464

Lyndee D 48 Schofield St. Bx NY 10464

John Noyan 50 Schofield St Bx NY 10464

53 Schofield St Bx N.Y. 10464

Cathy Merico 46 Schofield St Bx NY 10464

Ruda 46 Schofield St Bx NY 10464

Evelyn Berardo 21 A Schofield St. Bx NY. 10464

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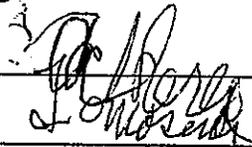
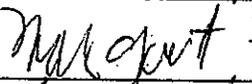
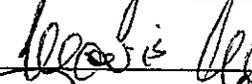
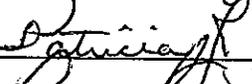
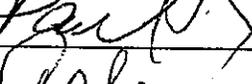
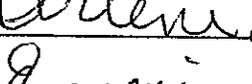
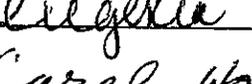
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Address

	181 City Island Ave 3 x 10464
	181 City Island Bx 10
	423 Minniford Bx 10404
	916 Pell Place Bx 10464
	114 Pelot St. Bx 10464
	40 Schofield St. 10464
	84 Centre St 10464
	113 Buckby St. 10464
	577 Minniford 10464
	212 Kirby St

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Signature

Address

Robert Owens	528 City Island Ave
Mary Arena	528 Kinnear Ave
Tom Vito	53 Centre St CI NY 10468
Robert Owens	155 Fordham St Bx 10464
Kar-Gorziska	250 City Island Ave
Carmela Conte	70 Fordham St
Doreen Conte	70 Fordham St
Helen Browning	51 Schuyler St
Mary Carman	320 King Ave Bx 10464
Charles Carman	320 King Ave Bx 10464

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Signature

Address

Jane [Signature]	100 Scherfield St, C.I.
LARRY CLARKE	295 CITY ISLAND AVE
Victor Anderson	156 Horton St Bx NY
James [Signature]	4 Bell Place Rec. NY
Al [Signature]	519 Minerva St Bronx, NY
Judy [Signature]	90 Reynolds St NY
John [Signature]	25 Dear St.
Cheryl [Signature]	153 Ditmars St Bx NY 10464
Carol [Signature]	650 C.I.A.
Rebecca [Signature]	255 City Island Ave Bx N.Y.

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Signature

Address

Anne Anrose - 10 10 Sunset Court

Lake Ariel, PA. 18436

William Schneider¹⁹⁵⁷ Bronxdale 10462 Apt. D21

Andrew Dixon 1957 Bronxdale Ave 10462 Apt. E

Angela Gentile 2114 Haight Ave. N.Y. 10461 PH

Adam Gentile 2114 Haight Ave. N.Y. 10461 PH

Victor Gentile 2114 Haight Ave. N.Y. 10461 P.J.

Roseanne Wehlitz 9 Tor Road Wappingers Falls NY 12590

Charles Wehlitz 9 Tor Road Wappingers Falls NY 12590

Jennifer Schatz 9 Tor Road Wappingers Falls NY 12590

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Address

<i>Samuel L. Morin</i>	<i>2 Leeward Lane City Isl. N.Y.</i>
<i>Richard Pecoraro</i>	<i>2 Leeward Lane City Isl, N.Y.</i>
<i>Edy Pecoraro</i>	<i>2 Leeward Lane City Isl, N.Y.</i>
<i>Jade Pecoraro</i>	<i>2 Leeward Lane City Isl, N.Y.</i>
<i>William Mejia</i>	<i>210 Carroll Street City Isl, N.Y.</i>
<i>Anna Mejia</i>	<i>210 Carroll Street City Isl, N.Y.</i>
<i>Michelle Morales</i>	<i>210 Carroll St. City Isl, N.Y.</i>
<i>Arnell Morales</i>	<i>210 Carroll St. City Isl, N.Y.</i>
<i>Luis Morales</i>	<i>210 Carroll St. City Isl, N.Y.</i>
<i>Morales Family</i>	<i>210 Carroll St. City Isl, N.Y.</i>

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Signature	Address
Clarissa Mahoney	210 Carroll St By Ny
Samantha Brelsford	210 Carroll St By Ny
Chloe Brelsford	210 Carroll St. By Ny
Cameron Brelsford	210 Carroll St By Ny
Anna Mejia	210 Carroll St. By Ny
Willie Mejia	210 Carroll St By Ny
Kobe Mejia	210 Carroll St By Ny
Helen Comerico	210 Carroll St. By Ny
Perry Comerico	210 Camell St. By Ny
The Pecorano's	210 Camell St By Ny
Edward Blanco	210 Carroll St. By Ny
George Blanco	210 Carroll St By Ny

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Signature	Address
Kimberly Kelly	341 CHA 10464
Joe Schaller	410 Kiny Ave. 10464
M Schaller	169 Ditmars 10464
Robert Moran	120 DITMARS 10464
Debra M. He	64 Earley St. 10464
Sha Shayya	25 Fordham Ave 10464
Judy Mc Cormick	412 Hunter Ave
Monty [unclear]	295 City Island Ave 2nd BRONX NY 10464
Joe Satter	43 FORDHAM ST

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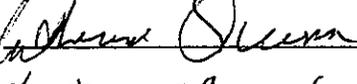
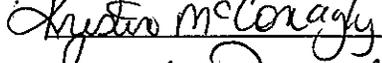
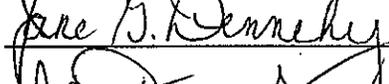
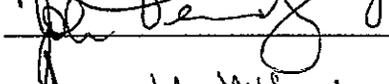
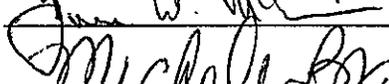
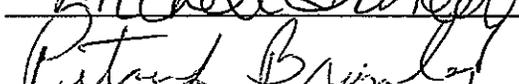
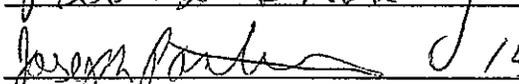
Richard Bollich	190 Fordham St	Bx 10464 ✓
Tommy O'Connell	238 Bowne St	CT 10464
John J. ...	161 Tier Street	BX 10464
John J. ...	325 C.I.A.	BX 10464
James Giriat	159 Hawkins St	BX
John D. ...	30 Pilot St	10464
Julia K. Batee	289 Minnola Ave	CT
Julian K. Batee	289 Minnola Ave	CT
James F. ...	412 Hunter Ave	BX 10464

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Signature	Address
	65 WINTERS STREET CITY ISLAND.
	56 WINTERS STREET, City Island.
	155 Fordham St CI
	690 Minneford Ave CI.
	34 Bay Street CI
	34 Bay St. CI 10464
	15 Pell Pl. - C.I. 10464
	60 Centre St CI 10464
	60 Centre St 10464
	150 Carroll St 10464

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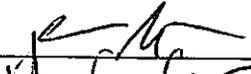
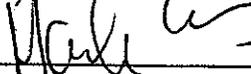
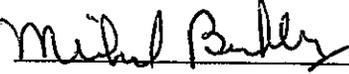
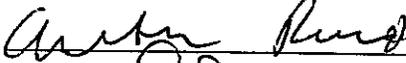
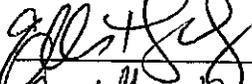
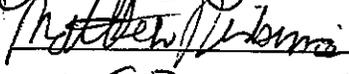
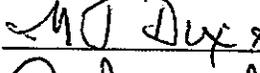
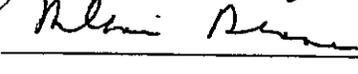
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Signature

Address

	283 Mansfield Ave
	69 Carroll St
	99 Reynolds St
	103 Pinal St
	Ellen Kelly 99 Pilot St BX NY 10464
	36 Schfield St Bronx NY 10464
	John Dux Box 3 Bx 10464
	4160 Hudson Av. N.Y. East 10475
	115 Rochelle St BX N.Y. 10464
	148 CITY IS AVE BX 10464

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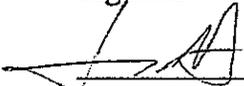
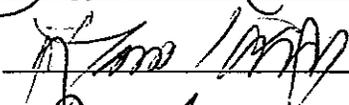
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Address

	417 King Ave Bronx 10469
Wendy Burt	417 KING AVE BX NY 10464
Anoosh Derrake	48 HAWKINS ST, BRONX NY, 10461
MAURICE RICHARD	150 MARINE ST BX
Carol Nemanc	290 William Ave Bronx NY 10466
Lisa Knapp	186 Ditmars St. Bronx, NY 10466
Linda Murphy	20 Fordham St - Bronx, NY 10464
Jillian Roberts	503 Minnieford Ave Bronx, NY 10464
	175 Fordham St Bronx 10464
	175 Ford St BX NY 10464

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Address

John Barron 400 King Ave, City Island, NY, 10464

Jeffrey McJannet President Performance Yacht Mgmt PO Box 157 City Is 10464

William J. Juranus 47-30 59th St, Woodside, N.Y. 11377

Lyn Sinclair 428 Municipal City Island 10464

Roma M. Motta 428 Minnieford City Island 10464

Frederick Chalk 350 Fordham Pl St, City Island 10464

~~Robert M. Motta~~ 350 Fordham Place, City Island NY 10464

John M. Motta 447 King Ave, City Island NY 10464

Sam Chalk 590 Ft. Washington #6M, NYC, NY 10033

Donald West Fordham St

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Address

Brenda Beckin

9 Pell Place Bx NY 10464

M-C Pgoose

33 Tier St Bx NY 10464

J. Schubert

44 Fordham St 10464

Danielle Calbo

151 Marine St 10464

Ralph 2. Bochi

483 Minnieford Ave Dx. ny 10464

Zplonda Cirulli

30 Pelat St Bx 10464 N.Y.

Fraylate

58 Hubris Ave

Gardner

169 Tier St Bx 10464

Tom Hefferman

631 Minnieford Ave

Melissa Howard

69 Fordham St Bx NY 10464

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Address

[Handwritten Signature]

3938 57th St #2 Woodside, NY 11377

[Handwritten Signature]

687 King Ave, Bronx (City Island) 10464

[Handwritten Signature]

110 Pilot St Bx 10464

[Handwritten Signature]

638 Macartney Bx 10464

[Handwritten Signature]

169 Beville St Bx 10464

[Handwritten Signature]

3270 La Fayette Bx 10464

[Handwritten Signature]

678 Minniford Ave Box 10464

[Handwritten Signature]

96 Hamlet St. 10464

[Handwritten Signature]

30 Tier St. NY, City Island 10464

[Handwritten Signature]

37 Bangs St BX NY 10464

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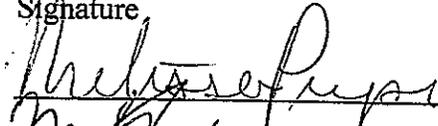
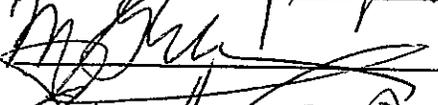
<u>Diane Myle</u>	<u>175 Fordham Street</u>
<u>Robert Myle</u>	<u>175 Fordham Street</u>
<u>Doreen Myle</u>	<u>175 Fordham Street</u>
<u>John Myle</u>	<u>179 Fordham Street</u>
<u>Jenna Fittiano</u>	<u>175 Fordham Street</u>
<u>Jim V. S.</u>	<u>175 Fordham Street</u>
<u>Albert Myle</u>	<u>171 Fordham St.</u>
<u>W. L. Myle</u>	<u>185 Fordham St.</u>
<u>Jessica Coyle</u>	<u>60 Hawkins St.</u>
<u>W. L. Myle</u>	<u>60 Hawkins St.</u>

Dear Mr. Vacca and New York City Council Members:

We, the undersigned, are hereby currently opposed to turning Hart Island, including Potter's Field, into public park land due to the following concerns:

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We the undersigned therefore respectfully suggest your serious consideration of these concerns and our request for our voices to be heard.

