



**NYC City Council Committees on Public Safety & Parks and Recreation
Joint Hearing on Safety in Parks
January 30, 2012
Public Testimony of New Yorkers for Parks**

Good morning. My name is Holly Leicht, and I am Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks, a citywide research and advocacy organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. New Yorkers for Parks has closely followed the issue of safety in parks for decades and played a central role in advocating for the 2005 legislation mandating that the NYPD begin to track crimes in New York City parks.

Many New Yorkers are surprised to learn that until five years ago, crimes in parks weren't reported as occurring in a park; instead, the NYPD tracked them to the nearest street address. Responding to a strong advocacy campaign by New Yorkers for Parks and other groups, the City Council, with strong leadership from Council Member Peter Vallone Jr., and Mayor Bloomberg passed Local Law 114 in 2005, mandating that the seven Major Felony Crime Complaints be tracked in City parks. This legislation marked a first step toward increasing transparency, accountability and public awareness about crimes in parks.

The legislation allowed for a phased implementation, beginning with the city's 20 largest parks. In 2008, the tracking requirement was expanded to 30 parks, and the law called for it to expand to the 100 largest parks one year later, the 200 largest parks two years later, and all parks measuring one acre or greater three years later. The reality has fallen short in two important respects.

Most significantly, no expansion of reporting has taken place since 2008, and the NYPD is still tracking crime in only 30 City parks, reportedly due to technological constraints. With such a limited sampling of parks, it is difficult to accurately analyze crime trends and patterns in parks or draw meaningful conclusions about resource deployment or other safety initiatives.

Secondly, the City does not make the data publicly available. New Yorkers for Parks' website is currently the only place providing the public with the crime data collected on the 30 parks. It is our hope that making this data available to New Yorkers will help them assess the safety of their parks. NY4P will continue to act as a clearinghouse for crime data as it becomes available, updating our website on a quarterly basis as the NYPD releases new data, though its utility is limited until a larger sample size is tracked.

Reporting crimes in all large parks is in everyone's best interest: it will help New Yorkers better understand the reality - or perhaps fallacy - of perceived safety concerns about parks, both generally and specifically, and could lead to a more informed and efficient distribution of police resources. New Yorkers for Parks urges the Council to work with the NYPD to identify the technological issues hindering the full implementation of this mandate, to develop and release a plan and timeline for overcoming these constraints, and to work closely with the NYPD to ensure that the full program is implemented within that revised timeframe.