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**Testimony before the New York City Council Environmental Protection Committee
by *Institute for Urban Design* Executive Director Olympia Kazi**

Friday June 26th, 2009

My name is Olympia Kazi, and I am the executive director of the *Institute for Urban Design*, a nonprofit membership organization of architects, planners and real estate developers. On behalf of the *Institute*, I want to thank the New York City Council Environmental Protection Committee for the opportunity to testify here today.

I am here to give testimony in support of the *Greener, Greater Buildings Plan*. Several initiatives within the proposed bills are timely and relevant. Above all, rethinking New York City's building code is a pressing matter. In the architecture and urban design world, the joke is that building codes are "as good as to keep you out of jail." It is about time that we raise our standards and establish a comprehensive, modern regulatory framework. By making energy efficiency a quantifiable measure for buildings and by setting performance standards, not only will we be taking a great step toward diminishing our carbon emissions, we will also be putting an end to an investment black hole: environmentally unsound buildings are in the long run less cost efficient too.

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As part of our support for these bills, we would like to advance a couple of comments and suggestions.

First: Although it seems to us appropriate to focus on existing buildings first and pursue initially the most cost-effective and doable ideas (as these bills do), we must not lose sight of the bigger picture. It is essential that we work on different fronts and try to develop an array of green initiatives for both existing and future buildings-initatives that need to be aligned across agencies. One example: it is important that we address things that may seem inconsequential but can actually make a great difference-we should make mandatory, for instance, the use of iterating thermostats and light-saving timers in all New York City buildings, and encourage people to get greater understanding of the function of shading devices or of the importance of cross-ventilation. Things like these, which can have a significant impact on quality of life, are hard to quantify and codify, but they must be addressed by your Committee. The Office of Long-term Planning and Sustainability is working a lot on public outreach, but a greater investment on civic education is needed.

Second: No city or building will ever be environmentally efficient unless it is so socially. We urge you to make all the amendments required to ensure that this bill does not become an opportunity for an upward distortion of rents where tenants would bear the costs while landlords would reap the long-term benefits. The Major Capital Improvement Allowance, a measure whereby a building owner who makes capital improvements is allowed to increase the rent pro-rated, should be amended to address this potential problem.

Many say that with the current state of the economy we should not be asking people to change or to invest. We believe that this would be a mistake and a missed opportunity. We believe that now is the moment to plan for the recovery, and we are confident that this Committee will step up to the occasion.

Thank you,

Olympia Kazi