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**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

**March 13, 2017**

**Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Testimony before New York City Council  
Committee on Governmental Operations**

**FY18 Preliminary Budget: Community Board Budget Increase Request**

My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you to Chair Kallos for the opportunity to testify before you about the Preliminary Budget proposed by Mayor de Blasio for Fiscal Year 2018.

Every budgetary investment in education, health, public safety, infrastructure, and more defines the narrative of our goals and priorities for the future of our City. Whereas I could speak at length on a wide range of policy challenges and solutions, I will focus my comments today on one specific area where this budget can be improved, and to that end, strengthen our neighborhoods and families.

While I am sure that no one here needs a lesson on the importance of the Community Boards to our City's governing process, I want to note that Community Boards are not just a place where local residents file complaints about noise, street repaving, and sidewalk cafes; they serve as key partners in helping the City to better understand local agency needs, review applications for neighborhood development, and provide important information to their constituencies on behalf of elected officials, non-profits, and small businesses. Alongside a handful of professional staff members, Community Boards are run by dedicated volunteers who are invested in their neighborhoods and in our City. Our commitment must match theirs.

In the preliminary budget, Manhattan's 12 Community Boards have been allocated a total of around \$2.8 million to account for PS and OTPS costs (this does not include rent). That means that these crucial government offices have to operate on a budget of just \$233,911. This funding level does not represent the necessary commitment on behalf of the City to foster successful, engaged Community Boards. While some may be dismissive of the critical voice Community Boards have in the land use process, we know and understand the importance of their recommendations. The Community Boards are the first line of defense against poor land use planning and need to be better equipped to succeed.

The proposed funding is not sufficient to allow for the flexibility and bandwidth for coordinated outreach on significant land use proposals – whether it's advanced mailings, copies of the applications, larger hearing rooms, or translation services. The budget also does not reflect what

is needed for significant technology and software upgrades as well as continuing maintenance, such as the license fees for GIS. These fees allow the Community Boards to map and visualize critical concerns and to take advantage of the wealth of data available from the city agencies.

As we move in the direction of greater transparency of our local affairs through online content and added technology, we must ensure that the technical assistance and added staff capacity is available to every single Community Board as needed. As this body and other elected officials, like me have increased our expectations of Community Boards—including live streaming of open meetings through legislation that I sponsored, providing translation services, and addressing requests for ASL interpretation—we have not increased our financial commitments to keep up with the additional demand.

I directed my office to provide in-kind resources to community boards as well. Through our partnership with BetaNYC and the CUNY Service Corps, we are building digital tools for community board members and staff. Now in their third cohort our CUNY students are trained to be Civic Innovation fellows who specialize in making it easier for communities to work with all kinds of data. When complete, their tools will make website management, attendance tracking and 311 data analysis easier than ever before.

I am recommending that we increase the budgets of each of the 12 Manhattan Community Boards by \$100,000 to cover those costs (not including rent). This would equal a \$1.2 million increase collectively for Manhattan's Community Boards. While \$1.2 million may represent a drop in the bucket in a budget totaling over \$84 billion, it represents a transformative investment in our hyper-local operations.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify here this afternoon. My office will remain engaged as the budget process continues. I hope that this body and the administration will take seriously the suggestions I've offered today.