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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer on Central Harlem West 130-132nd Street Historic District August 14, 2018

Good afternoon Chair Adams and members of the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses. I am here on behalf of the Manhattan Borough President, to express support for the designation of the Central Harlem West 130-132nd Street Historic District.

The Borough President wholeheartedly supports the designation of this proposed district, which has exceptional social, cultural, and political significance in the history of our City and our nation. The approximately 164 buildings in the proposed district are a living testament to the central role of Harlem's African-American community in effecting social and political change in the 20th Century. Indeed, among the beautiful row houses in the proposed district are several important institutional buildings, including the headquarters for the New Amsterdam Musical Association (the oldest African-American musical association) and the Alpha Physical Culture Club (the first all-black athletic club in the United States). The former Utopian Neighborhood Club House, designed by African-American architect Verner Woodson Tandy, served as the planning headquarters for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963.

The proposed district also exhibits high architectural merit. The proposed district's largely-intact group of late 19th century buildings tells the story of Harlem's speculative building boom, with row houses built primarily in the Neo-Grec style and including work from architects such as Cleverdon & Putzel, Charles Baxter, and William J. Merritt.

During the hearing held before the LPC on April 17, 2018 the owner of 161-165 West 132nd Street testified and expressed opposition to his property's inclusion in the historic district. [A petition advocating for its inclusion was submitted and LPC included the site within the historic district boundaries. LPC's decision to include the site was the right one]. The garage site at 161 W. 132nd street completes the cultural and architectural narrative of the district. And removing it from the boundaries LPC set forth would have harmed the integrity of.

Our historic districts are a bulwark whose effect extends beyond its boundaries to enhance surrounding blocks and encourage in our historic housing stock. Excluding this site from the historic district would endanger the integrity of the midblock on which it sits. All historic districts have boundaries, and the fact that this building is historically intact makes it well suited to remain in the district.

Underrepresented communities have long had to fight for landmark status, and now is not the time to whittle away at the edges of this important achievement. The Central Harlem West 130-132nd Street Historic District would do much to memorialize and protect the multifaceted legacy of Harlem and its effect on the history of New York City and the United States. The Borough President thanks the work of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and the tireless efforts of Community Board 10 and local advocacy groups like Save Harlem Now! in moving this forward, and she urges that the members of the Council Subcommittee vote to designate this worthy Historic District with the boundaries the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated in their final decision.