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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

Testimony of Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President Given to the New York City Council Committees on Transportation and Public Safety on Vision Zero Progress and Needs January 26, 2017

My name is Gale Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you to the Chairs of the Transportation Committee and Public Safety Committee for holding this hearing today on a collection of important bills related to the ongoing implementation of Vision Zero in our city.

In addition to debating the merits of the package of bills before the committees today, I also understand the purpose of this hearing is to report on both the progress and needs of the Vision Zero initiative overall. The successes, it seems to me, are clear; many traffic safety numbers have improved. In 2015, we recorded to lowest number of traffic deaths since 1910—more than one hundred years ago. Preliminary statistics show that number dropped even further in 2016. Our rate of traffic deaths is a quarter of the national rate. With Mayor de Blasio’s impressive show of support for Vision Zero this year—funding now totals \$1.6 billion through 2021—this is sure to be just the beginning of improvements in street safety.

However, there is plenty of room for improvement. The bills before the committees today, if passed, will help. Intros 542 and 671—sponsored by Chair Rodriguez and Councilmember Paul Vallone respectively—will do so by creating new traffic calming measures at intersections that badly need them, such as near senior centers, parks, and schools. Other measures, such as intro 1280 sponsored by Councilmember Deutsch, would call for more robust data collection with respect to motor vehicle injuries and fatalities helping ensure Vision Zero remains a data-driven initiative. These and similar commonsense measures will help continue to make the Vision Zero experiment a success.

Another area that needs additional focus is one Chair Rodriguez has helped highlight in recent weeks: hit-and-run collisions. We’ve all seen the news reports. 2017 has just begun, yet we have already witnessed multiple tragic hit-and-run crashes. This is not, unfortunately, a new phenomenon. While we have yet to see statistics reported for 2016—which in and of itself is a problem—the hit-and-run figure we have from 2015 is far from encouraging: apparently there were 38,000 hit-and-runs that year, just in New York City. Chair Rodriguez’s proposal to create a reward fund could help us live up to the mayor’s Vision Zero commitment to be proactive. Accompanying legislation requiring that hit-and-run crashes be reported regularly by NYPD would likewise keep such a program data-driven.

We must also work to increase the speed at which certain Vision Zero improvements are deployed around the city. Last year, for instance, the city committed to installing 10 miles of protected bike lanes per year, which seems insufficient in light of the \$1.6 billion Vision Zero investment. I'm greatly encouraged that the mayor has increased funding for bike lanes for the coming fiscal year from \$245,000 to \$690,000, and hope that the increase will result in protected bike lanes in areas of Manhattan that still sorely need them, such as along 5th and 7th Avenues and along 6th Avenue north of 33rd street.

Lastly, despite progress, Vision Zero is also lagging in accessibility upgrades for New Yorkers with disabilities. The city has been diligently installing curb cuts where they didn't exist before, thanks to a 2002 settlement that forced the Department of Transportation to bring the city's corners up to ADA standards. But still, 14 years later, we have yet to see 100% of the city's curb cuts fully installed—a canvass organized by my office several years ago located 142 missing curb cuts just along Broadway. ADA-compliant pedestrian ramps may not be as noticeable of an accomplishment to the average New Yorker as a sleek new separated bike path—but they are just as important for street safety, particularly for New Yorkers with disabilities.

Overall, we have much to be proud of; our streets are demonstrably safer thanks to Vision Zero initiatives. But we must continue proposing and implementing innovative ideas such as those being discussed today if we are to achieve a future with zero major traffic injuries or fatalities. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.