Signature	Address
	7 Hawkins St.
	300 CIA. CITY ISLAND NY 10464
	300 C. I. A Bx NY 10466
Jennifer H.	205 CITY ISLAND AVE. 10464
Amel Bernardo	74 Tier St. 10464
Chisa Desrosiers	74 TIER ST. 10464
Chouy Bernardo	74 TIER ST. 10464
Nelson Son	152 Bay St 10464
Scott Mifs	143 Fordham St
	499 MINNIEBORO AVE

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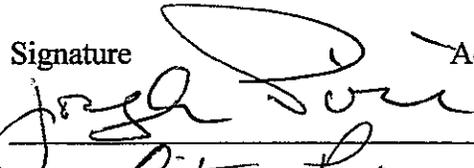
Philip Tomer	40 Easley St
Bob	101 Reynolds St.
Mike	7 Hawkins St.
Frank Cote	36 Hawkins ST 10464
William	71 Hawkins St.
Windy Warku	71 Hawkins St
John	152 Hawkins St
Dusan Goonan	615 King Ave
James Goonan	615 King Ave
Joseph Goonan	615 King Ave.

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Signature	Address
	76 Fordham St
Rita Piro	76 Fordham St
Marlene Croffi	88 Bay St
Sam Piro	743 Buckley St.
Rita Aurriemma	67 Fordham St
Anthony J. Piro	76 Fordham St
Maria Cortazzo	
Robert Cortazzo	
F. Muscoluso	63 Fordham St
C. Harley Piro	35 Furley St

Dear Mr. Vacca and New York City Council Members:

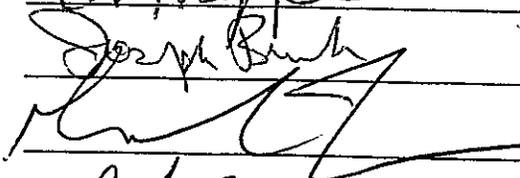
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Signature

Address

	97 WINTERS ST.
Debra Monahan	611 Minnieford Ave
Nick Monahan	611 Minnieford Ave
Bernadette Monahan	611 Minnieford Ave
Ryan Fitzpatrick	109 Fordham St.
John Monahan	25 FORDHAM ST.
Joseph Bink	31 E. 107th St
	Hunter
John Jones	311 KING AVE
Cary Ham	311 King Ave

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Signature

Address

	45 Winters Street
	41 Winters St
CAROL FUSCO	30 PILOT ST
OSMO FUSCO	30 PILOT ST
Georgina Raudapf	30 PILOT ST Rt 10464 2J
	551 City Island Ave.
J.G. Lavalk	358 City Island Ave.
Stephen Caranante	171 Reville Street
JULIAN MOSES	314 KING AVE
Michael Krapp	166 Ditmars St, Bronx, NY 10464

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Signature

Address

<i>Mr. Harley - G</i>	<i>35 Earley St</i>
<i>L. Harley - G</i>	<i>35 Earley St</i>
<i>John Muzika</i>	<i>63 FORDHAM ST</i>
<i>Miriam Muzika</i>	
<i>Lina Policastro -</i>	
<i>Patricia Genovese</i>	<i>27 Goldham St.</i>
<i>Edward Genovese</i>	<i>27 Fordham St.</i>
<i>Paula Bivona</i>	<i>70 Pell Place, Bx 10464</i>
<i>Christine Torresrossa</i>	<i>53 Centre St. Bx 10464</i>
<i>Joseph Bivona</i>	<i>70 PELL PLACE Bx 10464</i>

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Signature

Address

Henry Burke 189 Fordham St Bronx NY 10464
Joan Krzymer 96 Marine St, Bronx, NY
Richard Krzymer 96 Marine St, Bronx, NY 10464

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FOR THE RECORD

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Signature

Address

<u>Andellana</u>	<u>65 Pennard St Bx NY 10464</u>
<u>Roseanne Black</u>	<u>104 Fordham St #18. Bx NY 10464</u>
<u>Janette Corwin</u>	<u>Appt 72 Fordham Street Bx, NY 10464</u>
<u>Mike K</u>	<u>77 Schofield St. Bx, NY 10464</u>
<u>Theresa Gronewaldt</u>	<u>140 Bownest Bx 10464</u>
<u>Marie Philips</u>	<u>67 Hopkins St. 10464</u>
<u>Janet Cerrato</u>	<u>2 Landing Way 10464</u>
<u>John Cerrato</u>	<u>2 Landing way 10464</u>
<u>Nicole Marie Cerrato</u>	<u>2 Landing way 10464</u>
<u>Fred Cerrato</u>	<u>51 Schofield St. 10464</u>

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Signature	Address
<u>Dante Amaldi</u>	<u>34th Carroll St Bx NY</u>
<u>John Laughlin</u>	<u>689 Kinn Ave Bx NY 10464</u>
<u>Rosetta Woods</u>	<u>147 Reville St Bx 10464</u>
<u>John A. Byrne</u>	<u>84 Centre St Bx 10464</u>
<u>Helen Michaels</u>	<u>97 Fordham St "</u>
<u>Virginia Ferrero</u>	<u>160 Houston 10464</u>
<u>Georgette Labate</u>	<u>173 Hopton St Bx NY 10464</u>
<u>Rosemarie Dick</u>	<u>79 Pell Pt Br N.Y. 10464</u>
<u>A. Bernadette Hayward</u>	<u>596 Municipal Ave. Bx NY 10464</u>
<u>Elisa Albo</u>	<u>74 Tier St, Bx NY 10464</u>

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Signature

Address

<i>Charles W. [Signature]</i>	61 Reynold ST BX NY 10464
<i>Donald [Signature]</i>	74 Reynolds St City Island NY 10464
<i>Kate [Signature]</i>	66 REYNOLDS ST CITY ISLAND, NY 10464
<i>J. Tuzos</i>	11 Reynold St
<i>Angelo Beltrachio</i>	78 Reynold
<i>Antonio Muzzelle</i>	95 REYNOLD ST
<i>[Signature]</i>	103 REYNOLDS ST.
<i>[Signature]</i>	439 Minford St
<i>Charles Kelly</i>	96 Reynolds St.
<i>[Signature]</i>	90 Reynolds St. City Island
<i>[Signature]</i>	101 REYNOLDS ST City Island
<i>Robert M. Phillips</i>	59 Reynolds St C.I. 10464
<i>[Signature]</i>	61A Reynolds St. CI 10464
<i>Charlie Hession</i>	61A Reynolds St

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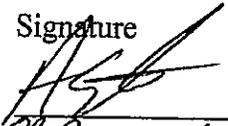
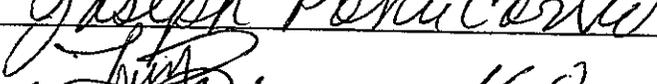
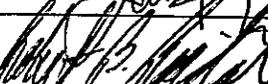
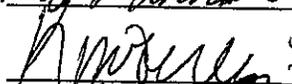
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Signature

Address

	BB WINTERS ST 3
	154 Fordham Street.
	154 Fordham Street
	30 Plot Street.
	
	
	160 Plot St
	551 City Island Ave.
	81 Marine St
	81 Marine St.
	247 Minnickford Ave

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Signature

Address

<i>John Brown</i>	<i>470 Minnick Ave</i>	<i>Bronx 10464</i>
<i>John Brown</i>	<i>179 Cross St</i>	<i>Bronx 10464</i>
<i>Nick Strah</i>	<i>Pell Place</i>	<i>Bronx 10464</i>
<i>John Brown</i>	<i>457 Minnickford</i>	<i>Bronx 10464</i>
<i>Giuseppe Monaco</i>	<i>519 Minnickford</i>	
<i>Antonio Manca</i>	<i>519 Minnickford</i>	
<i>Paul O'Neil</i>	<i>Earl D. Moore</i>	<i>Bronx 10464</i>
<i>Carol Fraga</i>	<i>439 Minnickford Ave</i>	
<i>Jelette Cera</i>	<i>439 Minnickford Ave</i>	
<i>Alfred</i>	<i>191 Reville St</i>	
<i>Floris Mesolite</i>	<i>30 Pilot St</i>	<i>City Island NY</i>
<i>Annunzio</i>	<i>Reville St</i>	<i>City Island NY</i>

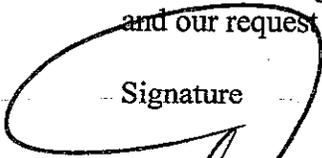
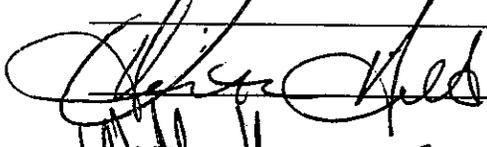
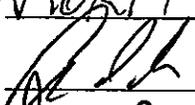
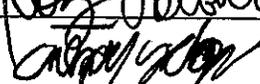
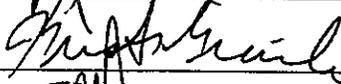
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Signature	Address
	358 CITY ISLAND AV.
	51 EARLEY ST C.I.
	169 Schofield St
NOBI MIRAGLIA	63 FORDHAM ST CI
	520 Minnieford
Roy Dotson	520 Minnieford Ave CI
	299 - FORDHAM PLCE
Mary Swann	62 HAWKINS ST
	525 Edgmont Pl
	Brown St
George Mascia	332 King Ave
Admiral Spada	73 Hawkins St
Jane Juhos	161 Marine St.

