



Testimony
New York City Council
Committee on Economic Development
Oversight – New York City’s Tourism Economy
Wednesday, October 23rd, 2019

Good morning Chair Vallone and members of the Committee on Economic Development. I am Samara Karasyk, Chief Policy Officer at the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce. The Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce is among the largest and most influential business advocacy organizations in New York, having spent the last hundred years developing and promoting policies that drive economic development and advance its members’ interests. Over the last number of years, we have played a central role in Brooklyn’s tourism economy, convening local institutions and businesses to bring Brooklyn to the forefront of tourism marketing in New York. We have brought groups of hotels and businesses to the International Pow Wow Tourism Conference (IPW) annually. We developed visitor trail guides to chocolate, beer, wine, and distilleries in our borough, and launched our first ever Brooklyn Passport in 2018 – a digital photo guide of 100 things to do and see in the borough.

However, it is incredibly difficult to fund our numerous tourism efforts and market them properly—a reason we were unable to participate IPW last year. Our tourism partners are eager to work with us but are generally small businesses and non-profit organizations that cannot fund large marketing efforts. Nationally, Chambers have shown to be ideal partners for tourism marketing because they know the local community and tourism stakeholders better than anyone else. The New York City Council should encourage a more focused effort and partnership among NYC and Company and the Chambers of Commerce. There must be tourism marketing resources dedicated specifically to the outer boroughs.

The economic importance of tourism in New York City is well documented. In 2018, a record 65M people visited New York City, making it one of the most popular cities to visit in the United States.¹ Many of these visitors flocked to Brooklyn to experience our wonderful cultural institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Academy of Music, and Brooklyn Botanic Garden. People come here to experience our beautiful parks – from Brooklyn Bridge Park to Prospect Park and Coney Island. Brooklyn is also home to major concert and sporting event spaces with Barclays Center, Kings Theatre, and MCU Stadium. Tourists also know Brooklyn as a culinary destination. These visitors patronize our fantastic restaurants, shop at our local stores, and rest their heads at one of our 2,100 hotels ².

¹ NYC & Company. (2019). *NYC & Company: Annual Report 2018-2019*. NYC & Company: Annual Report 2018-2019 (p. 6)

² NYC & Company (2019) *Hotel Development in NYC* (p.1)



Aside from the revenue that tourism creates, this key industry creates local jobs, with 17% of all Brooklyn employment represented by hospitality (accommodation and food service) and retail.³ Since 2010, this sector has grown approximately 73% - adding roughly 20,000 jobs and \$2 billion a year in spending.⁴ In fact, in Brooklyn and Manhattan alone, there has been an 81% increase in employment at museums and cultural institutions over the past 15 years.⁵ The data speaks for itself – tourism puts New Yorkers to work in stable and good paying jobs and is an important revenue driver for our local businesses. It is crucial that the city continue to build on the strong work of NYC & Co. and its local partners to bolster the tourism economy, specifically in the outer boroughs.

We look forward to continuing to work with the City Council on this issue. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

³ Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, *Comprehensive Economic Development Study*, 2018, (p.36)

⁴ Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, *Comprehensive Economic Development Study*, 2018 (p.36)

⁵ Center for an Urban Future (2018). *Destination New York*. (p. 17)