



**Testimony of Assistant Commissioner Samara Karasyk
City Council Hearing Regarding DRIE Income Eligibility Increase
July 22, 2014**

Good afternoon Chairman Cohen and members of the Committee on Mental Health. I am Samara Karasyk, Assistant Commissioner of External Affairs. With me here today is Sara Meyers, Assistant Commissioner of Tax and Parking Program Operations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the Preconsidered Introduction regarding the Disability Rent Increase Exemption Program or DRIE, which will increase the DRIE income eligibility threshold to \$50,000 with an effective date of July 1, 2014. DRIE and the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption Program, or SCRIE, are hugely important to this Administration and we support this bill wholeheartedly.

Under this Preconsidered Introduction, in order to qualify for DRIE, applicants must have a total household income of \$50,000 or less, live in a rent regulated apartment, spend at least one-third of their income on rent, and receive one of the following disability benefits from the State or Federal government:

- Federal Supplementary Security Income (SSI);
- Federal Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI);
- US Department of Veteran’s Affairs disability pension or compensation that is related to military service or compensation; or,
- Disability-related Medicaid if they have received either SSI or SSDI in the past.

The current DRIE income eligibility threshold is \$20,412 for single households and \$29,484 for households that have two or more people in residence. By increasing the income eligibility to \$50,000, this new law will freeze rent increases for more disabled New Yorkers living in rent regulated apartments. It will also simplify the DRIE application process by applying one income threshold to all types of households, regardless of how many people reside therein. We are pleased that this bill will make it easier for applicants to understand the program’s requirements while benefiting additional New Yorkers.

As you know, SCRIE's income eligibility threshold increased to \$50,000 effective July 1, 2014. That legislation was signed into law prior to the July 1 effective date. The DRIE and SCRIE programs are nearly identical and have the same application process. Having recently passed legislation which increased the SCRIE income threshold to \$50,000, the Council's action on this bill doing the same for DRIE will ensure the programs continue to mirror each other and allow for ease of administration and understanding by the general public.

In the case of the Preconsidered Introduction we are discussing today, we will apply the new DRIE income eligibility threshold retroactively to July 1, 2014 after the law is finalized. This means that if we received someone's application on or after July 1, 2014, and they qualify for the DRIE benefit under the new law but were above the income eligibility threshold previously, we will grant them the benefit after the law goes into effect but it will be retroactive to July 1, 2014.

We expect that the increase to the DRIE and SCRIE income threshold will result in more program participants and are in full support of more New Yorkers having access to these valuable benefits. We are prepared for this change and have the staffing in place to timely process all new applications. We communicate regularly with City Council, community groups and the Mayor's office for People with Disabilities, and we will all be ready to spread the word about the increase to the income threshold for DRIE once the law is enacted. We look forward to collaborating with you and your offices to ensure that we reach every potential DRIE participant. We are planning an extensive SCRIE and DRIE marketing campaign for the fall. We are totally committed to reaching every New Yorker that qualifies for these programs and are hard at work on a new outreach strategy that will accomplish this goal. We will be presenting our DRIE and SCRIE outreach plan to City Council in the autumn.

At this time, we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.