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Signature	Address
<i>Karla Longo</i>	451 Minnietord Ave
<i>L. Mena</i>	478 Minnietord Ave.
<i>Carly Marcus</i>	478 Minnietord Ave
<i>Jim Sarno</i>	484 Minnietord Ave
<i>Joe Sarno</i>	466 MINNIETORD AVE
<i>Chris Sarno</i>	466 Minnietord Ave
<i>Susan Strull</i>	465 Minnietord Ave.
<i>Frank Huh</i>	465 Minnietord Ave
<i>Joseph Marcus</i>	465 Minnietord Ave.
<i>Theresa A. Berona</i>	470 Minnietord Ave.
<i>Elizabeth Montalono</i>	102 Hawkins St.

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The only viable access to Hart Island is via the Fordham Street Ferry Terminal on City Island. As you know City Island is already inundated with non-resident traffic. The City Island Bridge is the only access to the mainland. Adding traffic will only jeopardize the public safety of island residents and visitors alike. Emergency access to the island is further dangerously compromised. In addition, Fordham Street is extremely narrow with no room for constant two-way traffic and no space for public parking in the immediate vicinity of the Ferry Terminal. Furthermore, Potter's Field is a burial ground which should be considered sacred and not turned into a public spectacle. We have no problem with access granted to the site for respectful remembrance, but we have not heard how the Parks Department plans to guarantee the maintenance of the due respect that we owe to these buried souls. For this and other reasons, we are asking that all plans to turn Hart Island into public park be placed on hold. The residents of City Island deserve a chance to express their concerns. A public forum would be ideal for all to voice their opinions, along with suggestions for an alternate solution. A consideration could be ferry service from Orchard Beach/ Pelham Bay Park.

We the undersigned therefore respectfully suggest your serious consideration of these concerns and our request for our voices to be heard.

Signature

Address

<i>Danice Stirling</i>	<i>152 Bay St.</i>
<i>Jane Gracchi</i>	<i>82 Rte. 100</i>
<i>JH</i>	<i>25 Winters St.</i>
<i>Roman Costo</i>	<i>190 Schfield St.</i>
<i>Joe Brubbs</i>	<i>415 City Island</i>
<i>Mare Scheper</i>	<i>449 King Ave</i>
<i>Cathy Duffy</i>	<i>158 Reville St.</i>
<i>Mamdu Bin</i>	<i>11 Forchan St</i>
<i>[Signature]</i>	<i>122 Hudson St.</i>
<i>[Signature]</i>	<i>373 City Island Ave</i>
<i>[Signature]</i>	<i>351 Fordham Pl</i>
<i>[Signature]</i>	<i>149 South 10th St</i>

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Signature

Address

Joyce Magyella 68 Earley St. Bx 10464

Koreanne Weiss 104 Arroll St Bx 10464

Judith Kaudin 46 Centre St Bx 10464

Edmond King 606 King Ave City Island 10464

Joe L. Conroy 246 Broun ST City Island 10464

Ch. L. Ryan 246 B Broun Street City Island 10464

JOE & LETTY PENNA 205 CITY ISLAND AVE. APT # 6 10464

David Casey 107 Ditmars Street Bx NY 10464

Nancy Centers 44 Winters St, Bx NY 10464

Jale Lutz 44 WINTERS ST

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Signature	Address
Joyce Casper	122 Pilot St. Bx. N. Y. 10464
Mike DiNapoli	221 Kirby St Bx NY 10464
Richard Wilson	100 Mermaid Pt Bx 299 10464
Scott Janski	98 Earley St C.I. 10464
James Ryan	34 Schofield St. Bx 10464
J. Glass	Schofield St.
Carl P. Wall	45 Scho Field ST Bx NY 10464
Elizabeth Jordan	551 Minnetonka Ave Bx NY 10464
Colleen Cannon	353 Fordham Pl Bx NY 10464
Ann Marie Hough	" " " "

The New York Times

Officials Object to Plan to Turn Hart Island Burial Site Over to Parks Dept.

FOR THE RECORD

By **Nina Bernstein**

Jan. 20, 2016

It was a vision to beguile many New Yorkers: an all-but-forgotten island in Long Island Sound that a noisy city would transform into its most tranquil park. And there was a concurrent vision for the families of the dead long buried there, on Hart Island: a cemetery now run like a prison would become a place to freely mourn.

But at a City Council hearing on Wednesday on a bill to transfer jurisdiction over the island's 101 acres from the Department of Correction to the parks department, there was opposition by all the city agencies affected. In the end, the vision came to seem more like a dream than a quick solution to years of criticism and litigation over Hart Island and its role as the city's only potter's field.

The parks department does not want it. "The operation of a public cemetery falls well outside of the agency's expertise and available resources," Matt Drury, director of government relations for the department, testified. "It is fair to estimate that any renovation of the island to allow use for the general public could cost upwards of tens of millions of dollars."

Last year, 1,137 bodies went to Hart Island for mass burials, transported from the medical examiner's morgues several times a week throughout the year, weather and tides permitting. Seven or eight inmates from Rikers Island are taken there by ferry to do the shoveling, under the supervision of five correction officers and a captain. Burial plots are long trenches, dug by bulldozer, where 150 adults or 1,000 infants are placed in plain pine boxes.

"It seems so 19th century," said Brad Lander, a Brooklyn Democrat, one of 23 co-sponsors of the bill, introduced by Elizabeth Crowley, a Democrat from Queens, and Mark Levine, a Manhattan Democrat. "It's ghoulish to think of Rikers inmates being trucked over to bury infants who have been abandoned."

In terms of cost, Ms. Crowley said, correction officers would be more effectively used to deal with violence at the jail, not supervising burials. She voiced disbelief at the Correction Department's \$400,000 estimate of the expense to run the potter's field, suggesting the cost was much higher.

But even under her sharp questioning, Carleen McLaughlin, director of legislative affairs at the Correction Department, insisted, "We're happy to continue managing Hart Island."

After the hearing, Mr. Levine, chairman of the Committee on Parks and Recreation, said, "I'm disappointed by the lack of vision we heard today from the administration."

Under the terms of a settlement reached last year in a federal class action lawsuit, small groups of family members and their guests have been permitted to take a restricted city ferry to the island to visit grave sites once a month. But Christopher Dunn, associate legal director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, told the Council that the settlement, which awaits final court approval, "falls short of what sound public policy and plain common sense would dictate for New York City's potter's field."

Anyone should be able to visit a Hart Island grave site, he said, not just relatives who register with the government and have to pass through a razor-wired entrance to a ferry from City Island, subjecting themselves to a search as well as the confiscation of cellphones that could be used to take pictures. Efforts to soften such rules have been rebuffed.

"As long as D.O.C. runs the facility, we are going to run it with the D.O.C. mentality," he said, urging a transfer of jurisdiction to any other city agency.

Tupper Thomas, executive director of New Yorkers for Parks, a century-old nonprofit group, agreed that the current arrangement is "just totally unacceptable in so many ways." But, noting that the parks department uses welfare-to-work recipients for 70 percent of its park maintenance, she said that the bill should not be passed unless it comes "with a lot more money and thought."

Melinda Hunt, a filmmaker and founder of the Hart Island Project who has been advocating more open access to the island for 25 years, said the city should rethink the whole burial process. A novel proposal that she supports, sketched out by British landscape architects, would make Hart Island the city's only "natural" or "green" burial place, allowing bodies to decay quickly into earth, perhaps with trees over them, and memorializing them online through GPS, rather than markers. The city might even be able to sell such graves to affluent, ecology-minded New Yorkers, Ms. Hunt said — if it addresses the shore erosion that has at times sent skulls to wash ashore on City Island.

Mr. Levine evoked a seductive image of what Hart Island could be for the many New Yorkers who now do not even know it exists. "There's something about being on an island in the middle of Long Island Sound," he said, "with centuries of history and a million stories to tell."

One of those stories was told in the day's most poignant testimony. It came from Elaine Joseph, a retired naval officer who said it was the 38th anniversary of the death of her 4-day-old baby daughter, Tomika. Her daughter died not indigent or abandoned, but after heart surgery at Mount Sinai Hospital during the blizzard of 1978, when the city was shut down. Her body was lost between the hospital and the medical examiner's office, and until 2009 her mother was not able to find out where she was buried. It was on Hart Island.

Ms. Joseph had to threaten a lawsuit to win the right to visit the grave site. She is grateful to the city, she said, but on her last visit, an armed correction officer would not allow her to walk over to the water, or pay her respects at the veterans' plot within view.

"I'm looking for a park," she said, "a bench where I can put a plaque with my daughter's name."

A version of this article appears in print on Jan. 21, 2016, on Page A20 of the New York edition with the headline: Officials Criticize Proposal to Turn Potter's Field Over to Parks Dept.

BLOG CITY LIFE

4 ADD COMMENT  LOVE IT

New York's newest park could be built atop nearly a million unmarked graves

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By Will Pulos

Posted: Friday January 23 2015, 3:04pm



Melinda Hunt/The Hart Island Project
Aerial view of Hart Island

Hart Island, which just east of the Bronx in the mouth of the Long Island Sound, boasts breathtaking views of the water, fascinating examples of Victorian architecture, 100 acres of open space and...the bodies of almost one million dead New Yorkers.

The largest publicly funded cemetery in the world, Hart Island has served as a potter's field for New York City since 1869. Since then, it's housed a prison, a workhouse for the poor, an insane asylum, a tuberculosis sanatorium and a missile base. Currently, around 1,500 bodies are buried there annually.

And in a few years, you might be able to picnic there. City Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley, who represents Ridgewood, Maspeth and Glendale in Queens, has introduced a bill that would transfer control of the half-mile-long island to the Parks Department. The goal would be to open the island to the public, transforming it into a space similar to Governor's Island (<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/parks/governors-island>).

"The island has a unique, beautiful idyllic setting that is different than any place in the city," says Councilwoman Crowley. "It would be a nice place for people to visit. Especially, for those who have an actual connection to the island if you have a loved one buried there."

Since 1975, the Department of Corrections has run Hart Island (the bodies are buried by Riker's Island inmates) and the area has been mostly closed to the public. Those wishing to pay their respects have to file an application to visit the island on a ferry (which runs only once a month). Once there, visitors are not allowed to go more than 20 yards past the dock or see any of the graves—there's a designated "mourning gazebo".

Transforming the island into a park would *not* mean the land would cease to be used as a burial site, however. Instead, the proposed legislation would limit Riker's inmates' work there to two days per week, and section off the area where active burials are taking place. Crowley recently toured the island with Council Member Mark Levine, the chairman of the Parks and Recreation committee, and representatives from the mayor's office. Bronx Community Board 10 signed off on the legislation last Thursday, and Crowley says she expects a hearing on the bill by June.

But before you poo-poo the idea of an afternoon spent hanging near buried bodies, you should know that you've probably already done it. Washington Square Park (<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/attractions/washington-square-park>), Madison Square Park (<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/things-to-do/madison-square-park-1>), Bryant Park (<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/attractions/bryant-park>) and Prospect Park (<http://www.timeout.com/newyork/parks/prospect-park>) were all originally used for public burials.

