



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Manhattan and Brooklyn Elected Officials Call on City to Address Increased Helicopter Traffic Over Downtown Manhattan and Brooklyn Heights

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Uptick in Noise, Traffic After 30th Street Heliport's Termination of Tourist Flights

Officials Call for Three Steps to Improve
Safety and Quality of Life

New York, NY— Today, Brooklyn and Manhattan community leaders and elected officials—including Congressman Jerrold Nadler, State Senator Daniel Squadron, Congressman Nydia Velazquez, Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Assembly Member Joan Millman, Council Member Gale Brewer, Council Member Margaret Chin, and Council Member Steve Levin—urged the City to take three steps to improve regulation and oversight of tourist helicopter traffic. After the West 30th Street Heliport ended all tourist flights last Thursday, communities in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn have experienced a sudden uptick in noise from helicopters using the Downtown Manhattan Heliport. Additionally, the already crowded skies over New York Harbor and the surrounding neighborhoods have become even more densely packed with helicopters.

The officials called on the City to address the safety implications of unregulated tourist helicopter flights and the impact on quality of life in communities that experience take-offs and landings or heavy flyover traffic. In a letter to Mayor Bloomberg, the elected officials urged the City to protect the safety of helicopter users and the quality of life of neighborhood residents by taking the following three steps:

- Implement a 311 protocol for receiving, responding to and addressing helicopter complaints.
- Increase oversight and planning of the helicopter industry, with a focus on reducing, if not eliminating, tourist helicopter traffic.
- Conduct an assessment of security risks involved in storing fuel at the downtown heliport.

Rep. Nadler said, “I have long been critical of the ‘wild west’ nature of our airspace. Unfortunately it took a deadly crash over the Hudson last summer to bring about minor improvements. But much more needs to be done from both a safety and quality of life

perspective. I am having discussions with the FAA on how to accomplish this, but as the owner and operator of the downtown heliport the City must do its part. I call on the Mayor to address this issue and work with us to greatly reduce tourist flights which are both a safety and a quality of life issue for New York City residents. Tourists don't come to NYC for an exorbitant 15 minute windshield view of our city."

Senator Squadron said, "New York is the greatest city in the world, whether at ground level or from the sky. But the never-ending parade of choppers rattles neighborhoods and raises serious concerns about safety. I look forward to working with the City and the federal government to formulate a comprehensive policy on tourist helicopter flights that deals with safety issues and the damaging impact that helicopter traffic has on residents' quality of life."

Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez said, "Without proper coordination between the City and FAA, helicopter traffic has fallen through the regulatory cracks. Taking care of relentless helicopter noise is a quality of life issue for New Yorkers on both sides of the East River. More importantly, addressing this issue is a question of safety for helicopter users, as well as those on the ground. Tourists can find equally spectacular views of the skyline at Brooklyn Bridge Park or the Brooklyn Heights Promenade without noise that disrupts the community."

Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz said, "Helicopter noise is a REAL quality of life issue. Low flying helicopters are loud, send off vibrations that rattle houses and make it impossible to find peace and quiet for residents living in the paths of flights, not to mention create a potential, as we've seen, for real human tragedy in the case of accidents. Residents on the West Side of Manhattan were able to successfully remove helicopter traffic from their waterfront and we have the same goal in Brooklyn. We have a beautiful waterfront park here too. We just ask that the City address Brooklyn's concerns and limit needless helicopter

noise in our Brooklyn sky!"

Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer, said, "The closure of a heliport on Manhattan's West Side shouldn't lead to an automatic disruption for residents along the East River. I join my colleagues in government in asking the City to take a second look at the increased tourist helicopter traffic, which is threatening the safety and quality of life of residents. We don't want our coasts to become aerial highways."

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver said, "I have great concern that the closure of the 30th Street heliport will increase helicopter traffic into the downtown community. It is incumbent on the City and Port Authority to ensure that the local residents and businesses of Lower Manhattan are not unduly impacted by these additional flights."

Assembly Member Joan Millman said, "The largely unregulated helicopter flights that imperil tourists and residents and disturb the peace all day is intolerable and dangerous. We need the FAA and EDC to quickly develop a comprehensive plan to address the excessive volume of flights, the noise complaints, and other safety issues we are suffering with each and every day. It is irresponsible to have so many helicopters using this heliport without a comprehensive safety plan."

