

**Testimony of the NYC Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment
to the Committee on Technology**

Oversight Hearing: Filming and Community Impacts

January 21, 2015

Good morning, Chairman Vacca and distinguished Members of the City Council Committee on Technology. My name is Cynthia López, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the work that our Office of Film, Theatre and Broadcasting does to attract new productions to the City, grow the number of jobs available to New Yorkers through workforce development, and foster a mutually beneficial experience when productions shoot on location in our neighborhoods. I am joined here today by First Deputy Commissioner Luis Castro and Deputy Commissioner Dean McCann.

The Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre and Broadcasting was founded in 1966 as the first film commission in the country. Over the past five decades, our office has served as the one-stop shop for the entertainment industry, issuing permits for productions filming on public property, providing police assistance and traffic coordination, and facilitating production throughout the five boroughs. We also promote the City as the ultimate filming location. Our office develops educational and workforce initiatives that help diversify the industry, and serves as the primary liaison for production and local communities.

According to an independent study conducted by the Boston Consulting Group, the entertainment industry generates a direct annual spend of \$7.1 billion, \$400 million in tax revenue, and employs 130,000 New Yorkers.

The seven billion dollars fuels local economies throughout the five boroughs, with money spent on everything from renting stage space to filming at private locations; from the lumber and hardware needed to construct sets, to the furniture and props purchased to decorate those sets. Costumes must be bought or made, and those costumes need to be dry cleaned on a regular basis. Hair and makeup supplies are needed. Casts and crews must be fed. One production alone spent over \$630,000 on catering from New York businesses and another \$365,000 on wardrobe.

In addition to supporting the local economy, productions provide jobs for New Yorkers. These include: location managers, script supervisors, camera operators, makeup artists, carpenters, set decorators, and production assistants, among others.

This past year the City hosted 242 films. So far in the 2014-2015 season, New York has been home to 44 primetime episodic television and digital series, including *Orange Is the New Black*, *Madame Secretary*, and *The Blacklist*.

There has been an increase of nearly 500 percent in the past twelve years, setting a new record. This growth has also been accompanied by private infrastructure investment and expanding studio and post-production capacity—from studios such as Broadway Stages, Kaufman, Silvercup, and Steiner Studios.

All of this production activity means several things. First, it means that more New Yorkers are working in solid middle-class jobs behind the scenes and aren't forced to move away from the City to find work elsewhere. Second, it means that thousands of local businesses are being supported by these productions.

Small businesses across the city have told our office that the increase in production has been a boon to their business, some even pointing out that, without the money generated from the films and TV shows patronizing their shops, they wouldn't have survived the recent economic crisis. This exceptional growth in production has strengthened our office's commitment to lessen the impact that on-location filming has had on local residents and communities.

In addition, we have created a number of workforce development and related initiatives to introduce more New Yorkers to career opportunities and increase diversity.

The "Made in NY" Production Assistant Training Program has helped more than 500 New Yorkers who were previously unemployed or underemployed gain access to the entertainment industry.

The program, which was developed in partnership with the non-profit organization Brooklyn Workforce Innovations, provides free training to New Yorkers and prepares them for entry level positions on film sets and in production offices. Approximately 95 percent of graduates are people of color. “Made in NY” PAs have recently worked on a variety of sets such as the upcoming Netflix series *Daredevil*, *Odyssey* on NBC, MTV’s new *Eye Candy*, and the Golden Globe Award-winning series *The Affair* on Showtime.

We’re eager to assist the next generation of filmmakers and creative talent, which is why we’re working with the Brooklyn College Graduate School of Cinema at Steiner Studios—the nation’s first public graduate school integrated into a working film lot. Funding for the school is the result of an extensive public-private partnership involving notable Brooklyn College alumni, our office, the New York City Council, the Brooklyn Borough President’s

Office, the City University of New York, and Steiner Studios. We're very excited that applications are now being accepted. A ribbon cutting ceremony is scheduled for the fall of 2015.

Another way we're helping create opportunities for New Yorkers is through the Made in NY Media Center by Independent Filmmaker Project (IFP). Located in Dumbo, Brooklyn, the center is an incubator space for storytellers, creative professionals, and entrepreneurs across multiple disciplines to collaborate and create new business opportunities. The media center is the result of a partnership between our agency, t IFP, and the New York City Economic Development Corporation to bring innovation to the media, digital, and entertainment industries.

