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How The Legislative Branch of NYC Government
Can Build On The Progressive Gains of
Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito

&

Continue To Improve the Lives of ALL New Yorkers

Humbly Submitted By

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Dear Colleagues,

It is my hope that this message finds you in the best of health- physically & spiritually. In addition, please accept my congratulations on serving in the City Council for the 2018-2021 term. I look forward to working with all of you to continue passing legislation and allocating funding to change-making programs that will improve the lives of all New Yorkers.

As you know, I am offering my leadership to guide the next City Council as Speaker. During my eight years in this body, I have had the privilege to work with two Speakers who made history by breaking barriers in City government. As a person of more color and the son of immigrants who overcame a disability, I aspire to also break a historical barrier. But more importantly, I want to build upon the legacy of our current Speaker and continue to bring a brand of **progressive** government to our City that has so far enacted transformational change.

Therefore, I am presenting the following proposals in this document for your review as a conversation starter. Over the last few months, I have had the opportunity to briefly discuss with all of you my vision for the next four years and the issues that are unique to your districts. Here is an expanded overview of those proposals— driven by internal conversations with many of you -which I believe will help to drive our institution towards continuing to be an effective counter-balance to the Mayor.

Most of you know my track record. I am a colleague who you know to be true to my word and earnest in my dealings. I've had the privilege of working with many of you as we've pushed two mayoral administrations in passing ground-breaking legislation and budgets. I am also a fair-minded person who deliberates with the consultation of my colleagues on both sides of an issue before reaching a consensus to do the right thing for our City.

We are all privileged to work each day on behalf of the residents of the greatest City in the world. I hope to spend the next four years as the Speaker of the greatest municipal legislative body in the world. With the draconian policies of President Trump threatening our City, it is even more important now that our body stand as a legislative line of defense against him.

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It is easy to practice progressive principles when the economy is good and the job force continues to grow steadily, thanks to the Obama administration's legacy. However, as we have learned in the past, the good times sometimes hit a bump in the road; the market has a possible downturn and a economic recession looms in the future.

There will be times when you find yourself the target of news report or editorial because of a position you have taken on legislative or land use issues; or that the Mayor's administration may be unresponsive to an issue in your community. It is then that our Council will need battle-tested stewardship. Leadership with a proven history of making the right decisions even when they are not popular and may prove to be politically risky. As Speaker, I promise to have your back during those times.

Ultimately, I anxiously look forward to working with all of you so that together we can realize the dreams of communities who have traditionally been locked out of government. I welcome your feedback on these proposals and opportunity to deliberate as we figure out how we can continue the legacy of our current Speaker and make the lives of ALL New Yorkers better.

I'm hoping you will dream with me.



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LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



The last two City Council Speakers deserve enormous credit for beginning the transformative changes that have led to our legislative body being more transparent and accountable than at any time in its history. The next City Council session should move even further to build on what was begun.

I believe that some fundamental rules of the institution should remain in place in order to preserve the legislative power of the Speaker's office; solely to insure that this branch of government maintains its ability to act as effective counter-balance to the executive branch. However, by pushing the progressive envelope to create more freedom for Members to pursue legislative goals, I believe we can make the institution stronger and more prepared for the challenges to come.

Listening to the proposals of good government groups and the suggestions of many of you, I am proposing the following be explored and

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enacted in the 2018-2021 legislative session of the New York City Council:

- **Greater freedom, transparency and support for Council Members to independently have bills drafted and introduced**
- **Transparency on the sponsorship of bills during the drafting process**
- **Greater freedom to initiate more land use projects**
- **Committee chairs should have the ability to have more real input on the hiring of committee staffer**
- **Reviewing the process of Committee hearings and votes that has often presented challenges to Chair's discretion**
- **Reviewing the process of issuing subpoenas by Committee discretion**
- **Review the overall number of committees so members can focus more meaningfully on substantive issues;**
- **Increasing use of the oversight powers of the City Council**

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BUDGET AGENDA



I believe that in many respects our institution's greatest impact doesn't come from the power of enacting legislation, but our unique role in oversight of the City's budget and our independent ability to allocate funding. There are those who believe that the Council should not have the ability to allocate discretionary and capital funding within our communities. Those critics undervalue the relationship that elected officials have in their community and the unique ability to identify district needs better than a citywide elected. Our budgets demonstrate the Council's commitment to addressing our City's priorities.

