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INTRO 512—Human Rights GOAL

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Good morning. I would first like to thank Councilmember Bill Perkins for sponsoring this historic human rights legislation, and all of the members of the Governmental Operations Committee for inviting me to speak in behalf of **Intro 512**.

I particularly welcome the opportunity to address this legislative body---
...Because you are the ones I've been waiting for! As the founder and director of Betty Powell Associates, a consulting and training firm specializing in multiracial/multicultural organizational development, I've been privileged to assist a broad range of organizations and businesses across this country (and internationally) to become more inclusive and highly functioning diverse institutions. These have included universities and schools, hospitals and other health service providers, law firms, community agencies and religious groups, large and small not-for-profits, state and municipal agencies. For almost twenty years I've been doing this work. Some would say fairly successfully. But, I've yet to be satisfied or convinced that all of the work that I, and legions of colleagues, have put into "diversity" training and coaching, racial and gender justice initiatives, and all of the millions of dollars that have been invested in these endeavors have brought us nearly as far as we could have come, ought to have come, since 1964—and the passage of that landmark piece of legislation.

Whether it was the New York State Department of Education or a St. John's University, New York City law firms or its Health and Hospitals Corporation, we've always found good people only too willing to engage in deep consciousness raising and rigorous self-examination as regards power and privilege, equity imbalances based on race and gender. And on the heels of that would follow institutional analysis and tentative or elaborate plans of action for change. But, always, always, no matter how courageous or progressive the leadership, the staff, the community or congregation, there exists this limitation of assumptions about what [deep social] change really is and can do. Why? Because training and education about power politics and inequity in the workplace in the absence of linkages to concrete policies and deep structural outcomes within the institution, is doomed to relative or absolute failure. People know this intuitively, even when they cannot or dare not speak it.

You, can turn this whole doomsday scenario upside down and right side up again for all those who work for and are served by the municipality of New York City. This legislation, **INTRO 512—The Human Rights In Government Operations Audit Law**, is **the** vehicle to address the connections between individual consciousness, interpersonal dynamics and structural inequality in the form of (often unintentional, but nonetheless damaging) discriminatory policies, practices and procedures. This approach to the problem is not without successful precedent. The city of San Francisco has

preceded you in this bold step, but, you are still the one that we in the Big Apple have been waiting for. Actually, in reality, communities, businesses and organizations across this country are seeking guidance, models, policies and practices which will truly support them in ensuring the inclusion of "...people from diverse cultural, [racial, ethnic] backgrounds and social groups as stakeholders with legitimate claim to a share in the community or institution's mission, work, responsibilities and benefits". Bailey Jackson, University of Massachusetts researcher and scholar, framed that concept as a guide for our justice and diversity work-- in 1968. Poised at the beginning of the 21st century, I hold strongly to the belief that education and awareness training and coaching alone, are not sufficient to achieve this most admirable goal. Despite historic legislation, admirable social advances that have gone before us, and all the diversity training in the world, **Good Governance cannot be blind to the truth** that on a daily basis we are all reminded that racism, sexism, oppression of all forms persists in our communities, in our corporations, in our institutions, and in the day to day workings of every agency of our beloved City. In the case of our culturally complex and very sophisticated metropolis, **political will** must be anchored in place, committed to institutionalizing --not just mechanisms for assessments, but values for us to live by; not just legal redress, but restorative and distributive justice to be transformed by. What this law will do, that goes far beyond the constraints that I've identified in (even the most successful training and education initiatives), is to rupture the structures of racialized patriarchies within all city governance. As opposed to waiting for the "diversity training"—or, at the other end, the lawsuit—to illuminate the unequal relationship that women and Peoples of Color have to power, privilege and possibilities as compared with men or white people, **you** get to say upfront, "We know that. We know that these inequities exist. They are as much a part of our nation's and our City's legacy as "We the People...."

You have before you a very powerful, a very creative tool in **INTRO 512**. With it, your chief legacy to the future could be to move human progress towards equality of opportunity, of privilege and power widely distributed—**to a whole other level**. In place of the endless posing and re-posing of the questions, acknowledging and re-discovering over and over again—the existence of racist and sexist practices and policies in our lived lives—"What we need to do," this law enables you to say, "is to look with unblinking candor, at all our City agencies' programs and policies, employment practices, budget allocations, service delivery, etc., ascertain through audit and analysis, not whether or not, but **how** the racial and gender justice GAPS **show up in our City's work and workplaces**, and then rigorously support, **historically unparalleled, pro-active, structural Solutions!**"

**(It is within this context that the multiple layers of education and training in the valuing of human differences make all the sense in the world.)*

At a recent conference on reparations, one of the speakers observed that, in spite of all the madness that surrounds us, "...There's a new breed of public servant on the Frontlines, today." (re: Office holders Councilmembers Perkins and Brown, and their work on reparations).

But, in my view, this new breed includes all of you. Because in precious few democratic spaces this morning, are elected officials deliberating upon what kind of authentically democratic culture and **all-inclusive** society we want to build, and how to proudly hold government accountable for helping to create it. **INTRO 512** is the history-making tool you have within your grasp to do just that. Victor Hugo once said that there is nothing

more powerful in all the world than an idea whose time has come. “Civil Rights”, as an idea, a vision, a value worked very well for us in the 60’s, and 70’s, and even into the 80’s and the 90’s. **The 21st century belongs to “HUMAN RIGHTS!”**