Families win access to Hart Island, NYC's potter's field

Peter D. Kramer, The (Westchester County, N.Y.) Journal News 5:55 p.m. EDT July 13, 2015

Peekskill artist Melinda Hunt has chronicled NYC's potter's field cemetery, Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound near City Island. (Video by Peter Carr/The Journal News)



(Photo: Melinda Hunt & Joel Sternfeld)

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. — For 24 years, Peekskill artist Melinda Hunt has spent her life documenting, charting and helping families gain access to Hart Island, where New York City has buried its anonymous and indigent dead since just after the Civil War. (<http://lohud.us/1PgrH9>)

The 101-acre island off City Island in Long Island Sound holds America's largest mass grave, where an estimated 1 million plain, pine boxes hold the city's poor and unknown.

Access to the potter's field hasn't been easy.

"Lawyers tell me it's harder to get onto Hart Island than a maximum-security prison," Hunt says in her bright upstairs office and studio on South Division Street.



USA TODAY

Cops: Woman stole grave wreaths to decorate home

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/07/01/woman-steals-wreaths-from-graves-to-decorate-her-home/29562721/>

On July 8, access got easier, when the New York Civil Liberties Union settled a lawsuit with the city, granting survivors visits once a month to the gravesites of their family members. Until now, access — through the Department of Corrections, which still oversees burials by Riker's Island work crews — has been to a gazebo on the island, far from the actual gravesites.

This settlement changes that, said Christopher Dunn, the NYCLU's lead counsel on the case.

"This settlement should help bring closure to the parents, children, brothers, sisters and other family members of the generations of people who suffered the indignity of mass burial and then suffered the added insult of being forsaken by a city policy that barred family and friends from visiting," he said.

Families like Dr. Laurie Grant, a Valhalla obstetrician and gynecologist whose daughter was stillborn 22 years ago this week, on July 13, 1993, at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan. The baby was buried on Hart Island without Grant's knowledge or permission while she recovered from the difficult delivery, she says.

Grant has been trying for years to get onto Hart Island. Last March, she arranged a trip and showed up at the dock, only to have no one from the corrections department show up to take her over. She said she hopes to be among the first to visit Hart Island under the new settlement.

"This is a hard time of year for me" surrounding the anniversary, she said, but added: "It's your right to visit the cemetery."

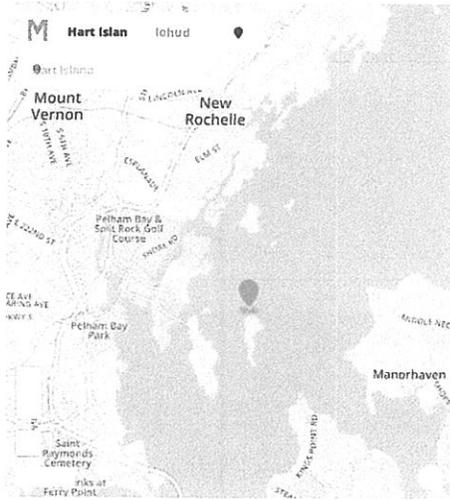


Current designated burial sites at Hart Island. (Photo: Melinda Hunt/The Hart Island Project)

The first visits will be July 19. While the details are still being worked out, Dunn predicted there would be two two-hour windows for up to 25 visitors each. (Family members wishing to schedule a visit can call the Department of Corrections at 718-546-0911.)

Hunt has been helping families navigate the bureaucracy for years, suing to gain access for mothers to visit their babies' graves. She turned thousands of pages of city records into the award-winning Hart Island Project website (www.hartisland.net), where she charts burials since 1980 and helps family members document the lives that led to Hart Island.

"It's like Facebook for the dead," she said. "We give people a blank slate to remember their family member, to tell their story. There's a reverence to what they write when they gather their thoughts. Unlike Facebook, we don't have nasty people show up."



Hunt also wrote the book on Hart Island, a 1998 collaboration with photographer Joel Sternfeld ("Hart Island," Scala). In it, she asked prisoners to reflect on the work detail that has them filling the vast plots that measure 20 feet by 70 feet by 6 feet. Those plots hold 165 adult coffins. Or 1,000 plain pine boxes holding the remains of babies.

Inmate Eddie Melendez wrote: "When I first came to Hart Island, it was just a job to me. But when I found out that my baby sister was buried here it hurt me. Because she didn't get a proper beirial. For I can pay my restpecks and now when I beiry a baby I think of my sister."



Artist Melinda Hunt at her Peekskill studio July 9, 2015. She has chronicled NYC's potter's field cemetery, Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound near City Island. This panel includes a photograph from the island and letters written by Riker's Island inmates tasked with burying New York's anonymous or indigent dead. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

Hunt also made the 2006 documentary film *Hart Island: An American Cemetery* and created a gallery work on the topic for Westchester Community College in 2012.

Hunt sees last week's settlement as a milestone in her effort to help families, but just a step on her goal to have the city parks department take over Hart Island and turn it into a city park. There is a bill before the City Council to transfer the island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department, and Hunt is hoping it will get a hearing in September.



USA TODAY

[Ice jam topples Civil-War era headstones in Ohio cemetery](http://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2015/03/17/ice-jam-cemetery-ohio-headstones/24899767/)

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2015/03/17/ice-jam-cemetery-ohio-headstones/24899767/>)

The 101-acre island could serve the same dual purpose as other city parks — Madison Park and Washington Square Park, among them — that were once cemeteries. Hart Island could become the nation's largest "green cemetery," where bodies are not embalmed and are buried in plain pine boxes, as they have been at Hart Island from the start, permitted to degrade and feed the soil. That effort would require an organized landscaping plan, something better suited to the Parks Department than the Corrections Department, Hunt said.

"I'd like to make it like Governors Island, where kids go on field trips," Hunt said.

For now, those trips are limited to family members, once a month, on a Department of Corrections ferry.

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BRONX

Part of Bronx's Hart Island may become a park

JENNIFER H. CUNNINGHAM

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS Updated: 01/07/2014 12:40 PM ET

298



CLARE YAFFA/AP

This Sept. 13, 1990 photo provided by Claire Yaffa shows a mass burial trench for adults on New York's Hart Island. Since 1869, more than 1 million people have been laid to rest at the potter's field on the island that lies in the waters just off the Bronx borough of New York City.

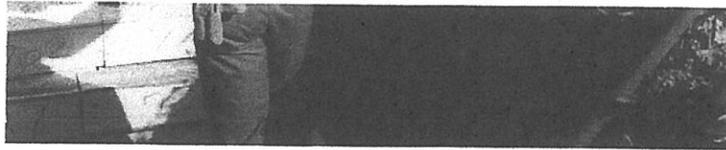
A Bronx-based potter's Field that's been in use since the Victorian era may get a new life.

Part of Hart Island, a 130-acre isle off mainland Bronx that has been used as a public cemetery since 1869, may become the city's newest park after a Queens lawmaker vowed to revisit a measure that would bring it under the jurisdiction of the Parks Department.

City Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley (D-Middle Village) said she'll re-introduce the bill she co-sponsored to transfer Hart Island's jurisdiction from the city Department of Correction. Crowley said she aims to have the bill — which died in committee on New Year's Eve — reintroduced by next month.



CLARE YAFFA/AP



This Thursday, Sept. 13, 1990 picture provided by Claire Yaffa shows the mass burial of infants in Trench 51 on New York's Hart Island. Since 1869, more than 1 million people have been laid to rest at the potter's field on the island that lies in the waters just off the Bronx borough of New York City.

"Every New Yorker should have the right to visit, without having to go through the (Department of Corrections) process," Crowley said. "My goal is to open up more of the island, and make it more visitor-friendly."

Crowley said she plans to work with the Council's new Parks Committee leadership to give the plan a fair hearing.

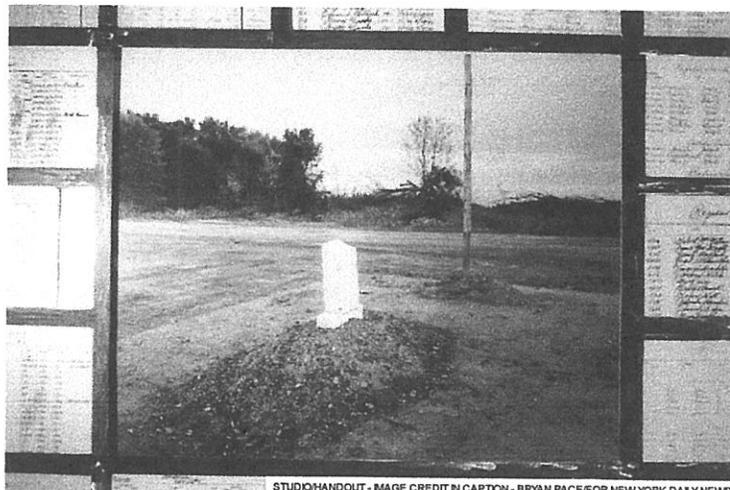


STUDIOHANDOUT - MAGE CREDIT IN CAPTION - BRYAN PACE/FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Potters Field - Title : Adult Mass Burial with Pages from the Hart Island Burial Record Books - Photo Credit : Melinda Hunt in Collaboration with Joel Sternfeld - Exhibit "Silent Beaches, Untold Stories: New York City's Forgotten Waterfront" at St. Johns University, Queens.

Currently, those wishing to visit some of approximately one million people entombed on the island have to formally request a visit and cannot visit the actual grave site, according to the Department of Correction. Visitors must take a city-operated ferry from City Island to Hart Island.

Rikers Island inmates are still burying people on the southern portion of the island. The common burial ground serves as the final resting spot for people who are indigent or those whose families don't know their whereabouts when they die.



STUDIOHANDOUT - MAGE CREDIT IN CAPTION - BRYAN PACE/FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Potters Field - Title : New Mass Grave and Mussel Shells with Pages from the Hart Island Burial Records - Photo Credit : Melinda Hunt in Collaboration with Joel Sternfeld - Exhibit "Silent Beaches, Untold Stories: New York City's Forgotten Waterfront" at St. Johns University, Queens.

If the park proposal is approved, the city would have to find a way to deal with the influx of traffic onto City Island, said Barbara Dolensek of the City Island Civic Association.

"Our main concern would be the impact opening a public park would have on City Island," Dolensek said. "We do think people should be allowed to visit on a limited basis."



An aerial photo of Hart Island from the 1950s.

The northern end of the island — which hasn't had new burials in many years — could easily be turned into a park, said Meirinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project, which is advocating for increased accessibility to Hart Island.