While corruption at all levels of government continues to be a problem that creates doubt in our system, I believe that institutional controls created by the last two Speakers has restored public confidence. Additionally, the growing success of Participatory Budgeting has made the New York City Council a model of budgetary programming.

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After conversations with many of you and good government groups, I believe that the next City Council can improve upon what our predecessors set forth by discussing and enacting the following:

- **Involving the existing leadership structure of the Council ie., Borough Delegation chairs, with greater roles in Leadership and BNT**
- **To improve and increase discretionary & capital funding, while improving the needs-based distribution of both**
- **Increasing Member Staff Budgets so that we can offer competitive salaries to talented staff so we don't lose them to lobbying firms or the Executive branch**
- **Ensuring that all our diverse voices are heard in this process and represented in leadership positions, especially as we experience a decrease in women in this session (down to only 11)**
- **Creating the *Melissa Mark-Viverito Internship Program For Young Women*— a fully-funded salaried initiative that recruits talented young women with an interest in public service careers. The decrease in the number of female members in our institution for the next Council should bother us all and there is no better training ground for women in politics than by working here**
- **Hiring a paid staffer for the Women's Caucus and create a consistent hiring policy for all Caucus staff**
- **Increasing the Council's substantive involvement with the City's overall budget and increasing the accountability of how the Mayor shifts funding on budget lines**

Additionally, the Council has always had a important role in helping

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the Executive branch create its annual budget. I have witnessed the “budget dance” first-hand as a member of Council leadership and the Budget Negotiating Team during the last four years. This institution has an enormous ability to push the Executive on specific issues to ensure sufficient and collaborative funding of critical areas of need.

That tradition should certainly continue and as Speaker, I would work collaboratively with my colleagues to negotiate with the Administration on many issues, including the following:

- **A New Deal for NYC (*See Next Page*)**
- **Infrastructure investment that creates projects for new roads, schools and gas/water lines, overhauling our City’s aging infrastructure and keeping up with our population growth**
- **Expansion of city mentorship program to create new apprenticeship in trade industries**
- **Free SAT Prep courses for all HS juniors**
- **Free tuition for CUNY community colleges**
- **Expansion of Crisis Management System**

A NEW DEAL FOR ALL NEW YORKERS

Walk through any neighborhood plagued with gun violence and you may find a shortage of housing, unkempt buildings, overcrowded public schools or poorly stocked grocery stores. You will probably see police, hear sirens or gun shots. You may even see a young child walking home completely desensitized to their surroundings. To them, healthy food, proper shelter, good schools and adequate healthcare are often out of reach. And to them, this is often the norm.

There is no question that children who grow up in these communities suffer a disproportionate share of deprivation that could follow them throughout their lives. The cyclical pattern of trauma this creates isn't new, especially in communities of more color, and is deeply rooted by significant structural deficits that continue to grow, resulting in strenuous circumstances and sometimes fatal actions. It's no surprise that **gun violence is a public health crisis**, is rampant in these neighborhoods and that crime and violence persist. It's also no surprise that solving these deficits and violence require more than just a Band-Aid, but too often, a Band-Aid is all that some people are willing to give.

Our City needs to reconstruct communities in crisis and a holistic cure is the only answer.

The late President Franklin D. Roosevelt recognized this and the deficits that countless Americans faced during the Great Depression. He fearlessly tackled them just as though "we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe." His programs and policies used a multi-pronged approach which did more than just adjust the economy and create short-term programs. The **New Deal** addressed major injustices faced by our elderly and working class through a variety of programs and initiatives including the Social Security Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act, which are still in effect today.

