

**Testimony of Nicole Doniger, Chief of Staff**  
**Before the New York City Council's Committee on Health, Committee on Parks and**  
**Recreation, and the Committee on Transportation**  
**Oversight: Hart Island**  
**May 30, 2019**

Thank you Speaker Johnson, Chairs Levine and Rodriguez and members of the committees for the opportunity to testify today regarding Hart Island. My name is Nicole Doniger and I am HRA's Chief of Staff.

The New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA)/Department of Social Services (DSS) is the nation's largest social services agency. Each year we assist more than three million New Yorkers through the administration of twelve public assistance programs, including burial assistance. Every day, in all five boroughs, HRA provides essential programs and supports to low-income New Yorkers. We work to ensure that our services and benefits provide low-income New Yorkers the assistance they need, through a wide range of supports, including Cash Assistance and employment services, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/food stamps), Medicaid, eviction prevention and rental assistance. In administering these programs, HRA is at the forefront of this Administration's efforts to combat poverty and address homelessness.

Pursuant to the New York State Social Services Law and established eligibility criteria, HRA provides financial assistance to individuals to help meet funeral expenses. These funds are made available when an indigent resident of New York City dies who may have been in receipt of Supplement Security Income (SSI) or Cash Assistance (CA), or leaves no funds to cover their burial expenses, and there are no Legally-Responsible Relatives (LRR) able to pay such expenses. To access this assistance, the individual making the funeral arrangements can call 311 or find the application on our website.

This assistance is critical to many New Yorkers who lack adequate funds for their loved ones. As such, we are in the process of implementing changes to ensure grieving New Yorkers can easily access this assistance. For example, one barrier was overly burdensome documentation requirements causing applications for burial assistance to be denied. To address this, we will soon be streamlining our application process to reduce the documentation needed and clarify the instances where further documentation would be required.

As we look to the future, HRA will continue to play a significant role in burial assistance in NYC. We are authorized by the State of New York to ensure that the City of New York provides for the burial of the indigent dead. The first step will be releasing a Request for Information (RFI) this fall to collect information about the market for public cemetery corporations. Given the current state of unknowns, we anticipate this burial assistance procurement process to take up to several years with opportunity for input from this body and the public.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to the Committees' questions.