Hunt — whose group is hosting a hearing this month on the future uses of Hart Island — said several former potter's fields in the city have been turned into parks — including Bryant Park, City Hall Park and Washington Square Park. Prospect Park in Brooklyn is home to a Quaker cemetery.



Inmates prepare for a burial at Hart Island.

"That's really the precedent for transferring it," Hunt said. "[The cemetery] doesn't impinge on Prospect Park being an active park."

Besides burials, the small island in the Long Island Sound that's less than a mile east of City Island, has also been home to a prison, a reformatory for boys and an insane asylum.

A Parks Department spokesman said he wouldn't comment on legislation that didn't yet exist, but said the department has refused jurisdiction of Hart Island in the past because the agency won't operate on an active burial ground.

Hart Island Project Public Meeting, Jan. 18, 2 p.m., City Island Library, 320 City Island Ave.

jcunningham@nydailynews.com

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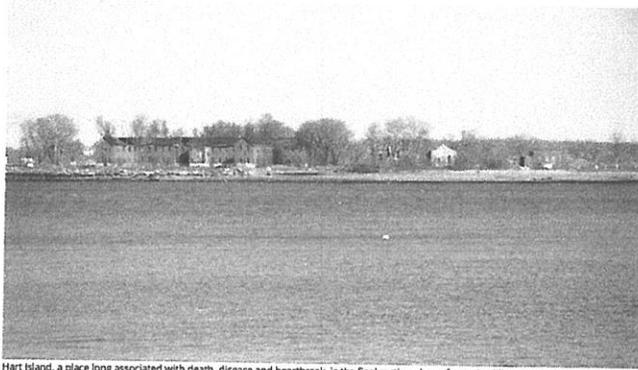
Will Hart Island be reborn as NYC's newest public park?

New York's public cemetery has been off-limits to the public for decades. But with a push to transfer control of the island-bound burial ground to the Parks Department, that could all change.



MATT HICKMAN [@](#)
January 22, 2015, 4:20 p.m.

f 182 p 3 g t



Hart Island, a place long associated with death, disease and heartbreak, is the final resting place of over 1 million people. (Photo: Don Emmert/AFP/Getty Images)

It may come as a surprise, but New York City is an old pro at transforming burial grounds into parks.

Long before the folk singers, chess players and skate rats moved in and it rose to prominence as a counterculture congregation spot for those crusading against "the man" (and before that, Robert Moses), Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village was a rural cemetery, not yet part of the city proper, where New Yorkers killed by early 19th century outbreaks of yellow fever were interred. Rumor is, around 20,000 souls were never disinterred and remain buried under the beloved and heavily trafficked park.

The same goes for Madison Square Park. Long before the era of never-ending Shake Shack queues, the Flatiron District's most bustling green space was an 18th century potter's field — a place where the indignant were laid to rest. Fifteen blocks north, Bryant Park served very much the same function up until the 1840s when the burial ground was decommissioned and the human remains were relocated elsewhere.

And then there's Hart Island.

Officially part of the Bronx, this 130-acre landmass located just east of City Island — and Rat Island — is best known for spectacular views of Long Island Sound, a smattering of creepy crumbling buildings and tens of thousands of unmarked mass graves.

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A mile long and only about a quarter-mile wide, Hart Island is located just east of larger City Island in the Bronx. (Photo: Doc Seay/flickr)

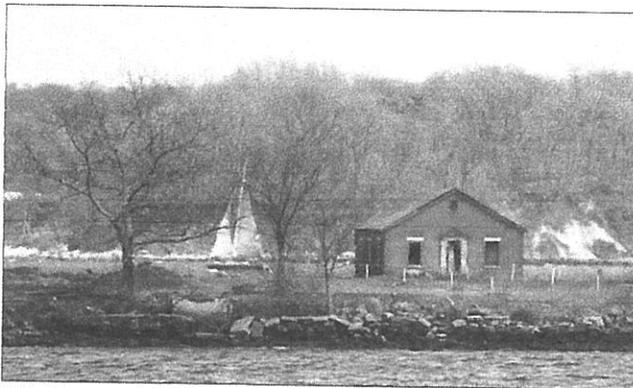
Home to what's still very much an active potter's field, Hart Island is the largest tax-funded cemetery in the world. The island has held many facilities over the years including a boot camp for delinquent boys, a drug rehab center, a tuberculosis sanatorium, a Nike missile site and an insane asylum. Since 1869 it has also been where the city sends its unclaimed and unidentified bodies (and dismembered body parts). A large majority of those buried on Hart Island include stillborn infants and young children along with foreign tourists, the homeless and the loved ones of New Yorkers who simply can't afford a private burial. More than 1 million souls are buried anonymously on the island with about 1,500 bodies arriving annually.

Once used as a prison itself including a short Civil War-era stint as a POW camp, interments on Hart Island are performed by inmates from nearby Rikers Island, New York's notorious primary jail complex. Today, these prison laborers are paid 65 cents an hour to bury the dead.

Following decades of attempts at reform and *slightly* improved access, including a monthly ferry that shuttles family of the deceased from City Island to a small gazebo "set aside for reflection" at the Hart Island ferry dock (visits to the actual grave sites are still verboten), sweeping changes are afoot at this strange and sad spit of land.

Late last week, Bronx Community Board 10 gave its blessing to proposed legislation that would transfer control of the island — pop culture junkies may know it best from the 2001 Michael Douglas/Brittany Murphy thriller "Don't Say a Word" even though no filming took place there — from the Department of Correction to the Department of Parks and Recreation. If the bill, re-introduced by City Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley after a failed attempt in 2012, is approved and the transfer is carried out, at least a small chunk of Hart Island would be christened as one of New York City's newest public parks, joining illustrious green spaces like Washington Square Park, Bryant Park, Madison Square Park and several other potter's field-to-park conversions.

Although the transfer of Hart Island to the Parks Department is a small step closer, it's still unclear what exactly this dramatic switch-up will involve.



Hart Island is home to several abandoned buildings including a boys' reformatory and a TB sanatorium. (Photo: Don Emmert/AFP/Getty Images)

Will the island's wealth of decrepit historic buildings be razed to make way for a harder-to-get-to (and decidedly more macabre) version of Governors Island, the



Matt Hickman
Design devotee blogs about cities, innovation and architecture.

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similarly sized military base-turned-popular summertime weekend getaway just south of Manhattan in the Upper New York Bay?

Will the business of burying bodies continue on the south end of the island, where most of the mass graves are located, or will it halt altogether under the Park Department's jurisdiction?

Will a park that's home to more than a million human remains and a history of illness and imprisonment prove to be a tough sell for solace-seeking, outdoor recreation-hungry New Yorkers?

Has the entire island been stigmatized beyond repair?

And does the Parks Department even *want* jurisdiction of Hart Island considering that it has declined control of it in the past?

These questions remain mostly unanswered. However, if anything, removing control from the Department of Correction and lifting Hart Island's technical status as a prison will likely result in more frequent ferry service and ease the ironclad restrictions on gravesite visits. It would provide a sense of much-needed closure to hundreds upon hundreds of families with loved ones buried on the island.



Hart Island, circa 1890. (Wikimedia Commons)

"Every New Yorker should have the right to visit, without having to go through the (Department of Correction) process," Councilwoman Crowley explains. "My goal is to open up more of the island, and make it more visitor-friendly."

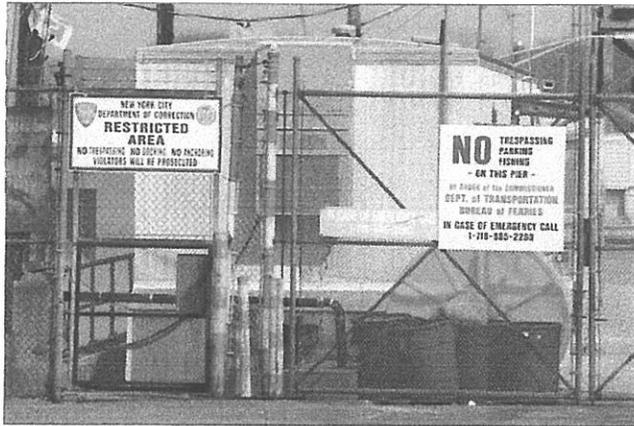
A separate class-action lawsuit filed by the New York City Civil Liberties Union is calling for the Department of Correction to allow access to Hart Island's burial sites.

On top of the lawsuits and proposed legislation, there's also been the recent launch of a haunting, gorgeously produced interactive website from artist and activist Melinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project, a grassroots advocacy group pushing for continued reform and visitors rights on the island. To even set foot on the island, relatives of the deceased currently must submit to a byzantine process via the Office of Constituent Services.

Unveiled last December, the Hart Island Project's new website not only tells the grim but fascinating history of the island, but allows users to locate the exact gravesite locations of the 62,200 individuals buried on the island since 1980 using global positioning data obtained through the Freedom of Information Law. Once friends and loved ones locate an individual's grave through the digital database, they can post photographs and written remembrances to the Hart Island Project's Traveling Cloud Museum — a virtual cemetery of sorts described as "an attempt to preserve the histories of who is buried for present and future generations."

"It's gorgeous in an otherworldly kind of way. What is really problematic is that it's

hidden, that it is controlled by the prison system and that we are ashamed of it," Hunt told Bloomberg. Although, for now, visitors are strictly forbidden from venturing beyond the aforementioned wooden gazebo, Hunt believes that the addition of the Traveling Cloud Museum, which adds an element of creative storytelling to the raw data, will enable friends and relatives to remember the deceased as more than just a name attached to a point on an online map.



Entrance to the once-a-month limited-access ferry to Hart Island. (Photo: Don Emmer/AFP/Getty Images)

Freshly minted parkland aside, Hunt believes that burials on Hart Island, a place she refers to as "New York City's family tomb" where "we don't always get along, but we do live and die and are buried close to one another," could continue under the auspices of the Parks Department but in a more respectful manner. She writes in a 2013 op-ed for the *New York Times*:

With recent technologies, and fewer burials, it should be possible for Hart Island to be cleaned up to become our newest park, restoring and reclaiming the landscape for public access and moving away from unseemly mass burials. GPS technology already invisibly marks grave sites; future burials could be scattered individually across the landscape and tracked similarly. Under Parks Department management, every unclaimed New Yorker could be given a green burial and a unique location, and every visitor would have a view of the Long Island Sound.

Spend some time at the Hart Island Project website to learn more about the island — and what's being done by folks like Hunt and Crowley to change it for the better. You can also peruse the names of those interred and learn more about their unique stories. Among them is the first child to die of AIDS in New York City, who, unlike other children buried on the island, was laid to rest in an individual grave instead of a massive communal plot. Kelsey Campbell-Dollaghan of Gizmodo has also written a wonderful firsthand account of an incredibly rare visit to Hart Island along with a small handful of other journalists, the first sanctioned press trip since the island was deemed as off-limits in the 1980s.