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It's time our City tackle the social, cultural and structural issues we face today with the same concerted efforts and valor. Unless we wage war against this emergency, communities will continue to be underemployed and disadvantaged, and will foster the environment which most likely leads to an increase in shootings. This does not excuse personal responsibility, but must be discussed and addressed alongside it.

Our City needs a New Deal for All New Yorkers.

One that moves toward an interdisciplinary, multi-pronged approach to violence reduction, starting with providing our youth with the tools they need to reach their highest potential. For many, that means **jobs**. Youth employment opportunities are essential building blocks in the creation of economically healthy communities; they are a form of economic preventative care and without them, too many communities languish.

New York City recently expanded summer youth employment opportunities, but it was nowhere near the levels needed, leaving the vast majority of young people who applied jobless. There are roughly 100,000 young people who want to work and have applied to the city for a youth job. Juxtapose that with the City-funded expansion of the New York Police Department two years ago. \$170 million was allocated to add approximately 1,300 cops on the streets with the goal of lowering crime and shootings, in the same neighborhoods as those unemployed youth with time on their hands. But the role of police is to react to problems, not proactively prevent them.

A **New Deal** would proactively solve problems at their core, instead of retroactively answering a call to help. To do this, we can prioritize and completely fund youth employment, allowing us to say that in addition to an increase in funding for police, 'every kid in New York City who wants a job can have one.' In New York

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City, that would require an additional \$100 million out of the city's \$85.6 billion budget to fully fund jobs for every applicant.

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that the current national black male unemployment rate is 9.5 percent, while the overall unemployment rate hovers around 5%. From 2009-2010, the unemployment rate for young people between the ages of 16 and 24 is roughly 21.5%. The unemployment rate for Black and Latino young people, statistically most likely to be the perpetrator or victims of **handgun violence** in New York City is 46%. NYPD are needed partners in our communities and adding more resources can help. Still, it's not fair to rely on the police alone— we are asking them to do too much. It is not fair to the men and women who risk their lives every day and not fair to the communities they serve.

We won't solve shootings, violence, or our poverty problems and the structural deficits they create, unless the problem is taken out of just the realm of police. Unless we make meaningful investments into programs that solve the problem, we're spinning our wheels or worse; we continue conditions that create animosity toward our police partners instead of partnership. **Providing young people with jobs is one of the most effective ways to offer them constructive opportunities**, avoid troublesome behavior, provide work experience and assist their families.

Based on a recent report by the Center for Urban Future, written by Andrew Sum, Neeta Fogg and Garth Mangum, economic researchers at Northeastern University, the benefits of early employment are considerable and long lasting- particularly for young people who do not plan to immediately attend college. Additionally, a recent University of Chicago controlled study found that young people with jobs - who were also identified as 'disadvantaged' - showed a 43% decrease in violent crime arrests. The impact lasted up to 16 months after the program.

It's clear that if every young person who wanted a job was able to

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have one, we would be one step closer toward combatting chronic issues that plague the same communities generationally. But youth employment is only the beginning of this **New Deal**, which will include a variety of programs and comprehensive efforts so that government can fully equip every community so they become the village to raise a child.

There is a definitive need to expand **new mental health initiatives** in communities of more color, especially since there is still a stigmatization of mental health in these communities. **Free mental health counseling** should become common place in these communities, which have been besieged by gun violence because of this.

Separately, it's clear that some students in these communities have new opportunities to achieve a higher education. Many high school students can't afford the cost to take the **SATs**, much less the cost to take rigorous test prep courses. These students shouldn't be held back because of their financial hardships, and everyone who wants a college education should have one. That's why we should fund free SAT prep classes for every student, and free tuition for students to attend community college.

A New Deal further includes expanding the city's Crisis Management System, which supports conflict mediation, mental health services, mentoring and legal aid through a multi-pronged approach. I am extremely proud to have co-chaired the Council's first-ever Taskforce to Combat Gun Violence with my colleague Council Member Fernando Cabrera of the Bronx. Our work helped launch the Crisis Management and the Council's continued advocacy will help to save more lives.

