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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**Testimony of Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
New York City Council Committee on Public Safety and Committee on
Courts and Legal Services
Oversight: Examining How the City Evaluates the Effectiveness of the
Provision of Legal Services
January 26, 2015**

Good morning. My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you to Chair Gibson, Chair Lancman and to the members of both Committees for the opportunity to testify.

The issues of the quality and costs of our provision of legal representation to indigent defendants are of tremendous importance to our City. The strength and integrity of the administration of justice both reflects and impacts the strength and integrity of the City itself.

Our system of criminal indigent defense has undergone a number of significant changes in recent times. These changes were needed, and I trust, will result in real improvements in the delivery of legal representation to indigent criminal defendants. We all want to be sure that we are providing the highest quality of representation, through the most efficient programs.

In order to determine the effectiveness of these changes, for example, the new per attorney caseload limits that became effective in April of this past year, we need to monitor and assess outcomes and costs. This would, in my opinion, best be accomplished through a requirement that an in-depth report be prepared and presented to the Council annually. Councilmember Rosie Mendez and I have introduced a bill, 223 of 2014, which would address this issue, and provide for such an annual report.

We also know that a number of the institutional providers are implementing new services, and new models of service delivery. The City needs to be able to assess the effectiveness of the newer programs in order to determine whether they should be funded at a greater rate, adjusted, or discouraged. These evaluations should be part of the annual report to the Council.

There is in the City, in the legal community, and most importantly, in this body, a growing understanding that many of those New Yorkers most in need of legal representation -- those with the most at stake -- should not be left to fend for themselves. Reflecting this awareness, there are four separate bills that would provide legal representation for groups of indigent tenants threatened with eviction. I am very supportive of these bills, including the most inclusive, Intro 214 of 2014, which would provide representation to all tenants living below 125% of the Federal poverty limit with representation to avoid the loss of their home.

In light of the growing movement for the substantial increase in the City's funding of civil legal services, I urge the consideration of establishing a similar requirement for annual reporting of the effectiveness of these programs as well as our criminal defense systems.

Thank you.