Do you think the proposed transfer could work? Have you had the chance to visit Hart Island in decades past?

Via *[NY Daily News]*

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Paying Our Respects: Deal Will Open City's Potters Field To Public

Posted on July 30, 2015 by tribune In Feature



Photo Courtesy David Travin/Flickr

By Lynn Edmonds, Staff Writer

New Yorkers are now able to visit the graves of loved ones on Hart Island.

The New York City Department of Correction, which manages operations on the island, settled a lawsuit with the American Civil Liberties Union on July 8 that aims to make it easier for families to pay their respects to loved ones interred there.

Since 1869, more than 750,000 dead may have been buried on Hart Island, which serves as New York City's "Potter's Field." It's the only cemetery the DOC has jurisdiction over, and nearby prisoners from Riker's Island continue to dig the graves and maintain the island.

The 101-acre island is about five miles northeast of Fort Totten Park.

DENIED ACCESS

Fresh Meadows resident Elaine Joseph's five-day-old daughter Tomika was buried on Hart Island in 1978, after she died in surgery during the winter storm that shut down New York City. Stranded in Brooklyn, Joseph could not get to Mount Sinai Hospital before they had taken her daughter's body to be buried. Officials claimed Joseph had signed papers authorizing this.



Top Photo: Hart Island is home to New York City's Potter's Field. Hart Island is located in the Long Island Sound about five miles northeast of Fort Totten.

Joseph filed a lawsuit, along with seven other women, to get access to her daughter's grave. She was the first of the plaintiffs to make the trip, doing so on March 2014. Capt. Martin Thompson, who managed operations on the island, left flowers on Tomika's grave - or the site an expert had deduced she would have been buried at, according to the year and her age.

But that was a one-time trip. "I want to go back when I want to go back," Joseph said.

Tellingly enough, Joseph was going to visit her parent's grave when she had answered the call for an interview with the Queens Tribune. She said she visited them frequently. "But the one I can't visit is my daughter," she said.

THE SETTLEMENT

Under the July 8 settlement between the ACLU and the DOC, Joseph, and other relatives and guests, should be able to visit the island on one pre-determined weekend day every month. Visitors will be escorted to the location of the burial by a DOC officer, and they will be allowed to leave mementos such as teddy bears, flowers and photos. The DOC will add burial plot numbers to their online database of those interred on the island, in order to help individuals determine the location of their loved one's remains. Additionally, the DOC will maintain an online and telephone system for scheduling visits. The first gravesite visits for family members took place on July 19. The weekday visits to the gazebo continue, and are open to the general public.

New York Civil Liberties Union Associate Legal Director Christopher Dunn said the settlement "should help bring closure to the parents, children, brothers, sister and other family members of the generations of people who suffered the indignity of mass burial and then suffered the added insult of being forsaken by a city policy that barred family and friends from visiting."

Public Advocate Letitia James also supported expanded visitation rights, writing a letter to the DOC in March and visiting the island in April. She released a statement the day after the settlement.

"No I didn't sign papers for the city to take care of it," I wasn't at the hospital," Joseph said in a phone interview. "That's what they called it, 'take care of it.'"

For decades, Joseph wasn't able to find out where her daughter was buried. Pre-Internet, she searched the yellow pages for "city cemetery." Finally, six or seven years ago, she saw a news segment about Hart Island, and she began concentrating her efforts there. Joseph learned that a New York City death certificate that has the place of burial left blank, like Tomika's was, mean that she was buried on Hart Island.

But realizing her daughter was buried on Hart Island did not immediately mean Joseph could visit her grave. Until July, mourners were restricted to visiting "the Gazebo," a spot on the island that did not have the graves in sight, one weekday per month.

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"The grieving public has been kept for far too long from getting the closure they need after a loved one is buried on Hart Island. I have pushed for expanded visitation to Hart Island because burial sites on public grounds should be open to all individuals who need to mourn. Anyone who has ever lost a loved one is aware of the undeniable importance of being able to visit their burial site," she said.

Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley (D-Middle Village) also adopted Hart Island as an issue in her position as chairwoman of the Fire and Criminal Justice Services Committee, and saw the settlement as a positive step.

"This change in policy will give visitors a level of comfort that they don't get by being restricted to the Gazebo area," she said.

DOC Commissioner Joe Ponte said he shared a common goal with the plaintiffs. "We want to enable access to the cemetery on Hart Island in a compassionate and safe manner," he said in a press release. "We look forward to implementing this historic settlement, and pledge to work closely with the NYCLU in order to make the compassionate access it envisions a reality."

A PARK?

Melinda Hunt, a visual artist and founder of the Hart Island Project, has been an advocate for increased access to Hart Island for years. She called the settlement "an important step forward."

"Using the prison system to lock away the dead removes the dead from the community," she said. "You are interrupting a normal commemorative process that is shared in all cultures."

Her non-profit organization aims to bring the dead interred there back from anonymity, by creating a virtual space to tell stories about them, advocating for family members who want to access graves, and pushing for the island to be opened up to the public.

She has a larger vision for Hart Island, which she describes as a beautiful landscape, devoid of human markers.

She would like the New York City Parks Department to take over the management of the island from the DOC. That way, the island could be opened up to the general public, and the living and the dead would not be locked away from each other, she said.

Hunt said that currently, there are still many obstacles that bar the island from being safe and easily accessible. Mass graves three coffins high, two across, and 70 feet long, remain open for up to a year, she said. She described the graves as unsafe, destructive to the ecology, and offensive to people.

"It's a 19th century burial process, but we don't have as many epidemics, we don't need to bury people in huge groups like this," Hunt said.

She invited a landscaper from England, where many city cemeteries are also parks, to discuss potential plans for Hart Island with Bronx Parks Commissioner Iris Rodriguez on July 28.

She envisions Hart Island as a place where the living could play, as well as commemorate the dead.

"People have this idea that cemeteries need to be removed. They're in the city, but they have fences around them, you can't go there and play ball and ride your bike, and do things that you do in a park," Hunt said.

She also advocated for the cemetery to become the first "natural burial" site in the United States, meaning the dead, buried in biodegradable pine boxes, would provide nutrients for the soil. The dead on Hart Island are already buried in pine boxes, so it wouldn't require much of a change, she says.

"All they have to do is reorganize how they bury people," she said. "DOC could still dig holes, and plant trees. It's just a different way of doing it that's more environmentally friendly and community oriented."

LEGISLATION

Crowley is working on legislation to transfer control of the city cemetery. She is lead sponsor of bill Int. 134 to transfer jurisdiction of Hart Island to the Parks Department, and bill Int. 133 to require the Department of Transportation to start a ferry service to the island. Crowley aims to schedule hearings in the fall.

"Parks has the ability to make Hart Island a sacred space for the public to both remember their loved ones buried there and also enjoy the green space away from the bustle of our city," Crowley said.

CONCERNS

Greater access might be a benefit to many New Yorkers, but the issue is most pressing for those who long to visit their loved ones.

Joseph was concerned about whether she would be able to visit under the settlement, because the volume containing Tomika's burial records was lost in a fire, and she's not in the doc's database.

After contacting the DOC multiple times, Joseph got her answer. She could go.

Joseph is scheduled to visit her daughter's grave in August.

Reach Lynn Edmonds at (718) 357-7400 x127, ledmonds@queenstribune.com or @Ellinoamerikana.

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July 17, 2015 Updated 07/17/2015

A sea change looms for once-sleepy City Island

Big moves afoot for the enclave—but on residents' terms.

By Kerry Murtha



Photo: Erik Ipsen

City Island dock for ferry to Potter's Field.

Change usually comes only two ways on City Island: gradually and grudgingly. Residents, known as clamdiggers (as opposed to land-lubbers), take pride in the place's isolation and in their own way of doing things. That's what makes this current moment in the history of the mile-and-a-half-long speck of land just off Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx so extraordinary.

On the horizon looms the largest raft of changes since the last of the island's renowned builders of yachts—including many America's Cup winners—sailed off into history in the 1960s. In the next two years, residents will not just bid farewell to the century-old bridge that links them to the mainland, they will also see the opening of the first new large-scale residential development in decades.

What's more, they'll witness a jump in the number of visitors streaming through en route to the city's Potter's Field just offshore—the final resting place of more than 1 million indigent New Yorkers.

"Like every community, City Island needs to change, if even a little bit," said John Doyle, a member of the City Island Civic Association.

But he and his fellow clamdiggers are determined it should come on their own terms. Take, for instance, the badly corroded 17-foot-high steel span that links them to the mainland. Yes, it has to go, but when city officials proudly unveiled plans to replace it with a roadbed suspended on cables from a soaring 160-foot-tall tower, residents filed suit to block it. They railed that it didn't mesh in their hamlet of modest two- and three-story houses, bait shops and seafood restaurants.

"We can't build houses higher than 35 feet," said Barbara Dolensek, vice president of the City Island Nautical Museum, which is housed in a white clapboard former school that dates to the late 1800s. "Having such a massive structure at the entrance of the island would have been inappropriate."

In the end, the city radically scaled back its ambitions, substituting a low-rise causeway-style structure. "It's a simple design that reflects the context of the community it connects," said Polly Trottenberg, commissioner of the city's Department of Transportation, which has slated a 2017 opening for the \$105 million link.

Blending in

Meanwhile, 43 new condominiums will rise on a five-acre waterfront site overlooking Long Island Sound in the next two years. Jeff Simpson, chief executive of the project's builder, Greystone Property Development, stressed that it was designed to fit in seamlessly with its surroundings, including the island's 1,500 single-family, mostly clapboard homes. He noted that there will be 22 freestanding townhouses, each with two stacked units, giving the appearance of one-family homes.

"We were worried at first that the complex would be tacky, but it blends in with the community," said Ms. Dolensek.

Simply dubbed On the Sound, the development will offer a mix of two-, three- and four-bedroom units complete with private driveways, gardens and elevated terraces. A community esplanade and gazebo are also being built. Prices start between \$450,000 and \$500,000 for a two-bedroom and run close to \$600,000 for a four-bedroom. More than a third of them have sold already, according to Mr. Simpson.

"We were planning to stagger construction, but given the demand, we're forging ahead," he said.

On the Sound is one of the biggest condo complexes on City Island to go up since the opening of the Boatyard, a 70-unit development erected in the 1980s on the former site of a shipwright's shop that, like many others, fell victim to the public's growing preference for fiberglass hulls. The boat makers are long gone, too. The island is now best known for its summer traffic jams and day-trippers who flood in to enjoy a respite from harried city life.

Many of those tourists remain blissfully unaware that neighboring Hart Island lies just several hundred yards away offshore. This summer, residents will help launch a campaign to make it a national monument. The effort includes plans to create more accessible parkland by transferring Hart Island from the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department. City Council hearings on the transfer are scheduled for this fall.

