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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer on Central Harlem West 130-132nd Street Historic District April 17, 2018

Good morning Chair Srinivasan and Commissioners. On behalf of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer, I thank you for considering the designation of the Central Harlem West 130-132nd Street Historic District, and for the opportunity to testify.

The Borough President wholeheartedly supports the designation of this proposed district, which holds tremendous social, cultural, and political significance in the history of our City and our nation. The approximately 164 buildings in the proposed district serve as visual reminders of the leadership of Harlem's African-American community in effecting social and political change in the 20th Century. Indeed, among the beautiful row houses in the proposed district are several important institutional buildings, including the headquarters for the New Amsterdam Musical Association (the oldest African-American musical association) and the Alpha Physical Culture Club (the first all-black athletic club in the United States). The former Utopian Neighborhood Club House, designed by African-American architect Verner Woodson Tandy, served as the planning headquarters for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963.

In addition, the proposed district also exhibits obvious architectural merit. The largely-intact group of late 19th century buildings tells the story of Harlem's speculative building boom, with row houses built primarily in the Neo-Grec style and including work from architects such as Cleverdon & Putzel, Charles Baxter, and William J. Merritt.

The Central Harlem West 130-132nd Street Historic District would do much to memorialize and protect the multifaceted legacy of Harlem and its outsized effect on the history of New York City and the United States. The Borough President thanks the work of the Commission, and the tireless efforts of Community Board 10 and local advocacy groups like Save Harlem Now! in moving this forward, and she urges that the Commission vote to designate this worthy Historic District.