



**City Council Committees on Economic Development and State and Federal Legislation  
Oversight Hearing on NYC Heliport Operations  
November 29, 2022**

Good morning Chairs Farías and Abreu and members of the committees. I am here today on behalf of Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso and Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine to express their commitment to ridding our city’s skies of non-essential helicopter travel. Helicopters are simply not necessary for either tourism or commuting, and their outsized impacts on noise and air pollution far outweigh any convenience they may provide.

Even according to the helicopter industry, the noise that helicopters generate flying at 500 or even 1,000 feet over the city is well within the range considered dangerous by the Hearing Health Foundation. With thousands of non-essential helicopter trips around NYC every week, it’s no wonder that New Yorkers submitted approximately 26,000 helicopter noise complaints to 311 last year. This noise is disruptive to residents who live along the flight paths – including much of Manhattan and Brooklyn’s waterfronts, as well as North and Central Brooklyn along the JFK routes – and the constant exposure can cause health impacts such as stress and anxiety, in addition to quality-of-life issues.

We appreciate the changes that the City has already implemented on the helicopter tourism industry, such as reducing the number of tourist flights and restricting flight patterns to over the waterways. However, the presence of tourist helicopters along our waterfronts is still extremely disruptive. Among other issues, the noise negatively impacts the experience for residents and tourists enjoying relaxation in our city’s open spaces, especially Riverside Park, Hudson River Park, Battery Park, and Brooklyn Bridge Park, where the noise from tourist helicopters is constant. New Yorkers have invested billions of public dollars into supporting and improving these parks, only to have their enjoyment of them diminished. Meanwhile, flights originating in New Jersey plague Manhattan communities and users of Central Park, and commuter flights to the airports and the Hamptons continue over Prospect Park and Brooklyn’s residential neighborhoods unchecked.

Yet noise pollution is not the only issue, and so proposed regulations to noise levels only address part of the problem. Recent reports indicate that commuter helicopters use about 43-88 gallons of fuel per hour (depending on the model), which is significantly more than what an average car uses per hour. Again, with thousands of non-essential trips every day, the tourist and commuter helicopter industry is a major source of air pollution in our city. Allowing this to continue runs counter to the City’s stated goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% from 2005 levels and developing strategies to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

We are aware that this issue requires a regional solution with many levels of government at the table. The most effective solution would be for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to ban non-essential helicopter travel from NYC's airspace, as outlined in Council Member Brewer's Resolution 291. This would address concerns from NYCEDC that an NYC-only ban will push more traffic to heliports in New Jersey, which have less restrictive regulations. In a letter to us sent earlier this year, NYCEDC President Andrew Kimball outlined the 2016 collaborative effort between NYCEDC, the helicopter industry, the Downtown Manhattan Heliport operator, and tour flight companies, which resulted in updated regulations. They did it before, and they can do it again.

In the meantime, we must work with the tools that we have at our disposal. That is why we support Council Member Restler's Intro 551, which would ban non-essential helicopters from operating at City-owned heliports. For all the reasons outlined, the City should not be supporting this industry in its current form. Notably, the concession license agreements that allow helicopter operators to use the City's heliports do not require a cause for termination.

In conclusion, we don't believe our constituents should have to suffer from noise or air pollution for another day just so tourists can view the city from above (we suggest the Top of the Rock) or so commuters can pay over \$1000 to get to the Hamptons faster. Until such time as the helicopter industry can sufficiently demonstrate that it can operate in a way that does not disrupt residents' quality of life, does not pose a threat to public health, and does not use fossil fuels that result in carbon emissions, we support a ban of non-essential flights from our City's heliports.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. Our offices look forward to working with the Council and any other necessary partners to get to a solution.