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TO IMPROVE CITY'S WORST BUILDINGS, COUNCIL INTRODUCES SAFE HOUSING ACT

Council will also vote to improve law granting health benefits to surviving family members of Correction and Sanitations employees, on whistleblower protection and lobbying amendments

City Hall, April 8, 2007 – In a nationally unprecedented effort to preserve housing and make vital repairs in the City's worst buildings, Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, together with Council members Letitia James, Erik Martin Dilan, and Gale Brewer, will today introduce landmark legislation to repair dilapidated residential buildings in need of top to bottom improvements. Speaker Quinn and members of the City Council will also vote on four pieces of legislation at today's Stated Council meeting.

The full Council will vote on legislation that would:

- Provide health benefits to families of Correction and Sanitation employees who die in the line of duty
- Protect City employees who report conduct that presents a risk to welfare of a child
- Combat film piracy
- Amend lobbying laws to preserve the privacy of lobbyists' home addresses and the names and addresses of their families.

SAFE HOUSING ACT

Speaker Quinn will introduce groundbreaking legislation to improve housing conditions for New Yorkers living in the City's worst buildings. Under the Safe Housing Act, every year the city would identify 200 buildings with the worst housing code violations and target them for aggressive inspection, follow-up, and comprehensive repairs. The City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) would facilitate and monitor these City-mandated improvements.

"I am extraordinarily proud of this legislation – both because of what it will do for tenants, and because of the collaborative process of housing advocates, landlords, the City and the Council working together that brought it about. The Safe Housing Act will soon give us the authority to enact lasting improvements on the City's worst buildings," said **Speaker Quinn**. "Tenants who live in problem buildings need real fixes, not just patchwork solutions. And for the first time, they will have the force of the law behind them making sure that their landlords take real action to improve their living conditions."

Thousands of families in New York City live in buildings with dangerous conditions and serious housing code violations. Negligent landlords often compromise the safety of their tenants and the long-term physical condition of buildings by failing to repair outstanding structural problems, and instead making short-term, substandard solutions.

After being notified by HPD, delinquent landlords would have four months to correct violations and make all required repairs from top to bottom. If building owners do not make those repairs, HPD would step in and make

comprehensive repairs. Owners would be required to reimburse the City for the cost of repairs. HPD would also address the major underlying causes for unsafe conditions in the building and would continue to monitor these building owners for one year.

“Every day my office gets complaints about serious housing code violations that are not repaired for months,” said the bill’s lead sponsor, Council member **Letitia James**. “Too often these complaints come from the most vulnerable among us – seniors on fixed incomes, immigrants with limited English skills, and families with young children. Under the Safe Hosing Act, the City will repair hundreds of buildings each year when landlords ignore City laws. Boilers and roofs will be replaced, rodents and insects will be exterminated, and overall building conditions will improve.”

“Living in substandard housing conditions has been shown to have serious effects on families who live there. But these buildings don’t just affect one family; they affect entire communities,” said Housing and Buildings Committee Chair **Erik Martin Dilan**. “As it stands now, people living in the worst buildings just don’t have the recourse they need to invoke real change in their quality of life. This legislation is a key element in balancing the needs of tenants and landlords, and will ensure that those living in the worst conditions receive the help they deserve.”

“The Safe Housing Act is particularly encouraging to the more than 10,000 tenants who have used the Targeted Cyclical Enforcement Policy (T-CEP) initiated by my office in 2004 to protect affordable housing,” said Council member **Gale Brewer**. “With the Safe Housing Act, T-CEP tenants and tenants everywhere, will have a valuable tool to ensure that their units are repaired in a timely fashion.”

CORRECTION AND SANITATION WORKER BENEFITS

The Council will vote to amend the Administrative Code to provide healthcare coverage for families (spouses, domestic partners and children) of Correction and Sanitation employees who die in the line of duty. The current process requires the Administrative Code to be amended and updated on an individual basis each time. This amendment will eliminate this time-consuming process so surviving family members of Correction and Sanitation employees receive healthcare benefits in a timely manner.

“I am thankful for the opportunity to be of assistance to the members and families of corrections officers and sanitation workers, by working with Speaker Quinn, my colleagues on the Council, and the Mayor’s Administration on this bill,” say Civil Service and Labor Committee Chair and lead sponsor **Joseph Addabbo**.

WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

The Council will vote to expand the City’s whistleblower protection law to protect City employees who report conduct negatively affecting a child’s welfare. Today’s amendment would provide protection for public employees, such as teachers, social workers, and ACS workers, who act in the best interests of children by reporting this type of conduct. The City’s existing whistleblower law prohibits City employees from taking an adverse personnel action against another City employee who reports misconduct, including corruption, criminal activity, conflict of interest, gross mismanagement or abuse of authority.

“No one should ever have to worry that standing up for the best interests of a child will hurt their career,” said Council member **Eric Gioia**. “Providing whistleblowers with added protection is the right thing to do.”

“People who have the backbone to stand up in the face of wrongdoing should not be punished for reporting misdeeds. Disclosure and transparency are essential to good governance, but when we are talking about circumstances involving our children that is the minimum standard we must meet,” said Education Committee Chair **Robert Jackson**.

FILM PIRACY

To combat the distribution of illegally copied films, the Council will vote to make recording a film inside a movie theater a misdemeanor. Currently, videotaping a film while inside a movie-theater without the written consent of the theater owner carries a maximum penalty of only \$250. According to NBC Universal, over 90% of pirated movies are recorded with hand-held cameras during a film screening.

This legislation would similarly criminalize the act of videotaping inside any other type of venue exhibiting motion pictures or live performances. However, this law would apply only when a sign indicates the prohibition of unauthorized recording devices in those types of venues.

“It is important for the City to provide protections for legitimate businesses. Videotaping a film is stealing from legal enterprises, and the penalty for that action should be strict,” said Small Business Committee Chair **David Yassky**.

LOBBYING LAW AMENDMENT

The Council will vote on a technical amendment to keep private the home addresses of lobbyists and the names and home addresses of their spouses, domestic partners, and unemancipated children from being publicly disclosed. Currently, the law requires lobbyists to report the home address and names of unemancipated minors, spouses, and domestic partners. This technical amendment would ensure information would be kept private and would not be made public. Campaign contributions made by lobbyists, their spouses, domestic partners, or unemancipated children would remain ineligible for public matching funds.

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