



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

BOROUGH PRESIDENT GALE A. BREWER
TESTIMONY TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL'S
COMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS
MARCH 17, 2014

Good morning, and thank you, Chair Mealy, for the opportunity to testify today in support of Intro 173 of 2014, a bill I introduced with Council Member Jimmy Vacca of the Bronx.

In my more than thirty years of public service, I've had over 1000 interns – fondly referred to as the “Brew Crew”. With their participation we've saved lives, kept tenants in their homes, obtained ‘one shot deals’, created an “age-friendly” neighborhood, organized tenant associations in NYCHA developments, provided seniors farm-fresh affordable produce, mapped the condition of street trees and pot holes, helped seniors get assistance in preparing their homes for bed bug extermination, investigated the taxi ‘lost and found’ claim system, drafted proposals on Bus Rapid Transit, and made streets safer and greener. The opportunity to mentor these interns, see them flourish, and watch them go on to careers in public policy, activism, or private sector jobs has been one of the greatest rewards of my career.



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And yet we have learned that not every intern works in a supportive environment, and therefore I encourage the Council to pass Intro 173.

This bill would explicitly protect interns, paid and unpaid, from discrimination or harassment in the workplace. Currently, the federal judge's interpretation of the city's human rights law leaves unpaid interns unprotected because they are not legally defined as employees. When an unpaid intern in a New York City media office was sexually harassed by her boss starting in 2010, she filed suit; the Federal Court ruled though that she had no legal claim due to her unpaid status.

This exception in the New York City Human Rights Law violates the spirit of the law protecting employees from discrimination and harassment on the basis of factors including gender, race, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, and military status. It fails to protect those – often students working at a business or agency in furtherance of their education – from discrimination or harassment. And interpreting the law to allow discrimination or harassment of interns could lead to a less supportive and fair working environment for all employees. We must ensure that unpaid interns have the same full protection of the New York City Human Rights Law as all other workers.