

Testimony of Meera Joshi, NYC Taxi & Limousine Commissioner/Chair

INTRO 171-A, in relation to traffic violations and serious crashes

INTRO 174-A, in relation to the Taxi and Limousine Commission review of crashes

INTRO 272, in relation to the Taxi and Limousine Commission's critical drivers and persistent violators programs

INTRO 276, in relation to a pilot program involving black box or telemetric technology in taxis and street hail liveries

INTRO 277, in relation to the reporting of crash data involving Taxi and Limousine commission licensed vehicles

City Council Transportation Committee

April 30, 2014

Good afternoon, Speaker Mark-Viverito, Chair Rodriguez and members of the City Council. My name is Meera Joshi, and I am Chair of the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC). Thank you for inviting me to participate in today's Transportation Committee hearing. I would especially like to thank Families for Safe Streets and all the family members here today. I cannot imagine the pain of losing a loved one to a tragic and preventable traffic crash. Having the courage to participate in today's hearing, to work toward enacting laws that may spare lives, takes a seemingly impossible level of commitment. As a parent, I am in awe of your fortitude and persistence.

Today, I am here to speak in support of legislation that would increase the TLC's ability to make our streets safer, starting with the drivers and vehicles we license. The legislation before us would amend the City's Administrative Code to strengthen penalties for unsafe driving, require the TLC to review crashes and report crash data to the public, and test new in-vehicles technologies.

Last week I had the opportunity to participate in two Vision Zero town hall events where I heard directly from residents living in Brooklyn and Queens. I would like to thank Speaker Mark-Viverito, Chair Rodriguez, and Council Members who have been

organizing town hall meetings in their districts. We cannot make policy in a vacuum. We need to hear from the community. A real cross-section of residents has participated in the town halls, and their level of engagement is truly impressive and invaluable. We are not done yet. There are many more town halls planned and we will continue to gather input from local experts as we shape our Vision Zero policy agenda.

As you may know, the TLC is the smallest of the three Vision Zero lead agencies, but its role is critical. TLC-licensed drivers cover over two billion miles each year, so in many ways, they set the tone on New York City streets. Although the majority of TLC drivers are safe, there are outliers who are not. My goal is to raise the standards for all TLC-licensed drivers so that the TLC license is synonymous with safety. As an agency, we will do this by instituting effective safe driving education programs, developing pilot programs with an eye toward incorporating in-vehicle technologies that deter unsafe driving patterns, and by incentivizing safe driving, such as creating a driver honor roll. And we are very thankful for our partners in the City Council who are working to pass legislation that will strengthen laws, which will give us more tools to make our streets safer.

Work on many of the initiatives identified in Mayor de Blasio's Vision Zero Action Plan has begun. As Council Member Vacca has recognized with Intro 276, the TLC has a unique opportunity to test in-vehicle technology that could elevate the quality of driving, provide accountability, and ultimately save lives. These technologies may also be attractive to the industry because incorporating them could result in reductions to the high insurance premiums and expenses associated with collisions. We recently released two Requests for Information (RFI) to learn more about black box and anti-speeding technologies. We are currently reviewing responses, and based on this review, will develop the framework for a pilot program.

We are also developing tools that would help make TLC licensees safer drivers. We are finalizing the design of an eye-catching left turn sticker, which will be placed in taxis and for-hire vehicles to remind TLC-licensed drivers to be alert to pedestrians in the crosswalk while making left turns. In addition, we regularly send safety reminders to drivers of yellow and boro taxis while their vehicles are stationary. These include

messages telling drivers to go slow, to be alert for pedestrians at all times and in all places, and in essence, to drive as if their kids lived there.

We recognize the important role education has in changing poor driving habits, and so we are working with DOT and CUNY to add to our curriculum a classroom presentation on dangerous intersections and newly-designed streets. In addition, we intend to require drivers who get in frequent crashes to take behind-the-wheel training courses.

Enforcement is also a key part of TLC's Vision Zero strategy. In recent years, the TLC has significantly increased enforcement against illegal operators. In this calendar year, the TLC has seized over 3,600 cars and over 190 vans operating illegally. In addition, with tremendous assistance from the NYPD, we are forming a safety squad dedicated to catching TLC licensees who speed. This is the first time the TLC has embarked on targeted speed enforcement and we are confident it will go a long way in helping us achieve our safety goals.

Now I would like to talk about five pending bills that support the goals of the Vision Zero Action Plan.

The first item of legislation, Intro 272, amends the TLC Critical Driver and Persistent Violator programs. The Persistent Violator program adds points to a TLC license and the Critical Driver program adds points to a DMV license. Under the current structure, the type of points issued is determined by who is writing the ticket at the time of the violation. Drivers receive DMV points if found guilty for a summons issued by police officers, and they receive TLC points if found guilty for a summons issued by TLC officers. These programs require the TLC to remove drivers from the road who have received either six or ten points on their DMV or TLC license within a 15-month period.

The proposed legislation would do three things. First, it will allow the TLC to weigh DMV points differently than the values issued by the DMV. For example, if a driver is issued a summons by a police officer for reckless driving and is found guilty, the driver would receive five points on his DMV license. We seek to increase this infraction to six TLC points, which would result in driver suspension.

Second, the legislation would give the TLC the ability to restructure how TLC points and DMV points are assessed. Regardless of the type of points a driver receives, we could suspend or revoke the license when the requisite point threshold is met. This would accelerate the process under which the TLC could remove unsafe drivers from the road.

Third, the legislation gives the TLC greater flexibility to suspend. Today, the Administrative Code requires a 30-day suspension at six points. The bill would allow the TLC to seek suspensions of varying lengths, such as a ten-day suspension, with the rationale that not all violations warrant the same penalty. We urge the Council to support this bill and look forward to a continued dialogue with you about the appropriate penalties for safety-related violations.

The next item of legislation, Intro 171-A, is a bill that would make our streets safer. We are pleased that Council has expanded the scope of this legislation. The legislation requires the TLC to quickly suspend a driver involved in a crash in which a person is critically injured or dies, and where the driver receives a summons for any related traffic violation. The legislation further requires revocation of the driver's TLC license if he is convicted of the traffic violation. This is powerful legislation and we thank Council Member Rosenthal for her leadership.

The third item of legislation, Intro 276, calls on the Commission to start a pilot program that tests black box or telemetric technologies for use in a taxi or a street hail livery, and to report on findings from the program. We support the intent of this bill and we have already started the process. We look forward to partnering with City Council and Council Member Vacca as the pilot program progresses.

The fourth item of legislation, Intro 277, requires the TLC to provide information about all crashes involving TLC licensees to the Council and to the public, in particular those involving critical injury or fatality. This bill will improve transparency among city agencies and for the public. We look forward to making this data more readily available.

The last item of legislation, Intro 174-A, would require the TLC to review the results of the police department's investigation of a crash involving a TLC-licensed

driver that resulted in death or critical injury. The purpose of the review is to determine whether the licensee is still fit to hold a TLC license and/or whether enforcement action is warranted. The bill also requires public reporting on this process. We support this bill as it leverages interagency cooperation to get unsafe drivers off the streets and provides the public a clear view into this process.

In closing, I would like to thank everybody who has come out today to move Vision Zero forward: victims' families, passengers, drivers, pedestrians, and members of the taxi and for-hire vehicle industries. Despite our differences, we have united in our common goal of reducing for-hire vehicle related traffic injuries and fatalities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on these five important items of legislation. We look forward to continuing our discussions with the Council on these lifesaving initiatives as the Vision Zero action plan progresses. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.