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Testimony of New York State Senator Zellnor Y. Myrie, District 20
New York City Council Subcommittee on Zoning & Franchises on
Industry City Rezoning Application
Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020

My name is Zellnor Y. Myrie, and I have the honor of representing the 20th Senatorial District in Brooklyn. My district includes Sunset Park, a neighborhood composed largely of immigrants where 30 percent of families live below the poverty line.

I speak to you today in opposition to the Industry City rezoning proposal. In March 2019, I along with my colleagues in government who represent Sunset Park wrote to the City Planning Commission to share our concerns about this large, private rezoning application that would further exacerbate real estate pressures, displacement, rising rents, and forever shift the nature of the waterfront away from manufacturing to commercial tourism and service economy. This would counter our efforts to restore Brooklyn's industrial position, and it would supercharge the displacement and gentrification that is undermining Sunset Park's affordability and blue-collar job base.

Since that time, the Council Member representing Sunset Park, backed by a coalition of residents and community groups, has undertaken a robust and comprehensive approach to reviewing the proposal and building consensus for equitable standards of development at Industry City. These standards included a more limited scope for the rezoning, additional investment in neighborhood needs like housing, workforce development and climate resilience, and most notably a legally-binding Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) that would address workforce, industrial waterfront and other community concerns. This CBA is critical-- as you know, real community-based engagement and development is not what ULURP was designed to effectuate.

Moreover, Industry City does not need a rezoning to bring jobs. In 2013, Industry City said they could only bring 5,000 jobs with private investment alone. Today, they are touting the over 8,000 jobs without rezoning. With one million square feet of property still undeveloped, they can bring thousands more jobs without public accommodation.

In normal times, coalitions of residents and community groups are at a distinct power disadvantage when attempting to negotiate terms with a major developer backed by billionaire global investors. When the pandemic struck, the ability of the community to obtain legal counsel and commence negotiations with the developer went

from limited to virtually nonexistent. Still, the private developer has forged ahead with their application, which is now before the full Council. I urge you to reject it.

Make no mistake: the City faces unprecedented economic challenges, and millions of working families-- particularly Latinx, Black and immigrant New Yorkers who bear the greatest burdens-- are facing daily uncertainty and financial hardship. Rejecting a significant economic development effort, without fully considering the merits and likelihood of realized community benefits, would be frivolous and capricious.

I do not believe that is the case in this instance. Rather, the local Council Member laid out a set of detailed pre-conditions, developed in consultation with community leaders and groups that have been working in Sunset Park for years. With this framework, the community has made clear that rezoning such a large portion of the waterfront for a single private actor is not in the best interests of the larger community.

There are some in the Sunset Park community who are supportive of this rezoning. While I do not agree, it is important that those voices also be considered. I must stress, however, that in considering these voices, this body be circumspect of outside efforts purporting to speak for the community. It is not difficult to find the community's true voice; I urge every member to do so before voting.

The COVID-19 pandemic has wrought devastation on our entire city, most acutely in places like Sunset Park. I urge you to stand with local residents and small businesses by rejecting this proposal, and ensuring that community voices are heard and incorporated into a future development application that includes greater city commitments to invest in housing and workforce development and a legally-binding CBA.