Added ferry service

Residents and elected officials hope the transfer will provide better upkeep of the island and protect it from any future development. A ferry now makes a monthly weekday run from the foot of Fordham Street on City Island to Hart Island, but a recent lawsuit settled by the city will now allow family members of those buried there an additional monthly weekend visit as well.

"Making Hart Island a national monument will draw the attention of the National Park Service," said Melinda Hunt, founder of the Hart Island Project, which has helped recover thousands of burial records. Ms. Hunt said country singer Emmylou Harris has agreed to perform at an Aug. 29 rallying event at the ferry-dock entrance on City Island's Fordham Street.

A version of this article appears in the July 13, 2015, print issue of Crain's New York Business as "A sea change for City Island."

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By Erin Clarke
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In one victory in a battle for public access to the city's potter's field. Beginning Sunday, relatives of people buried in the municipal cemetery on Hart Island will have easier access to the graves of loved ones. NY1's Erin Clarke filed this report.

The ferry to Hart Island will soon be open to the public more often, and people from near and far who have relatives buried in the city's potter's field will be able to visit those graves much more easily.

"For the very first time families will be able to visit the gravesites. They'll be able to leave mementos, perform religious ceremonies there if they want to," says NYCLU Associate Legal Director Christopher Dunn.

The change is the result of a settlement between the city and the New York Civil Liberties Union. Until now, visitors could only go alone to Hart Island—and only to a gazebo nowhere close to the graves.

Under the new policy, one day a month—a Saturday or Sunday—25 people will be permitted to visit Hart Island for two hours.

For the first time, visitors will also be allowed to bring as many as four other people with them.

"They can walk to a gravesite so that you know that that person has been interred," says Elaine Joseph.

Joseph was one of seven women who did just this last spring with the help of the Hart Island Project. Her infant was buried on Hart Island in 1978 because of a mistake by a hospital. The trip gave her closure that she says millions of others deserve.

With this victory, advocates and family members believe they're one step closer to achieving another goal: turning Hart Island into a park.

"It is a physically beautiful island. It just needs some work on the infrastructure," Joseph says.

"It would become a woodland again and a much nicer place for families to visit," says Hart Island Project Director Melinda Hunt.

The Parks Department manages former burial sites at Washington Square and Madison Square parks, but it would have to figure out how to operate a park alongside an active cemetery.

Legislation to transfer jurisdiction of Hart Island to the Parks Department from the Correction Department is awaiting a City Council hearing.

"We expect over the next year or two Hart Island will be more and more open and within a couple of years anyone can visit," Dunn says.

Now, it is truly a sanctuary for those who are buried here, and their loved ones.

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Families win access to Hart Island, NYC's potter's field

 Peter D. Kramer pkramer@lohud.com 4:18 p.m. EDT July 10, 2015

Peekskill artist Melinda Hunt has chronicled NYC's potter's field cemetery, Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound near City Island. (Video by Peter Carr/The Journal News)



(Photo: Melinda Hunt & Joel Sternfeld)

For 24 years, Peekskill artist Melinda Hunt has spent her life documenting, charting and helping families gain access to Hart Island, where New York City has buried its anonymous and indigent dead since just after the Civil War.

The 101-acre island off City Island in Long Island Sound holds America's largest mass grave, where an estimated 1 million plain, pine boxes hold the city's poor and unknown.

Access to the potter's field hasn't been easy.

"Lawyers tell me it's harder to get onto Hart Island than a maximum-security prison," Hunt says in her bright upstairs office and studio on South Division Street.

On July 8, access got easier, when the New York Civil Liberties Union settled a lawsuit with the city, granting survivors visits once a month to the gravesites of their family members. Until now, access — through the Department of Corrections, which still oversees burials by Riker's Island work crews — has been to a gazebo on the island, far from the actual gravesites.

This settlement changes that, said Christopher Dunn, the NYCLU's lead counsel on the case.

"This settlement should help bring closure to the parents, children, brothers, sisters and other family members of the generations of people who suffered the indignity of mass burial and then suffered the added insult of being forsaken by a city policy that barred family and friends from visiting," he said.

Families like Dr. Laurie Grant, a Valhalla obstetrician and gynecologist whose daughter was stillborn 22 years ago this week, on July 13, 1993, at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan. The baby was buried on Hart Island without Grant's knowledge or permission while she recovered from the difficult delivery, she says.



Current designated burial sites at Hart Island. (Photo: Melinda Hunt/The Hart Island Project)

Grant has been trying for years to get onto Hart Island. Last March, she arranged a trip and showed up at the dock, only to have no one from the corrections department show up to take her over. She said she hopes to be among the first to visit Hart Island under the new settlement.

"This is a hard time of year for me" surrounding the anniversary, she said, but added: "It's your right to visit the cemetery."

The first visits will be July 19. While the details are still being worked out, Dunn predicted there would be two two-hour windows for up to 25 visitors each. (Family members wishing to schedule a visit can call the Department of Corrections at 718-546-0911.)



Artist Melinda Hunt at her Peekskill studio July 9, 2016. She has chronicled NYC's potter's field cemetery, Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound near City Island. A photograph behind her shows an open plot on the island. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

Hunt has been helping families navigate the bureaucracy for years, suing to gain access for mothers to visit their babies' graves. She turned thousands of pages of city records into the award-winning Hart Island Project website (www.hartisland.net (<http://www.hartisland.net/>)), where she charts burials since 1980 and helps family members document the lives that led to Hart Island.

"It's like Facebook for the dead," she said. "We give people a blank slate to remember their family member, to tell their story. There's a reverence to what they write when they gather their thoughts. Unlike Facebook, we don't have nasty people show up."

Hunt also wrote the book on Hart Island, a 1998 collaboration with photographer Joel Sternfeld ("Hart Island," Scala). In it, she asked prisoners to reflect on the work detail that has them filling the vast plots that measure 20 feet by 70 feet by 6 feet. Those plots hold 165 adult coffins. Or 1,000 plain pine boxes holding the remains of babies.

Map: https://a.tiles.mapbox.com/v4/lohud:mm767c7f/pape.html?access_token=pk.eyJ1IjoibG9odWQilCjhljoiNFV1V2RlOCJ9.eAM4e2I3IsPc9bvAxOxOVQ#12/40.87541-73.7771



Inmate Eddie Melendez wrote: "When I first came to Hart Island, it was just a job to me. But when I found out that my baby sister was buried here it hurt me. Because she didn't get a proper beirial. For I can pay my respects and now when I beiry a baby I think of my sister."

Hunt also made a 2006 documentary film ("Hart Island: An American Cemetery" (http://www.newfilmakersonline.com/movie-download/8514_2542/Melinda-Hunt-Hart-Island-An-American-Cemetery/)) and created a gallery work on the topic Westchester Community College in 2012.

Hunt sees last week's settlement as a milestone in her effort to help families, but just a step on her goal to have the city parks department take over Hart Island and turn it into a city park. There is a bill before the City Council to transfer the island from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department, and Hunt is hoping it will get a hearing in September.

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Artist Melinda Hunt at her Peekskill studio July 9, 2016. She has chronicled NYC's potter's field cemetery, Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound near City Island. This panel includes a photograph from the island and letters written by Riker's Island inmates tasked with burying New York's anonymous or indigent dead. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

The 101-acre island could serve the same dual purpose as other city parks — Madison Park and Washington Square Park, among them — that were once cemeteries. Hart Island could become the nation's largest "green cemetery," where bodies are not embalmed and are buried in plain pine boxes, as they have been at Hart Island from the start, permitted to degrade and feed the soil. That effort would require an organized landscaping plan, something better suited to the Parks Department than the Corrections Department, Hunt said.

"I'd like to make it like Governors Island, where kids go on field trips," Hunt said.

For now, those trips are limited to family members, once a month, on a Department of Corrections ferry.

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Powerball jackpot climbs to \$900M hours before drawing
00:50

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GROUPS WANT CITY'S POTTER'S FIELD OUT OF THE JURISDICTION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

Community Board 10 discusses legislation on Hart Island transfer to Parks Department

By Patrick Rocchio

Bronx Times

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Community Board 10 chairman Martin Prince (c) listens to Melinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project during a parks and recreation committee meeting on Monday, January 12. The future of Hart Island was on the agenda.

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The ferry dock to Hart Island at the eastern end of Fordham Street on City Island.

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It appears that Community Board 10 will debate the merits of two new City Council bills about jurisdiction of the city's Potter's Field on Hart Island.

The CB 10 Parks and Recreation Committee meeting hearing on Monday, January 12 included a lively discussion about two bills currently before the City Council's Fire and Criminal Justice Committee that seek to transfer the primary jurisdiction of Hart Island from the Department of Correction to the Parks Department.



The matter has been referred to a full-board by the Parks and Recreation Committee in a unanimous vote on January 12. A committee vote was not taken because a quorum was not present.

A group of local activists from City Island Civic Association want to see the island transferred to Parks because they believe it would prevent Hart Island, off the coast of the shoreline community, from being used as a full-time prison, said CB 10 district manager Kenneth Kearns.

Currently, inmate labor buries bodies at the city's Potter's Field on the island, the location of approximately one million graves, for only 16 hours a week.

This City Island activists' concerns are complemented by those of the advocacy group Hart Island Project, whose leaders believe that having the island made a park would make it easier for people to visit relatives and friends buried there.

At the meeting, CB 10 chairman Martin Prince expressed his reservations about transferring jurisdiction, in effect saying he would prefer to work with the existing framework to make the situation more workable for people who want to visit the island.

"My belief as chairman is that we work within city agencies, we try to get productivity out of those agencies, and advocate for the people who live within the board," said Prince, adding that he believes this means advocating for the deceased on Hart Island.



"We know that in dealing with city agencies, in city transfers a lot can get way off track and the situation can become much worse," he added. "I don't believe that our dead deserve to be politicized, they need to be revered."

Prince said that it is easy to say transfer jurisdiction of Hart Island to the Parks Department, but asked what happens once it is under the department's purview.

One of the advocates for the transfer, CICA corresponding secretary John Doyle, said that all of the Bronx's City Council delegation supports the bills advocating the transfer. The primary sponsor of the bills is Queens Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley.

"We have done all of the leg work," he said. "We are just looking for an up or down vote on this."

Melinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project believes that a 100-acre park, as opposed to a facility run by the Department of Correction, would be more inviting and welcoming to grieving families who visit graves on the island.

She pointed out that many parks were once potter's fields, including Washington Square Park, Madison Square Park, Wards Island, and Randall's Island.

A visit to the Hart Island by a delegation from the City Council is being planned for Friday, January 16, said Hunt.

Reach Reporter Patrick Rocchio at (718) 260-4597. E-mail him at procchio@cuglocal.com. Follow him on Twitter @patrickfrocchio.