These ideas are by no means meant to be an exhaustive list of ways to cure communities, but this **New Deal** is a launching platform with the goal to do just that. There's no better time to locally address this issue that has left so many impoverished peo-

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ple believe that the ‘American Dream’ is out of reach. It isn’t, and with collaborative efforts, we can prove it.

In conclusion, I believe that the defining change in our City government’s philosophy towards this issue is to accept that we cannot respond to the problems in these communities with a law enforcement first strategy. We must bring social, educational and employment resources simultaneously. As Speaker, I hope to help usher in a **New Deal** with your help.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

As I've spent the Summer and Fall months engaging in conversations with many of you about becoming Speaker, I listened intently to many of the concerns you expressed about other issues of concern to your constituencies. There were numerous ideas raised about improving our City for All New Yorkers and I am committed to discussing how to make these and other ideas a reality.

- **Taskforce to review NYPD procedures in responding to crisis situations involving the mentally ill**
- **Taskforce to expedite capital construction projects**
- **Creation of a Fair Fare program Metrocard subsidization program**
- **Expansion of farmers markets industry through organizations like Harlem Grown, GrowNYC and Seeds In the Middle, while including easements for upstate farms**
- **Addressing the opioid epidemic, particularly in the Bronx and Staten Island**
- **Pushing for enforcement against auto & tire repair shops that store inventory on sidewalks obstructing pedestrians**
- **Enhancement of the Participatory Budgeting program to include recognition markers for completed projects**
- **Expansion of CitiBike program particularly in underserved communities**
- **Ensure the success of small businesses on Queens Boulevard with the installation of bike lanes**
- **Aggressive SCA capital program that addresses school overcrowding**
- **Aggressive Parks capital program for the creation of more community centers**

TERM LIMITS EXTENSION:

Finally, as a candidate for Speaker of the City Council, I would like to propose the following legislation for your consideration:

Extending term limits for members of the New York City Council from two four-year terms to three four-year terms through referendum vote

I believe that in order to truly strengthen the power of the Legislative branch in our municipality, Council Members should have the opportunity to serve for three terms while the Executive serves for two terms – similar to how the Legislative branch extends beyond the Executive branch at the Federal level (although they aren't currently the best role models).

I can personally testify that Members need at least three potential terms to truly be successful in representing their constituencies. Your first term is really an exercise in learning on the job the nuances of legislative, constituent and budgetary work, as well as finding the right team to assist you. Additionally, the budget and legislative process in the City Council is an arduous lengthy one– you really need 12 years to see major projects through to fruition. I went from having 1-2 bills passed midway through my first term to passing more legislation than any other member, with the exception of the Speaker, at the end of my second term.

Critics may believe that the voters have permanently decided this matter – I would counter that even good ideas need tweaking some time because they have unintended consequences. After nearly two decades, I believe its time to take the issue back to the voters and strengthen term limits.

To that end, I have been actively drafting legislation for several years since testifying before the City Charter Revision Commission in 2010. Additionally, in consultation with several good government groups and many of you, I believe that although the Council may have the

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power to achieve this measure by legislative vote, the matter should be decided again by the voters through referendum.

It is my intention to introduce the legislation very shortly to achieve term-limit expansion and intend to see it passed in the next session with your support.

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Here are a few wise words from someone whom I believe has helped inspire today's generation, myself included, with the hope and *burning* will power to continue to make change in our society.

“I think the overwhelming majority of the American people know that we have got to stand together, that we’re going to grow together, that we’re going to survive together....the cost of college education today is so high that many young people are giving up their dream of going to college, while many others are graduating deeply in debt....Yes, we become stronger when men and women, young and old, gay and straight, native-born and immigrant fight together to create the kind of country we all know we can become....It makes a lot more sense for us to be investing in jobs and education rather than jails and incarceration....Finally, let us understand that when we stand together, we will always win. When men and women stand together for justice, we win. When black, white and Hispanic people stand together for justice, we win.”

I believe that ALL of us together can improve the lives of ALL New Yorkers.....