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Remarks as Prepared: DCWP Commissioner Levine Delivers Remarks at Martin Luther King Jr. Day event at the Brooklyn Academy of Music

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Good morning. I'm Sam Levine, and I'm honored to serve as Commissioner of the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection.

We may be in Brooklyn, but on this day of reverence, my mind goes back to Harlem.

On June 12, 1963, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered an address at City College, just hours after learning that civil right hero Medgar Evers had been murdered in Mississippi.

The nation was in mourning. But Dr. King refused to hopelessly despair. He pierced the fog of complacency with clarity and moral urgency.

"No nation or individual can live alone in the modern world," he said. "We must all learn to live together as brothers, or we will all perish together." More than seventy years later, this message of unity has never been more poignant.

Dr. King was a tireless advocate for economic justice – work that takes cooperation and solidarity, work that can't be accomplished alone.

When he was murdered in Memphis, he was standing with striking sanitation workers demanding dignity on the job, fair pay, and safe conditions. He understood that civil rights without worker rights are hollow promises.

The Poor People's Campaign left an enduring legacy in advancing the dignity of working people – Black workers, immigrant workers, sanitation workers, domestic workers – whose labor built this country while their rights were too frequently denied.

But let us be clear: honoring Dr. King does not mean confining his struggles neatly in the past.



As we speak, masked agents descend into our cities to intimidate immigrant workers. Corporations earning billions of dollars rely on wage theft, exploitation, and fear to boost their bottom lines. And powerful forces continue to weaponize racism to divide workers against one another.

So, we dishonor Dr. King's legacy if we celebrate his words while ignoring the same injustices playing out today.

That is where the work of DCWP comes in. Standing with worker who sound the alarm on injustice. Holding corporations accountable – no matter how wealthy or well-connected they are. Making real the promise that work in this city comes with dignity, safety, and respect.

As Commissioner of DCWP, my mission, alongside Mayor Mamdani, is simple: to fight for workers and enforce the laws that protect you. Not someday. Not symbolically. Every day.

In his speech in Harlem, as he did throughout his life, Dr. King reminded us that change only comes when ordinary people insist on it together.

It's going to take all of us. So, New York: Happy Martin Luther King Jr. Day – and now let's get to work.