We also host an on-going career panel series entitled “Made in NY” Talks, in which students and interested New Yorkers have the opportunity to hear firsthand from industry professionals about how they started in their careers.

To enhance the City’s competitive position as a global center for entertainment production, our office works diligently to attract production through several initiatives.

The “Made in NY” Marketing Credit program is a unique incentive that no other city provides, and that directly speaks to our commitment to helping productions from script to screen. Any project that shoots at least 75% of its work here in the City is eligible to receive co-sponsored advertising. As a requirement for participation, productions donate to an organization of their choice through a partnership with the Department of Cultural Affairs to further advance the arts in New York City.

Through this partnership, New York City films and television series have donated more than \$1million to local cultural institutions. Among the recipients of this cultural credit are Broadway Cares, Boys and Girls Club of Harlem, the Queens LGBT Community Center, and Women Make Movies, to name a few.

We continue to promote New York City as a prime location for film and television production through partnerships with film festivals, including the Tribeca Film Festival, New York Television Festival, Urbanworld Film Festival, the New York International Children’s Film Festival, Yes to the Bronx Film Festival, and the Queens World Film Festival. These events offer exposure to filmmakers and producers and provide a platform to promote our services.

To further encourage the production industry to support the local economy, our “Made in NY” Discount Card Program connects productions to local vendors that offer

a discount on their services. There are now over 1,200 participating vendors in this program.

While our efforts have led to tremendous growth in the City's film and television production industry, we're also aware of the impact these productions can have on the local community, and we have been working collaboratively with elected officials, community leaders, and production companies to respond to neighborhood concerns.

Our office makes every effort to notify communities in advance of local productions coming to their neighborhoods. Whenever a permit is approved for production to film and hold parking in a given neighborhood, an automated notification goes to the City Council Member and community board with the location, date and time of the shoot. These notices are intended to help local officials and community boards inform

their constituents of film activity in their area. We are also working on adding the borough presidents to these notifications.

We also require productions to post signage in neighborhoods to provide residents with information on how to contact the production directly with any questions they may have. We require all productions to be good neighbors. We have revoked permits when productions have failed to adhere to our requirements. To ensure compliance with permits, we send out field representatives from our office daily to conduct set visits and inspections on parking and safety.

We respond to every call, letter, and email we receive so that we can remedy issues promptly. And every year, our staff invites community boards, business improvement districts, and City Council members to our office to discuss

any concerns or questions. This year's meetings are scheduled at the end of this month.

We also host community appreciation screenings, working closely with Council Members' offices and community boards, so residents have the chance to see their neighborhood on screen after hosting a film crew on their street and share in the pride of the finished product. And we encourage productions to give back to the communities in which they film.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, one studio donated hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of goods to local relief efforts and even bought blocks of hotel rooms to provide housing for crews whose homes were affected.

Recently we announced a landmark partnership with Teamsters Local 817 which is donating \$160,000 to our office through the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City to support community enrichment in local neighborhoods. One component of this partnership is a community giveback, in which three neighborhoods will receive \$50,000 each to improve a public library, school, or community-based organization in their area. Additional details about this initiative will be announced shortly.

Throughout the year, we continually evaluate production activity and work with productions to explore different parts of the five boroughs. We are also working with the Staten Island and Bronx Borough President's offices to curate additional site suggestions to help filmmakers understand all the locations that the City has to offer.

To assess the impact of our work, we are analyzing our agency's activities on an annual basis, as well as the overall economic development and growth of New York City's media and entertainment industries. We will be releasing our analysis later this year.

Our agency is committed to transparency. But we also share some of the concerns that members of the film and television industry have expressed about the impact of Intro 84, the legislation under consideration today. The amount of reporting called for in Intro 84 could be seen as inhospitable toward the production community. It is my belief that further discussion is needed of what information can be released and what form that information will take. We look forward to working with you to move the conversation forward.

The film industry is incredibly mobile, and our agency has worked tirelessly to bring this business and these jobs to New York. It is important to make sure that the release of such information would not have a negative impact on a thriving industry that contributes billions of dollars to the City's economy and employs thousands of New Yorkers.

In the end, we feel the best approach is to continue to work with City Council and local communities to find ways to share information that advances the interests of the City and allows us to remain at the forefront of the entertainment industry.

I appreciate the opportunity to address you today. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.