

Spoken Comments of Katherine Beltran
The Bronx Defenders – Organizing Project Leader
New York City Council
Meeting of the Committee on Public Safety
June 29, 2015

Good afternoon. My name is Katherine Beltran, and I am on the Leadership Committee of The Bronx Defenders Organizing Project. The Organizing Project is a group of clients, former clients, and community members that organize to reform the criminal justice system. In my role, I lead campaigns and recruit members to build the power of the community in the South Bronx and beyond. I am also a single mom of four. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I hope that my testimony will show you the need and urgency to pass Intro 182 and 541, known as “The Right to Know Act.” This simple legislation can help prevent the unnecessary escalation of tensions during civilian-police encounters like the one I had. My son Lejend was walking home from school one day and stopped by a convenient store. While in the store Lejend noticed a group of young boys running out and he felt something was wrong. He tried to leave but was grabbed and dragged back into the store by a store clerk.

Fortunately a public safety officer from Lejend’s former school recognized Lejend and called me to let me know what was going on. When I arrived, the

officer questioned my parenting skills. I asked the officer for his identity and he replied *“that wasn’t important,”* covered his badge and said I should physically discipline my son and publicly humiliate him, so he wouldn’t do it again. The officer told me that my son *“was a bad seed”* and I felt insulted. This officer had served as the judge and jury of my son even though there was no proof that a crime had been committed. This is an inappropriate way for a police officer to communicate with the people they’re supposed to be serving and protecting. The officer’s behavior led to a breakdown of communication where I felt I could not speak or be heard by the officer. Requiring NYPD officers to identify themselves helps to protect New Yorkers’ basic rights during civilian-police encounters. .

My son Lejend informed me that the officer had his ID and that made me feel uncomfortable and vulnerable. The officer would not identify himself, but now he knew where my son lived and could target him at home or near his school.

Now is the time for the City Council to pass the “Right to Know Act” and help improve communication and increase transparency between police-community interactions. Having access to the identify of an officer is a basic civil right. Thank you.