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October 11, 2023
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Memorial

I am honored to be here to remember the tragedy and the fight for workers' rights. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire right here at 23–29 Washington Place on Saturday, March 25, 1911, was the deadliest industrial disaster in the history of the city, and one of the deadliest in U.S. history. The fire caused the deaths of 146 garment workers – 123 women and girls and 23 men – who died from the fire, smoke inhalation, falling, or jumping to their deaths. Most of the victims were newly arrived Italian or Jewish immigrant women and girls aged 14 to 23; of the victims whose ages are known, the oldest victim was 43-year-old Providenza Panno, and the youngest were 14-year-olds Kate Leone and Rosaria "Sara" Maltese.

It is an honor to meet the descendants of these families who are here today.

In the lead up to this extraordinary event, I have been reflecting on the effort it took to make this memorial a reality. There are many people to thank but I am singling out LuLu LoLo Pascal Evans who is a member of the Remember the Triangle Fire Committee Board. She is also a performance artist, playwright/actor, activist who grew up in East Harlem with parents I knew and who were loved by all who knew them. Rose and Pete Pascal were the Mayoress and Mayor of the Italian and even the Puerto Rican community in East Harlem. Rose, her mother, worked for Borough President Percy Sutton and many BPs after that – she had a 60-year career. LuLu has been one of the stalwart leaders to create this memorial, through ups and downs of city, state and federal agencies, funding challenges, design changes, and everything else you can think of to throw impediments in the way. I think everyone involved knows more about Revocable Consents and registering contracts so that matching funds can be accessed than they ever wanted to! I have lots of emails about these issues! But we are here today thanks to LuLu, who has her mother's grace, warmth and creativity, and many others: I want to also thank Mary Anne Trasciatti, Ed Pincar Jr., Manhattan Commissioner for DOT, both John Beckman and Kyle Kimball from NYU and the unions, especially Edgar Romney, for your support.

The fire led to legislation requiring improved factory safety standards and helped spur the growth of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), which fought for better working conditions for sweatshop workers. There is lots of progress, but work remains to be done.

Ten years ago, with support from the unions, I passed the Paid Sick and Safe Time law, which guaranteed paid time off for 3.4 million private-sector workers across New York, including 1.2 million workers who had no access to paid sick time before the law was passed.

We also know that the work of real change doesn't end with the passage of any law. Even ten years later, so many workers don't know about and don't have access to their rights. Last year, A Better Balance and Community Service Society published a report finding that over half of low-

income women and a significant number of middle-income women are not aware of Paid Safe and Sick Time, undermining the effectiveness of the law.

Last week I passed a law to require an education and outreach campaign on the law so that workers are aware of their rights to utilize paid sick and safe leave. I have another pending bill to add a private right of action to the law, which would allow workers to go to court to enforce their rights and seek remedies for violations.

Challenges persist. In a rapidly changing economy, with new forms of employment and evolving workplace dynamics, we must remain vigilant in our efforts to ensure the well-being and dignity of all workers.

That includes the more than 65,000 Deliveristas who are still battling for fair pay while working under dangerous conditions. It took three years of campaigning to secure basic rights like the right to use the bathroom on the job and a minimum wage. And the minimum wage is still tied up in the court. Deliveristas face unrealistic demands that can compel them to speed and take unnecessary risks to meet their unofficial quotas. This not only endangers their own safety but also puts other road users at risk.

And the batteries. Overused and low-quality e-bike batteries can spark explosive, fast-moving fires with little or no warning, leaving just seconds to escape. Batteries have burst into flames while charging near a door or window, trapping people inside their apartments. Lithium battery fires have killed 14 people and injured 93 others in New York this year, including a blaze in June at an e-bike in Chinatown, just over a mile away, that caused four deaths.

We must continue to advocate for stronger worker protections, fair wages, safe working conditions, and the right to organize. We must honor the memory of those who perished in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire by striving for a society where no one has to choose between their life and their livelihood.