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**** NEWS RELEASE ****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 5/18/2011

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Council member Margaret Chin joins Council member Elizabeth Crowley to call on Mayor Bloomberg to reverse the closure of 20 fire companies citywide

New York, NY – Today, Council member Margaret Chin (D-1, Manhattan), Council member Elizabeth Crowley (D-30, Queens), Chair of the City Fire & Criminal Justice Committee, and colleagues rallied outside of Engine 4, Ladder 15 in lower Manhattan to oppose Mayor Bloomberg’s proposal to close 20 fire companies citywide. The Administration has yet to disclose the specific companies on the chopping block but Engine 4 in Lower Manhattan has been slated for closure in the past.

Council member Chin and Council member Crowley were joined by Uniformed Firefighters Association President Stephen Cassidy; Uniformed Fire Officers Association President Al Hagan; Community Board 1 Chair Julie Menin; representatives from Downtown Independent Democrats; Executive Director of Asian Americans for Equality Chris Kui; Executive Director of Indochina Sino-American Community Center Peter Cheng; Community Board 2 member Edward Ma; as well as advocates and residents.

“Firefighters are essential personnel in this city and we will not stand for any fire house closures,” Council member Chin said. “Closing fire companies that have received special training and that are situated in areas that remain high-level targets for terrorism, does not make sense.”

Council member Chin, who represents lower Manhattan, including the financial district and World Trade Center, has fought to keep Engine 4, Ladder 15 – a company with decontamination training and counter-terrorism equipment, including a portable shower and hazmat suits – open, after repeated threats of closure in recent years.

“Fight fighters are in the most important business I can think of: the business of saving lives,” Council member Chin said. “These closings will have devastating ripple effects in neighboring communities by placing an undue burden on our firehouses and increasing

response time. This is dangerous to the community and is it dangerous for the men and women of the fire department.”

“New Yorkers need and deserve the best fire and emergency medical protection—but our first responders can’t save lives from closed fire companies. Closing even one fire company in this City would jeopardize the safety of our tax-payers. The bottom line is, fires don’t care about budgets,” said Council Member Elizabeth Crowley (D-30, Queens), Chair of the Fire & Criminal Justice Committee.

“The proposed cut to Engine 4, when we know Lower Manhattan remains a top terrorist target, is not only wrong, it is dangerous. The lessons from 9/11 teach us that we must be vigilant and prepared and having the proper amount of FDNY firefighters and resources in our community is critical,” said Julie Menin, Chair of Community Board 1, which includes the Financial District, Battery Park City and City Hall.

“Our neighborhoods know better than most how important first responders can be. Cutting public safety is the wrong way to solve our budget problems,” Paul Newell, District Leader, said.

The Administration’s executive budget for FY12, once again, calls for the full-time closure of 20 fire companies through attrition. The cost to restore these companies, accounting for overtime costs, is estimated to be \$55 million. To date, the Administration has never made public a proposed list of closures or spelled out the criteria that it would use in determining how companies would be evaluated for closure. The shuttering the 20 fire companies would increase response times and further tax a department that is already 270 members below its budgeted headcount.

In District-1 Manhattan there have been an increase in fires and fatalities in recent years, especially in low income and immigrant neighborhoods, most notably the Grand Street fire in April 2010 that displaced over 200 people.

In January 2011, fire fighters saved the 183-year old St. James Church in lower Manhattan after a fire broke out in the attic. In the last year, there has been a rash of fires in the St. James, Oliver Street neighborhood, a fatal fire at 124 Ludlow, and at least a half dozen more in District-1.

Council member Chin said. “Not only does the FDNY respond to these emergencies but they also supplements with fire safety workshops and prevention tips in communities prone to fires. This service is invaluable. Fire fighters are our front line of defense in the case of a fire and are experts in terms of prevention.”