Council Member Gale A. Brewer said, "The number of low-flying tourist helicopters over the West Side and Central Park has become intolerable. All through the Easter weekend West Siders were calling and emailing me about this worsening condition. The noise drowns out even normal conversation in people's homes, and even closing all the windows on a beautiful spring day does little to keep out the continuous sound of low flying helicopters. The residents of the West Side did not move here to live next to an airport, nor do they pay their taxes to do so. We have met with city and federal agencies, as well as the industry, over the last 18 months. I have sponsored press conferences, convened meetings, held protests at the

heliports, written letters and collaborated with other elected officials to try to address this issue. Congressman Jerrold Nadler has been particularly helpful, but we are told by the FAA that they are powerless to curtail the tourist helicopter flights. I will continue to work with all parties to seek a reasonable limit and ultimately an end to the tourist flights over Manhattan.”

Council Member Margaret Chin said, “Helicopters are a major concern here in lower Manhattan and throughout the City. They are a noise problem for residents, creating unnecessary disturbances. And moreover, they are a safety hazard. We all saw the unfortunate results of the free-for-all in our skies with last year’s crash on the Hudson. Something must be done to limit the number, frequency, and uses of these helicopter flights, and to improve safety and quality of life for residents of lower Manhattan and New York City.”

Council Member Steve Levin said, “I stand with my fellow elected officials to strongly urge the City to amend their policy on helicopter tourism. Not only does the constant flow of helicopters pose serious concerns, it is also a severe detriment on our quality of life. Brooklyn’s newest park, Brooklyn Bridge Park, which recently opened, features spectacular views and provides a beautiful space for recreation and relaxation. However, it is difficult to enjoy this amazing new park with the constant deafening roar of helicopters overhead. As both Councilmember for the area and a member of the Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Committee, I urge the City to limit helicopter tourism over our great city.”

Julie Menin, Chairperson of Manhattan Community Board 1, said, “After all that the Lower Manhattan community has gone through after 9/11, and the myriad safety concerns that the neighborhood still faces, it is more than time for a complete overhaul and re-examination of the regulatory framework surrounding helicopter traffic to prevent a catastrophic accident

from occurring. It is high time to address this safety concern before any additional accidents occur.”

John Dew, Chair of Brooklyn Community Board 2, said, “Relocating tourist helicopter service to heavily congested residential communities is both unfair and counterproductive. The noise pollution that is generated by this activity is intolerable. The community has struggled with creating areas of quiet enjoyment within the new Brooklyn Bridge Park. The addition of regular tourist helicopter service will render this park practically unusable. The city must explore alternative sites.”

Judy Stanton, Executive Director for the Brooklyn Heights Association, said, “The helicopter activity above Brooklyn Heights has reached intolerable levels. Residents compare their indoor experience of incessant noise from helicopters to ‘jackhammers in the sky’. We see six at a time, hovering above the Downtown Manhattan Heliport, waiting to land, and an equal number idling on the helipad, waiting to take off. Additionally, we see a large number of low-flying helicopters, up to 30 an hour, originating elsewhere and flying over the Heights below FAA radar, that is below 1500 feet. This is not only a noise issue it is a safety issue.”

Doreen Gallo, Executive Director for the DUMBO Neighborhood Alliance, said, “The DUMBO Neighborhood Alliance is very concerned about the saturation of helicopter traffic and noise throughout the Brooklyn Waterfront and Historic District neighborhoods. The community has worked for decades toward the creation of a continuous, open space, waterfront park. An increase in helicopter traffic is a distraction to the livability, quality of life in DUMBO and our surrounding neighborhoods.”

Gus Sheha, a Board Member of the DUMBO Neighborhood Foundation, said, “It is hypocritical for the mayor, who touts his administration’s progress on cracking down on noise pollution, to condone one of the biggest violators of noise-limiting ordinances – the

helicopter industry. Citizens and tourists alike should not feel as if they are in a war zone as dozens of choppers crisscross the sky at any given time.”

Bill Stein, a member of the Fulton Ferry Landing Association, said, “The newly opened park was relaxing and enjoyable for exactly 10 days – and then the helicopter invasion began. The tourist flights must be eliminated.”

John Loscalzo, founder of Brooklyn Heights Blog, said, “There needs to be a reduction in helicopter noise over Brooklyn Bridge Park. The four hour daily quiet period Brooklyn Heights Blog proposes is the first step in making sure that this wonderful new public space will be enjoyed by all.”

Ro Sheffe, Chairperson of the Manhattan Community Board 1 Financial District Committee, said, “Since 9/11 many Lower Manhattan residents are justifiably concerned about all low-flying aircraft, because of potential hazards and because of unnecessary noise. Some low-flying aircraft are necessary for security. Tourist helicopter flights are not. What’s needed is an enforceable policy that restricts tourist flight paths, altitudes and times to minimize potential hazards and local impact.”

See attached letter.