

**Testimony of Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson**  
**New York City Council Committees on Housing and Buildings and**  
**Fire and Emergency Management**

**Fire Safety in Buildings: Two Years After Twin Parks**

**February 29, 2024**

Good morning, I am Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson, and it is an honor to be speaking with you today on such an important topic. I want to thank Chair Sanchez, Chair Ariola, and the members of the Committees on Fire and Emergency Management and Housing and Buildings for convening this hearing to discuss how we as a city can better respond to fires in our city.

Two years ago, in January 2022, we experienced one of the deadliest fires in our city's history with the fire at Twin Parks North West claiming the lives of 17 of our neighbors, 8 of which were children and injuring forty-four others. Working in partnership with my colleagues at all levels of government, non-profit partners, hip hop luminaries, and private partners, our office immediately took action to support our neighbors through the collection and distribution of food, clothes, and hygiene products and helped coordinate with other agencies to ensure that everyone was able to find permanent accommodations.

This fire was an unspeakable tragedy and was a call to action and attention for work to be done to ensure a tragedy of this magnitude never occurs again. This fire and many others have provided insight into where gaps in services exist and opportunities for improving the lives of our residents through public policy. My office has been engaged in this work over the past two years to raise awareness around fire safety education and awareness through Fire Safety Workshops with community-based organizations, NYCHA tenant associations, community boards, and senior centers so that Bronxites can be better informed about how to prevent a fire from occurring in their home.

Over the years, fires in The Bronx have been caused by numerous factors. Happy Land was due to a lack of egress, Prospect Avenue due to a lack of stove covers and unlocked doors, and Twin Parks was a result of two self-closing doors not closing properly and a lack of sufficient heat resulting in tenants using space heaters. In recent years, we have seen an increase in residential and commercial fires due to the charging of lithium-ion batteries. Each cause requires a distinct solution, and the bills put forth by many of our colleagues in government today are seeking to address these issues.

In my Strategic Policy Statement that my office released in 2022, I called for several policy changes that would help prevent and mitigate fires, which includes ensuring there is efficient interagency communication, so we do not further traumatize victims of fires. These bills being considered today, and others recently enacted by the Council, mirror those proposals, including expanding our inspections capacity and capabilities, informing victims of fires of their rights and available resources, and cracking down on negligent landlords.

The work we have done with the Council, as well as the State Legislature, to enact new fire safety legislation has also been critical. The Twin Parks fire was preventable, but a cascading series of failures resulted in tragedy. I was proud to work with Councilman Oswald Feliz in 2022 to introduce legislation strengthening enforcement around self-closing doors. With these bills, and others tackling the root causes of these fires, such as heat provision in apartment buildings and space heater regulations, we are protecting our tenants from harm.

I am proud to lend my support to these bills today as they aim to make an impact on our city's emergency response and save lives. I want to thank all the Council Members who have introduced or co-sponsored legislation around fire safety and addressing this important topic with the seriousness it deserves. I hope that, together, we can tackle the root issues surrounding these fires and build a safer and more sustainable future. I encourage the

Council to support these bills in honor of those who have lost their lives in fires in The Bronx and throughout the City. Let us work together to make sure that these avoidable tragedies are never repeated.