

TESTIMONY OF STATE SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS REGARDING RES. NO. 2166-2009.

October 20, 2009

I would like to thank the New York City Council, the Speaker and the Committee on Governmental Operations for conducting a hearing on Resolution 2166, calling upon the United State House of Representatives to pass both H.R. 22, the United State Postal Service Financial Relief Act, and H.R. 658, the Access to Postal Services Act, which would stop the unnecessary closure of neighborhood post offices and would increase community input as the Post Office reorganizes branches throughout the city of New York. I would also like to thank Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, Congressman Jerry Nadler, New York Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, and Council Member Alan Gerson for their hard work and leadership on this issue.

The threat of wide-spread post office closures in New York City is of great concern, particularly in light of the adverse effects they can have on low-income and limited-mobility residents of the city. For these members of our community, the difference between having a post office in the neighborhood and having to travel by public transportation to a post office is a significant one. Included on the list of post offices at risk for closure is one in the district I represent: the Pitt Street Station Post Office, located at 185 Clinton Street in the Lower East Side.

The Pitt Street Post Office is located in Cooperative Village, a densely populated residential area consisting of 4,500 apartments that is part of the Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) program, meaning that over 50 percent of the residents are senior citizens. Senior citizens generally have more limited mobility and rely on mail much more than other segments of the population.

If the Pitt Street Station post office were to close, the closest post office would be Knickerbocker Station, which is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, the Knickerbocker Station is located ten blocks away from the Pitt Street Station, a walk that is generally difficult for senior citizens. Secondly, unlike the Pitt Street Station, the Knickerbocker Station is not located on a bus line. Residents who currently use the bus to reach the post office would no longer have this option. Finally, while the Pitt Street Station is located at street level and is ADA accessible, the Knickerbocker station requires the use of an elevator for accessibility. Elevator use very often results in long wait times, and community members report that the Knickerbocker Station elevator is often out of order.

To summarize, the Knickerbocker Station post office, for all intents and purposes, simply is not accessible enough to serve the Cooperative Village community that currently relies the Pitt Street Station post office. Redirecting all Pitt Street Station traffic to Knickerbocker Station would, therefore, be highly detrimental to this community. I am certainly not alone in this viewpoint. New York State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and I have collected thousands of petitions from constituents who feel that closing the Pitt Street Station post office would have a catastrophic effect on their lives.

The Pitt Street Station post office is just one example of a post office whose closure would devastate a New York neighborhood, but there are many others. New York is a city of neighborhoods, and no matter what the circumstances, the local post office is a vital element of any neighborhood. There is still no service quite like it. That's why I would argue that even as the USPS faces the real need to reduce costs, there simply must be a different equation for New York City, one that takes our unique communities and pedestrian culture into account, and that makes community input a top priority in all considerations. Passing H.R. 22 and H.R. 658 will help New Yorkers who are striving to preserve their distinct neighborhoods in a difficult economic climate.

I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to submit testimony today. Please do not hesitate to reach out to my office at 212-298-5565 for further information.