



**New York City Council Committees on Parks & Recreation and
Fire & Criminal Justice Services
Hearing on Int. No. 134
January 20, 2016
Tupper Thomas, Executive Director**

Good morning, my name is Tupper Thomas, and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. I want to thank the City Council Committees on Parks and Recreation and on Fire and Criminal Justice Services for inviting me to speak on this issue. New Yorkers for Parks does not support the current proposal to transfer the jurisdiction of Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Department of Parks and Recreation. As a final resting place for close to a million New Yorkers, we recognize the critically important need to increase public access to the island, but we have concerns that there are not enough details in the current plan to lay out a reasonable process for converting this land to NYC Parks.

As it stands, the Parks Department has not had the budget needed to adequately maintain its existing citywide network of almost 2,000 parks, and the current conditions on Hart Island would require significant remediation before increased public access could become a reality. The restoration of this land would be prohibitively expensive for a city parks system that is already stretched thin. With conditions on the island ranging from dilapidated structures from the 19th century, to a Cold-War era missile testing site, to the mass graves that are still being actively created, we are concerned that the cost to NYC Parks would be significant. There is also the question of ferry service to and from the island, which is currently outside the realm of service provided by the Parks Department. Additionally, there is the question of how NYC Parks will manage the burials, as that is not currently a task overseen by parks workers.

We recognize the important efforts to increase visibility and access to Hart Island, but we feel that the transfer of the island to the Parks Department is not currently feasible, given the financial constraints facing NYC Parks. As of now, there are too many unanswered questions about the management of this unique space that must be addressed before such a transfer can be made. We do hope that this can be the beginning of productive dialogue toward a meaningful plan for increasing access to Hart Island, and believe there may be alternative ways to improve access that would not necessitate a jurisdictional transfer.

Thank you.

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