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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration

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My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you to Chair Menchaca, Councilwoman Mendez and the Committee on Immigration for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to speak about how we can work with ethnic media sources to ensure a solid line of communication regarding local issues between city government and immigrant communities. As Manhattan Borough President, each month I convene the African Immigrant Task Force, and our ethnic media members, such as Dr. Onyeani of the African Sun Times, play an integral role in ensuring that the Task Force and my office are addressing issues of concern to the African community.

In 2014 *New York Magazine* reported that New York City's ethnic newspapers have a combined circulation of 2.9 million, across 95 ethnic newspapers. In a city where half of our families speak a language other than English, ethnic media play a vital role in how they stay informed. The City must do a better job of supporting these media outlets and their communities in two ways. First, by purchasing space for announcements of public information, such as auctions of city property; second, by informing them of important public policy initiatives or issues that are relevant to immigrant communities.

In two recent examples, city government has not adequately utilized ethnic media to publicize key facts in a timely way about either the recent spate of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids on undocumented refugees or the public health implications of the Zika virus outbreak.

With regard to the immigration raids, it has been widely reported in the mainstream media that since October 2013 an estimated 100,000 adults and children have fled from Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and other areas of Central America to the United States to escape systemic violence. In response, starting on January 2, 2016, the Department of Homeland Security undertook a series of raids across the country targeting these undocumented Central American refugees and detaining 121 for immediate deportation.

News of these raids caused alarm in New York City neighborhoods as immigrant communities across the country reported ICE raids on homes, businesses, and schools. In order to protect

themselves, city parents began keeping their children home from school and avoiding their jobs. Within a few days it became apparent to immigrant advocacy groups that New York State was not targeted by these raids, and to get correct information out advocacy groups organized emergency conference calls, led “Know Your Rights” workshops, and helped answer questions and calm people’s fears.

Yet it was not until January 6th, 2016 that the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs released an official statement that New York City was not a target of these raids, failing to partner with local ethnic media in an adequate or timely way, and thereby allowing fear and unfounded rumors to spread. In recent years city government has taken many measures to make New York safe and welcoming for immigrants. It has limited its cooperation with ICE, and launched the groundbreaking municipal ID program that enables all city residents to acquire an official form of identification and ease their access to financial and other services.

Similarly, though the Zika virus outbreak has been an issue of concern for African and Central and South American constituents for months, with Columbia, Ecuador, El Salvador and Jamaica all recommending that women who have traveled to these countries delay pregnancy, mainstream outlets and city agencies have just begun to share information about the virus. This was another opportunity where city offices and agencies could have utilized and invested in ethnic outlets to address a serious cause for concern for large segments of our population

We are missing a key piece of outreach to immigrant communities when we fail to utilize local ethnic media to publicize critical information, support local newspapers, take the pulse of these communities, and address issues of immediate and particular concern to them.

We must and can do better. I call on the administration to increase its outreach and liaison on these issues, but particularly with the media that serve communities of immigrants whose members rely on their native language and news services to stay informed.

I look forward to working with the administration, the Council, and our community boards to address these concerns and help create a more well-formed and inclusive city.