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Remarks as Prepared: DCWP Commissioner Levine Delivers Remarks to Freelancers Union

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Good afternoon, and Happy Ninth Birthday to the Freelance Isn't Free Act!

It is a real pleasure to be here with so many champions for economic justice, including Rafael Espinal, Chi Ossé, and today's esteemed panelists, who fight every single day for a city that working people can afford.

To Andrea and the incredible team at the Freelancers Union: thank you for bringing us together for this important discussion.

Today marks an important milestone for the 1.3 million freelancers who call this city home. Nearly a decade ago, under the stewardship of Brad Lander, New York enacted the trailblazing Freelance Isn't Free Act, legislation enforced by DCWP, the agency I oversee.

Since 2017, DCWP has closed more than 4,300 cases and recovered over \$3.5 million for New York City freelancers.

Tonight's celebration is a reminder that while freelancers work independently, across disparate industries, different job sites, and unique projects — freelancers are not alone. Your solidarity matters.

Last year, more than two dozen freelancers came forward with complaints against Splashlight, a major creative production company working with some of the biggest brands in the world.

Our investigation uncovered a familiar pattern of abuse: contracts ignored, payments delayed for months, freelancers treated like an afterthought. In fact, Splashlight fulfilled fewer than twenty percent of its freelance contracts on time.

So DCWP took action. We secured more than half a million dollars in restitution for 350 freelancers, ensuring that workers who were denied timely payment finally received the compensation they were owed.



The message this case sent — freelance labor is not free labor — comes at a critical moment for the creative industry.

Big Tech is coming for creatives. Not to support artists. Not to help working writers and actors and content creators survive in an increasingly brutal economy. But to scrape, harvest, and appropriate creative work so a handful of giant corporations can get even richer and more powerful.

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

And we've seen this story before. We saw what happened to journalism when tech platforms gutted local newsrooms while monetizing their content. We saw what Uber did to taxi drivers — taking an industry built by workers and destabilizing livelihoods in the name of “innovation.” We've watched platform monopolies squeeze small businesses, workers, and creators while telling everyone it was simply the price of progress.

Well, New York does not have to accept that.

The question is whether we are going to let Big Tech steamroll 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 artists deserve ownership over what they create. That human expression is not raw material for billion-dollar algorithms. That freelancers deserve to be compensated for their work.

So as we celebrate nine years of the Freelance Isn't Free Act, let us remember why we're in this fight and recommit ourselves to the work ahead. Let us continue building a city where creative work is valued, where independent workers are cherished, and where no one has to scrape and claw just to receive what they already earned.

And to every freelancer in this city: If you ever experience violations or suspect wrongdoing, reach out to us at nyc.gov/workers. DCWP will step in.

Thank you.