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HART ISLAND PROJECT CONTINUES TO ADVOCATE FOR TRANSFER OF HART ISLAND TO THE NYC PARKS DEPARTMENT FROM NYC DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

City Island Civic Association, Chamber visit Hart Island and take tour

By Patrick Rocchio

Bronx Times

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The ferry dock to Hart Island, at the eastern end of Fordham Street on City Island, is clearly marked as a restricted area by both the Department of Correction which runs the island, and the Department of Transportation which operates the ferry.

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City Island leaders toured Hart Island in a continuing effort to gain support for its transfer from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department.

Home to the city's Potter's Field, a delegation of 20 people, including key leaders in the City Island Civic Association, City Island Chamber of Commerce, representatives from Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.'s and Councilman James Vacca's offices, toured the 100-acre island with the DOC on Wednesday, November 5.

Advocates of the public getting easier access to the large mass graves on the island, located just off the coast of City Island and Orchard Beach in Long Island Sound, are hoping that the visit provided adequate reasons for the transfer of the island's jurisdiction to the Parks Department.



Among the transfer supporters was Melinda Hunt of the Hart Island Project.

She said that the City Islanders were supportive of a change, and believes that at least the northern side of Hart Island would be a perfect place for a park since it is not an active burial site and doesn't have a lot of grave markers. The markers it does have could be removed, as grave sites can be found using a Global Positioning System (GPS).

"They were very supportive in terms of transferring jurisdiction in some way," said Hunt of the City Islanders who were on the rare visit.

Pual Klein, vice-president of the City Island Chamber of Commerce, said the group visited areas accessible by roads, describing the trip as an "overview of the space."

"It terms of space, there are beautiful views," said Klein. "I think it would be a great addition to the Parks Department."

Klein said he thinks that there should be a ferry to Hart Island from Orchard Beach, with a possible stop on City Island.



"I think it should be open to the public," he said, adding "I think it would be a great thing."

Most of the abandoned buildings on the south side of the island have been left to nature, said CICA corresponding secretary John Doyle, who was on the trip. He said the tour took about two hours. Mobile phones were taken from the attendees before they were put on the ferry and shuttled across part of the sound, he said.

"It would be nice to open it up a little bit to the public, and I didn't see anything there that changed my mind about doing that," he said. "I think it was helpful for our associations, the civic and the chamber, to get the same tour and the same briefing so we are basically on the same page."

Citing a history that includes the final resting places of generations of New Yorkers, and a Civil War Memorial, Doyle called it a "unique piece of history," and said that the group was given a longer and more extensive tour than most visitors receive when visiting the graves of their loved ones.

There is currently legislation before the Fire and Criminal Justice committee of the City Council calling for a change in jurisdiction, said Hunt. Yet, ironically, there was no representative from the Parks Department on the site visit, she added.

Vacca's chief-of-staff, Michael Rivadeneira, was on the trip representing the councilman. After the tour, he said issues like the examination of the capacity of the Parks Department's budget to determine if the cost of a new park can be absorbed, and if they can turn the island into a place where people can come to pay their respects, should be explored.

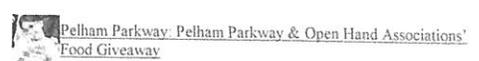
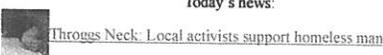
He said that currently, all but three members of the Bronx's City Council delegation have expressed at least some support for the bill.

The position of the Hart Island Project has been that Parks would be a more appropriate agency to manage the island to more easily facilitate visits by grieving people who have loved ones buried there.

Reach Reporter Patrick Rocchio at (718) 260-4597. E-mail him at procchio@cuglocal.com. Follow him on Twitter @patrickrocchio.

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LEGISLATION TO TRANSFER JURISDICTION OF THE NEW YORK CITY'S POTTER'S FIELD FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS TO THE PARKS DEPARTMENT IS NOW BEFORE A CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE

Hart Island lawsuit calls for more public access as advocacy continues on multiple fronts

By Patrick Rocchio
 Bronx Times
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The ferry dock to Hart Island, at the eastern end of Fordham Street on City Island, is marked as a restricted area by the Department of Correction and the city Department of Transportation.

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Hart Island, home to the city's Potter's Field burial sites that's now off limits except for relatively infrequent visiting days, could soon be abuzz with visitors. Two recent developments seem to signal that momentum is there to open the island to visitors, either through a City Council action transferring its jurisdiction from the Department of Corrections to the Parks Department, or through the courts, sources said.

These developments include the unveiling of a new Global Positioning System by the advocacy group Hart Island Project that can help visitors locate over 62,200 grave locations on their smartphones, and a federal lawsuit by the New York Civil Liberties Union seeking more public access to the burial grounds based on the belief that the city's policy limiting visitors violates constitutional rights of due process and religious exercise.



Melinda Hunt, of the Hart Island Project advocacy group working on behalf of the public to gain more access to the nearly 1 million gravesites on the island, said that a legislative remedy by the City Council or actions by the courts would have the desired effect.

"I'd rather the City Council update the Administrative Code and assign an appropriate city agency," said Hunt, who said she was also open to legal remedies.

"I would like (the city) to review the whole burial process, because it would be much better to build structured vaults and have the Department of Health and the medical examiner deposit bodies without using inmate labor," she added.

Currently, DOC inmates bury bodies on the island in mass graves. The transfer of jurisdiction legislation, so far, is still sitting in the council's Fire and Criminal Justice committee.

The City Island Civic Association supports that legislation and all but one of the members of Bronx's City Council delegation have agreed to support the transfer of Hart Island's primary jurisdiction to Parks, said CICA corresponding secretary John Doyle. He has been lobbying for the borough's council delegation to support a change in jurisdiction.

Making Hart Island a park could be a boon to City Island, since it is the closest residential community to the island, as has been previously reported in the Bronx Times.

The CICA supports the goals of gaining more access to the island for families of people who are buried there, said Doyle when asked about the NYCLU suit.

"We have been sympathetic to the humanitarian arguments allowing fundamental fairness in having people visiting their dead loved ones," said Doyle, who added "opening Hart Island hurts no one, and provides a level of comfort and closure to a large group of people."

Doyle said that he hopes the legislation transferring jurisdiction will be taken up by the council in the next year.

"From a community standpoint, making Hart Island parkland protects the community from the next bad idea that city bureaucrats come up with," he said.

Members of the CICA board and the City Island Chamber of Commerce, as well as representatives from elected officials, toured the island in November. CICA second vice president Barbara Dolensek said Hart Island is in poor overall condition, and that she believes DOC should just be there to bury bodies.

The lead counsel on the NYCLU case, Christopher Dunn, stated that there was no reason for people to suffer in order to visit a cemetery.

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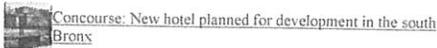
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"By preventing people from visiting the graves of their loved ones, the Department of Corrections is robbing people of the basic right to mourn and express their grief in the way they want," said Dunn.

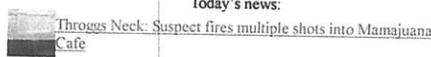
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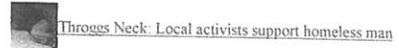
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Address: 125 Maiden Lane

I represent: Hebrew Free Burial Association

Address: 125 Maiden Lane

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1580 Res. No. 1559

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Name: CATHI SWETT

Address: PO BOX TWO BRONX 10464

I represent: Pelham Cemetary Assoc.

Address: King Ave Bronx 10464

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Address: _____

I represent: WATERFRONT ALLIANCE

Address: 217 WATER ST

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Name: Greg W. Hamant (PLEASE PRINT)

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I represent: G-One-Quantum

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Name: Toni Martino (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Joseph Martino / buried at Hart Island

Address: _____

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Name: Randolph Waterman (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Dorie Miller Post 213 BKlyn

Address: 1402 8th Ave. BKlyn, NY

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Name: Ben Smith

Address: Pir. City leg Aff.

I represent: NYC DOT

Address: _____

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Name: Cathi Swett

Address: PO Box Two Bronx NY 10464

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Name: Brenda Prohaska

Address: 55 Centre Street

I represent: City Island Community Center

Address: 190 Fordham St

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Name: First Deputy Commissioner Angel Villalona

Address: _____

I represent: D.O.C.

Address: _____

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Name: Acting Deputy Commissioner Patricia Lyons

Address: 336 E. W. 113R AVE.

I represent: CHADRON D.C.N.Y. 11530 VETERANS

Address: ORGANIZATION OF FRIENDS

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Name: Captain Thompson

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I represent: D.O.C.

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Name: Ms. Nicole Doniger Strom

Address: _____

I represent: HRA

Address: _____

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Name: Matt Drury - Director - Govt Relations

Address: The Arsenal

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

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Date: MAY 30, 2019

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dina Maniotis

Address: 421 East 26th St.

I represent: OCME

Address: 421 East 26th St

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1559, 1580 Res. No. _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Edw. re Francos Martley Public Adminstr

Address: 130 Stuyvesant St, Ste. 402, ST 10301 ^{Richmond Co.}

I represent: Office of the Richmond County PA

Address: same as above

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ELAINE JOSEPH

Address: 75-47 184th ST; Fresh Meadows NY

I represent: Hart Island Project / Family ¹¹³⁶⁶

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Barbara Dolensek

Address: 21 Tier St. City Island Bronx

I represent: City Island Historical Society ^{NY 10464}

Address: 190 Fordham St Bronx NY 10464

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Melinda Hunt

Address: P.O. Box 4327 NY NY 10163

I represent: The Hart Island Project

Address: same

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 906/9084 Res. No. 90

in favor in opposition

Date: 5/30/18

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Name: CHRIS DUNN - NYCLU

Address: 125 Broad Street, 19th Flr/NY, NY 10004

I represent: New York Civil Liberties Union

Address: same as above

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Name: JUDITH BERDY

Address: 531 Main St NY

I represent: Roosevelt Island Historical Soc.

Address: same

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 906 Res. No. 909

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Date: _____

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Name: Cathy Cepek

Address: _____

I represent: Resident of City Island

Address: _____

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Name: L. David Webb

Address: 427 Macoll St Rego, NY 1123

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Name: Rabbi Regina Sandler-Phillips

Address: PO Box 4882, Brooklyn, NY 11202

I represent: WAYS OF PEACE Community Resources

Address: Same As Above

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: HERBERT SWEET

Address: 236 E. M. HER AVE

I represent: GARDEN CITY, N. Y. 11530 VETERANS +

Address: ORGANIZATION of FRIENDS

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Name: TOM WAGNER

Address: 27-40 HOYT AVE S

I represent: SELF

Address: _____

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Name: Elsie Soto

Address: 116 W 197th st Bronx N.Y. 10468

I represent: Hart Island Project

Address: Hart Island N.Y.

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Name: Harriet Cohan

Address: 387 Grand St NY NY 10002

I represent: myself / the

Address: same

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