



TESTIMONY OF CANDIS TOLLIVER

On Behalf Of

SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION LOCAL 32BJ

Before

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

On

THE RIGHT TO KNOW ACT

(Intro 182A & 541)

JUNE 29, 2015

With more than 145,000 members, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 32BJ is the largest union of property service workers in the United States. In New York City, we represent over 70,000 workers. We work primarily as cleaners, property maintenance workers, doormen, security officers, window cleaners, building engineers, and school and food service workers. We are a diverse group in every way representing various nationalities, ethnicities and races. Our workers come from all over the city, representing every borough.

We focus our work on making sure our workers, and all low wage workers, receive fair pay and good benefits that bring a good quality of life. Quality of life, however, is not just about the job you have, it's also about living in safe, vibrant communities and being treated with dignity and respect. The Right to Know Act is about raising the quality of life for all New Yorkers. SEIU 32BJ supports this legislation because it helps promote public safety while ensuring that our members, their families and neighbors are treated fairly and respectfully by the New York Police Department (NYPD). This common sense bill -- comprised of the NYPD Identification bill and the Search Consent bill -- increases the accountability of the NYPD and standardizes everyday encounters between police and the community.

Intro 182A or the NYPD Identification bill simply requires officers to identify themselves to the public, and explain the reason for the encounter. Currently, New Yorkers have the right to ask an officer for identifying information but often these requests lead to escalation that is unsafe for citizens and police. This law would change that. By requiring officers to provide this information when they are engaging the public in law enforcement activity, the NYPD would be building better relationships with the communities they serve and honoring their motto of 'Courtesy, Professionalism and Respect'.

Intro 541, the Search Consent bill, will provide New Yorkers with information about their rights regarding searches by law enforcement. We all have a right to privacy and far too often that right is violated by officers when they perform searches without informing people of the right not to be searched. Under current law, New Yorkers can refuse a search when there is no legal justification for the search – but again, that places the entire burden on the citizen to deny an officer that permission. Further, many people have no idea that they even have the right to refuse a search. The search consent bill would shift the burden back to the officer, making sure he/she provides the citizen with information regarding the search and allow the person to make an informed decision regarding that interaction. This law will also help to build trust between police and communities who feel that officers often abuse their authority.

We thank Councilmembers Torres and Reynoso for recognizing the need to address the issue of police encounters and how they affect our communities. Far too often New Yorkers – mostly people of color – have negative, uncomfortable interactions with police. These bills will ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of race, ethnicity or socio-economic status are treated fairly. These bills represent the NY that we all deserve.

Thank you.