Testimony

of

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before the

New York City Council Committee on Health

on

Intro 657A

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City Hall – Committee Room
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Good morning Chairman Johnson and members of the Health Committee. I am Corinne Schiff, Deputy Commissioner for Environmental Health at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. On behalf of Commissioner Bassett, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Introduction 657A, which builds on an existing framework to enhance transparency about drinking water tank inspections.

Before turning to the proposed legislation, I want to provide some background on the Health Department’s role overseeing the safety and quality of New York City’s drinking water. The city’s water originates from protected reservoirs in the Hudson Valley and Catskill Mountains. About a billion gallons a day travel south through a system of approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels, and aqueducts to the City, where they are distributed throughout the five boroughs. Pressure in the city water mains is powerful enough to send water into buildings and up as high as the sixth floor. In taller buildings, water is typically delivered to the basement and then pumped to a tank on top of the building, where, by force of gravity, it descends through building pipes to the tap.

The Health Department has oversight responsibility to ensure that the City’s drinking water meets federal and state water quality standards. We do this by inspecting upstate reservoirs, water treatment plants and storage and distribution facilities. We review designs from the Department of Environmental Protection for new and upgraded water facilities, validate system-wide sample results and check water supply and treatment operational reports. The Health Department conducts water quality sampling at taps around the city and investigates water quality-related complaints.

The Health Department also enforces New York City Health Code and Administrative Code requirements on property owners regarding building drinking water tanks. Water tanks—the iconic, round, mostly wooden structures that dot our roof tops—are subject to mandates from the Health Department and Department of Buildings that govern construction; annual cleaning, inspection and water sampling; tenant notification; and reporting on inspection and sampling results. New Yorkers can find the results of their building’s annual water tank inspection and water sampling on our website at nyc.gov/health/watertanks.

New York City water meets or exceeds legal requirements, is famous for its quality and great taste and, as Dr. Bassett likes to say, is the best beverage for your health. The Health Department supports Intro 657A, which would restore the requirement that the Department
report information about building owners’ annual water tank inspections to the Council. By expanding transparency, the legislation will further promote New Yorkers’ confidence in their drinking water. We look forward to working with the Council on this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to take questions.