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**TESTIMONY BY NEW YORK STATE SENATOR BRAD HOYLMAN
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
REGARDING MADISON SQUARE GARDEN**

**(ULURP Application Nos. N 130137 ZRM, N 130138 ZCM, C 130139 ZSM,
and C 130140 ZSM by MSG Holdings L.P.)**

April 10, 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony before the New York City Planning Commission (CPC) today. My name is Brad Hoylman and I represent New York State's 27th Senate District, which includes parts of the West Midtown Central Business District, where Madison Square Garden (MSG) is located. Although my district's boundaries do not include MSG, I represent the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the arena. Furthermore, the long-term prospects of MSG, Pennsylvania Station (Penn Station), and the vicinity, which are at stake in this hearing, are extremely important to my constituents, as well as all New Yorkers.

As you know, MSG Holdings, L.P. has applied for two special permits: one to allow the continued operation of its 22,000 seat arena in area zoned to allow an arena of only 2,500 seats, and another to allow large LED advertising signs that exceed the surface area and use restrictions of the site's existing zoning. The original special permit for the arena expired on January 24, 2013 after a term of 50 years. Both special permits now sought by the applicant would endure in perpetuity.

I appreciate that MSG is a major international venue and a significant contributor to the local economy. I also recognize that there are numerous obstacles to the relocation of the facility. However, I strongly believe it is incumbent upon me as an elected official to embrace the unique opportunity for the possibility of a modern and revitalized transit hub in the heart of Manhattan's West Side as part of the new Moynihan Station. Granting MSG's request for a special permit to operate its existing facility in perpetuity would preclude this vision from becoming a reality, as essential improvements to Penn Station would only be feasible through redevelopment of the site.

I therefore echo Manhattan Community Board 5's (CB5) recommendation that MSG's special permit for its continued operation be limited to ten years. Let me state clearly that I do not believe that MSG bears the burden of facilitating the redevelopment of Penn Station. All



stakeholders must use this punctuated term to come up with comprehensive plans for the future. I also echo the recommendation made by both CB5 and Manhattan Community Board 4 that the special permit for enlarged signage be denied, and that all restrictions regarding such signage in Subarea B4 of the Special Hudson Yards District be enforced.

While I have a number of concerns about the applications before CPC today, I will focus my comments on a few key issues. First, MSG's location atop Penn Station—the nation's busiest rail station—blocks implementation of any significant redesign of the infamously congested and labyrinthine station below it, which Senator Moynihan once likened to a rat hole. Transportation infrastructure is fundamental to our city's economy, culture and global stature, and ensuring its long-term viability must be a top priority. As I'm sure you are aware, while Moynihan Station will eventually serve Amtrak riders, commuters using the Long Island Rail Road, New Jersey Transit and the subways will continue to rely on Penn Station for the foreseeable future.

When the City granted MSG its original special permit more than half a century ago, Penn Station accommodated approximately 200,000 passengers. Today, it operates dangerously over-capacity, serving more than 640,000 daily passengers. The type of improvements necessary for Penn Station to remain even a functional transit hub, let alone one befitting a main entrance to the world's greatest city, can only come with a redevelopment of the site currently occupied by MSG. Specifically, the station is in dire need of critical design changes to its track layout and circulation to accommodate the current number of passengers and even more so in light of the expected surge in ridership expected to follow the completion of Hudson Yards, East Side Access, and other large projects. It is my understanding that this work cannot be done without relocating MSG's support columns, which is itself impossible with the arena above.

An earlier plan to move MSG to another location to allow for much-needed improvements and expansion at Penn Station was, unfortunately, never realized. Certainly, it is important to me that the arena remain a thriving New York City institution, and I have no delusion that these issues will be resolved any day soon. However, as *The New York Times* architecture critic Michael Kimmelman noted recently, “[t]he point isn't deciding which possible site is best right now. It's knowing there are paths worth pursuing, and focusing the next decade on exploring them.” Again, I urge CPC to use its authority as granted in Section 74-31(e) of the Zoning Resolution to limit the special permit for the continued operation of the arena to ten years.

I should note that the immediate priority in the long-term effort to improve Penn Station is to complete the Moynihan Station project, which includes an expansion of the West End Concourse leading to existing tracks and platforms. This expansion will help relieve some of the congestion currently plaguing riders in Penn Station and will provide an ADA-compliant concourse underneath the James A. Farley Post Office (Farley Post Office) building serving 17 commuter rail tracks. While Moynihan Station alone will not solve the problems facing Penn Station, its completion is a prerequisite.

Regarding MSG's request for a special permit for increased signage, I greatly appreciate plans by MSG to improve the appearance of the arena; however, I oppose the type of large-scale LED advertising screens found in Times Square spreading into the West Midtown Central Business

District and other neighborhoods. Currently, MSG displays approximately 4,000 square feet of advertising above Penn Station. If granted, the special permit would allow for about 17,000 square feet of signage, including a 5,300 square foot series of different-sized display panels forming a media wall along the arena's Eighth Avenue façade. I agree with both Community Boards 4 and 5 that such signage is not suitable for the neighborhood.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and for your consideration of my remarks.