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August 25, 2009

Brooklyn Heights Association Statement Before a Public Oversight Hearing of the New York City Council Committee on Transportation Re: Helicopter Safety

My name is Judy Stanton. I am the Executive Director of the Brooklyn Heights Association, New York City's oldest and largest neighborhood association serving the interests and welfare of residents and merchants in Brooklyn Heights.

In speaking on behalf of the Association, I wish to thank the City Council for holding this oversight hearing. I am here to urge the City Council to call for changes in the practices and policies followed by the self regulated helicopter industry which, in our opinion, have contributed to the dangerous level of helicopter traffic above New York City and Brooklyn.

As has been stated by others, the City's attention has again been brought to this issue for a very sad reason: nine people are dead from a mid-air collision that occurred over the Hudson River in an unregulated air corridor where pilots are required to do no more than "see and avoid" each other. Thankfully, such collisions do not happen every day, but that is not reason enough to allow the industry to continue operating with virtually no clear rules for use of the air above a densely populated city like New York. The collision could have been above the East River, or over downtown Brooklyn or Manhattan rooftops. We maintain that there are simply too many flights occurring on an hourly basis every day for honest people to say that the air above New York is safe.

We are alarmed by a statement in an August 11th article of the New York Times which stated that "the Economic Development Corporation has cleared the way for the excursion operators to move from West 30th Street to the Downtown Manhattan Heliport." Is this the administration's answer to the questions being raised about helicopter safety - to transfer the danger from one side of the city to another? Have the residents of Brooklyn Heights not been loud enough, such that our friends on the upper west side were heard but we are to be ignored? I trust that the

elected officials representing neighborhoods along the Hudson had no such intention but we must ask the question, nonetheless. We're not going to solve the problems that exist by moving flights from one river to another.

We call upon the City and the industry to produce the economic data to support the economic benefit claims by the Mayor's office, helicopter industry officials, tourist company operators, and heliport operators that seem to be used to explain the on demand air traffic that amounts to free -for- all above our heads, at distances no greater than a few hundred feet.

On behalf of residents of my community, I would like the City Council to consider these questions:

- 1) Could there be regulations governing how many tour helicopter flights per day are allowed in and out of New York City's heliports?
- 2) Should it be permissible to fly above residences rather than always being required to stay out over the middle of the river,
- 3) How many of the business courier flights per day, into and out of the downtown Manhattan heliport, are really necessary?
- 4) How many media helicopters at one time are needed to cover the same flat tire on the BQE or a construction tie- up on the Brooklyn Bridge? Brooklyn Heights sees and hears this traffic all day long, sometimes as many as seven or eight flights per hour, and we question the necessity of all of it.

Good people know that there is an inherent danger caused by the absence of traffic rules in the New York City airspace below 1000 feet yet, no matter who we complain to, we are told that there is no real jurisdiction. While the FAA decides whether they wish to change any of their rules, we call upon the City Council to use its legislative powers to examine the uses of the City's heliports and, if necessary, take steps to close the City's heliports to all but essential emergency uses until better management of city airspace is in place.

Thank you for your consideration.