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## **Remarks as Prepared: DCWP Commissioner Levine Delivers Remarks at Model Alliance's Fashion Workers Act Anniversary Celebration**

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Good evening!

Thank you, Sara [Ziff], for the warm introduction.

To you and your trailblazing team at Model Alliance: thank you for bringing us together—and for leading the movement that made this gathering possible.

We are here tonight because of your conviction in a simple, though no less powerful ideal: that an industry built on creativity should also be an industry built on fairness, dignity, and accountability for the people that make it possible.

It's a conviction that behind every photo shoot, every ad campaign, and every runway show there are workers who deserve rights and respect. It's a conviction that the fashion industry is not shaped only by designers and brands, by luxury houses and glitzy production studios—but by the workers.

Tonight, as we double down on that conviction, we mark an important milestone: the first anniversary of the Fashion Workers Act.

This is a landmark policy achievement that has strengthened protections and expanded opportunity for thousands of New York City fashion workers—from models to stylists, designers, writers, and content creators.

And it's one piece in a broader, whole-of-government approach to ensure that innovation serves fashion workers, and not the other way around.

The Freelance Isn't Free Act, passed nearly a decade ago, guarantees that independent creatives have the right to be paid on time and in full. Since the law went into effect in 2017, DCWP has closed 4,596 cases and helped Freelancers recover over \$3.5 million dollars.



From the very beginning, the Model Alliance has been one of DCWP's closest allies in empowering independent creatives and informing them of their rights as freelancers. Without this partnership, the Freelance Isn't Free Act wouldn't be what it is today.

Here at DCWP, we are committed to ensuring that creative workers have the tools, protections, and bargaining power they need to thrive.

That is no small thing. Especially at this moment.

Because the truth of the matter is stark: we are living through a period of profound, potentially irrevocable disruption for creative labor.

Let's not mince words: Big Tech is coming for creatives. Not to support fashion workers, or to help them survive in an increasingly brutal economy. But to scrape, harvest, and appropriate their creative work so a handful of giant corporations can get even richer and more powerful.

The tech companies pushing AI down our throats want a flattening of creative output. A fragmentation and mass dulling of the workforce.

They want your art without your consent. Your image without the credit. Your creativity without compensation.

Unfortunately, we've seen this story before. We've watched, time and time again, as multi-million-dollar companies squeeze workers and stiff creators while telling everyone it was simply the price of progress.

The question is whether we are going to let AI oligarchs run roughshod over yet another iconic New York industry—or whether we are going to fight back.

Whether we are going to defend the idea that creative work has value. That fashion workers deserve agency and oversight over what they create. That human expression is not raw material for billion-dollar algorithms.

Well, let me tell you, in this New Era, New York is not going to accept that.

It can be difficult to know where to turn. Where do we go when the tectonic plates undergirding the economy are shifting so rapidly? Where do we find solace amidst this technological sea change?

We find it in each other.



Industries do not change because powerful people wake up one morning and decide to share power—they change when workers organize, when workers refuse to accept that exploitation is simply the cost of doing business.

History is replete with examples: from the garment workers who transformed workplace safety and labor standards in the early twentieth century, to the immigrant textile workers who went on strike for bread and roses, to the models and creative professionals who organized and fought for the Fashion Workers Act that we're celebrating tonight.

Progress in has always flowed along the same path: workers coming together to demand the dignity they have long deserved. The creeping ubiquity of AI in the fashion industry should not change that fact.

Fashion is, at its core, an intrinsically human enterprise. It is human imagination: human expression, human risk-taking, and human craft.

The danger, now, is not the technology itself, per se. The danger is allowing the technology to become a pretext to devalue the workers whose identity and creativity makes that technology worth *anything* in the first place. The danger is a future in which fashion workers lose control and autonomy over their work—in which consent is optional, compensation is an afterthought, and human expression is treated as raw material for corporate profit.

Fortunately, that is not a future we are resigned to capitulate to. Because the future of fashion should not be defined by how *efficiently* corporations can extract value from creative work. It should be defined by how *effectively* we nurture, protect, and reward the people who create it.

A more innovative fashion industry requires more humanity, not less. More creativity, not less. More respect for workers, not less.

That is the tradition the Model Alliance has advanced. That is the promise of the Freelance Isn't Free Act and the Fashion Workers Act. And that is the future we are determined to build—together.

Thank you.