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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**Testimony of Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Oversight - Construction Safety
May 11, 2015**

Good morning. I am Gale A Brewer, Manhattan Borough President, and I thank Councilmember Jumaane Williams for scheduling this oversight hearing on construction accidents in our city. Unfortunately, many of the accidents have taken place in Manhattan. We are here with a grim responsibility – to demand safety in and around New York’s construction sites. I hope that this hearing gives insight into why these accidents – some fatal – are taking place, and what we should be doing to stop them.

The latest tragedy was the recent death of Christian Ginesi who fell 24 stories in an elevator shaft at a construction site at 301 W. 46th Street, outside the Riu Plaza Times Square Hotel.

As horrifying and unacceptable as this was, this was not the first time a worker had fallen on this site: in June 2013, work was halted here after a report of a worker suffering a three-story fall. And in May and September of 2014, inspectors found more unsafe conditions at this site: improperly supported scaffolding, and a missing safety training certification.

But it’s not just here at this site. Across Manhattan in recent months we’ve experienced what feels like an uptick in safety incidents. In early April, a piece of plexiglass fell from a construction site on East 34th Street, seriously injuring a pet dog but luckily not killing anyone. Less than three weeks later, a truck collapsed and killed the construction safety manager at a site on East 44th Street. According to Crain’s New York Business, the 44th Street incident was the eighth construction related death of 2015. That was only four months into the new year – and for comparison, there were only eight such deaths in all of 2014. So here we are on just May 11, 2015, and we have already passed 2014’s year-long total for construction-related deaths.

After a resident was killed at the former St. Vincent’s hospital site when plywood flew off temporary fencing in a burst of wind, and hit the woman walking on the street, the developer and contractor met with elected officials and the Chair of the community board. It was not a predictable accident, but it was a horrific outcome. That developer now has a wind calculator on site – most developers rely on the media’s meteorologist and the Central Park weather station - and has bolted down the fence, but with such tall buildings going up, and so much construction, we need to think differently about safety.

Reframing our approach could include improvements to onsite and offsite training for construction workers, more frequent inspections of construction sites that have prior complaints and/or are engaged in the advanced phase of their high-rise construction and working with

industry partners, labor, DOB and OSHA to see if more effective safety gear exists and should be required.

I will continue to do whatever I can to encourage more and better enforcement from the Department of Buildings, but we must look into the wider problem. I am deeply concerned that builders, developers and contractors are perpetuating a culture of disregard toward basic public safety – and workers and residents will pay the price.

One construction site death is one too many – we must reverse this disturbing trend and protect both the workers and the residents in and around construction sites.

Thank you.