

**Testimony of Nicholas O'Brien – Director of Public Affairs for the Mayor's Office of Data Analytics and  
Acting Open Platform Officer –  
before the New York City Council – Committee on Technology**

**October 27, 2014**

Good afternoon. My name is Nicholas O'Brien. I am the Director of Public Affairs for the Mayor's Office of Data Analytics and the Acting Open Platform Officer for the City of New York. In my role as the Open Platform Officer, I am responsible for the implementation of Local Law 11 of 2012, the New York City Open Data Law. Here with me is Albert Webber of the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications' Office of Advanced Technologies. The Mayor's Office of Data Analytics is housed within the Mayor's Office of Operations, and works with the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications or DoITT to fulfill the requirements of the Open Data Law. The law has the full support of the administration and we are working tirelessly to ensure it is fully implemented.

The New York City Open Data Law was signed into law on March 7, 2012. The law was the product of a collaborative effort including the City's technology community, the nonprofit sector, the Council, City agencies, and the Mayor's Office. It has served as the basis for a number of other Open Data and Transparency policies and initiatives throughout the country and established New York City as the leader in the field. I'm here today to testify on the progress of the implementation of the Open Data Law and highlight some of the successes we've had since the last hearing on this topic in November of 2013.

The primary vehicle for delivering data to New Yorkers is the Open Data Portal accessible at [nyc.gov/data](http://nyc.gov/data). To date we have released 1,268 unique data sets on the portal, up from 350 in 2011 when the portal was first launched. 99 of those sets have been fully automated and new automations are coming online every month. In July, we released the 2014 edition of the New York City Open Data Plan, which catalogues 345 unreleased datasets covered under the law and their planned release dates. When combined with the 1,268 already released, we have a total of 1,613 data sets which comprises the known universe of Open Data sets maintained by the City of New York. The 2015 edition of the Open Data Plan will be released to the Council on July 15 of 2015. Between now and the release of the 2015 plan we will publish an additional 100 data sets.

In addition to these activities, which are mandated under the law, we are undertaking numerous initiatives beyond what is required by the law to increase transparency and facilitate the use of City data to provide meaningful insight.

Just last week, we launched significant enhancements to the search and browse functionality which Mr. Webber will detail in his testimony. These enhancements were the result of a collaborative process undertaken by the Mayor's Office, DoITT, Open Data advocates and the larger civic tech community.

In August, the Mayor signed two bills into law, Local Laws 37 and 38 of 2014, designed to create a more transparent and effective City government. Local Law 37 requires the Law Department to publish the City Charter, the Administrative Code, and the Rules of the City of New York online and update the compilation of laws within 30 days of any change. Local Law 38 requires the City to post the City Record

online within 24 hours of publication. At a public hearing preceding the signing of those bills, the Mayor also announced an innovative public-private partnership to transform 4,000 publications of the City Record, currently stored in PDFs, into machine readable format to ensure they can be used to understand trends and patterns surrounding City operations.

In September, the Mayor announced the winners of the 5<sup>th</sup> annual New York City BigApps competition. This year's competition, hosted by DoITT and the Economic Development Corporation, was designed to use City data to make New York a better place to live, work, play and learn. The winner of the live category, Heat Seek uses 311 data and thermometers placed in tenant's apartments to help ensure that New Yorker's apartments are kept at or above the minimum temperature during the heating season. BigApps also is a driving force in creating good technology jobs based on Open Data. Two examples, MyCityWay which received \$6 million dollars in venture capital funding and Embark NYC which was acquired by Apple in 2013 are early examples of viable businesses driven by Open Data.

These initiatives are just the latest embodiment of the Mayor's long standing commitment to openness and transparency in government. This administration believes this commitment is essential to creating an equitable City and ensuring every New Yorker is well served by its government.

--

With regards to the data itself, we know the City's data is complex and we provide extensive background information on featured datasets to increase awareness and usability of the most frequently viewed datasets on the portal. We are currently featuring the newly released restaurant inspection data which was never before directly available on the portal. We are also using the Open Data Portal to show visualizations built with public data. These visualizations make the information contained in the portal more accessible as New Yorker's seek to understand their City.

Our work to improve usability and access to City data includes engaging with agencies on an ongoing basis to enhance the public's ability to access, consume, map, and visualize New York City's geographic data. By leveraging the City's GIS expertise, we have enabled users to create different types of maps of more than 165 datasets through the Open Data portal, including hurricane evacuation zones, wifi hotspot locations, parks, and building footprints. This map data is not covered in the law but we feel that it is an important component of Open Data.

--

One of the benefits of Open Data we are working to quantify is the improvement in fulfilling FOIL requests. Last year, the Environmental Control Board, or ECB, received two FOIL requests that they were able to respond to by directing the requestors to the Open Data portal. This not only makes it easier for agencies to respond to requests, it also provides faster, easier, and cheaper access to the data, potentially reducing the need for the public to submit lengthy FOIL requests to gain access to information.

We are also focusing on measuring the economic benefit of Open Data. We are tracking aggregate usage and have begun to catalogue the applications built on top of the data; this is the first step in our effort to rigorously quantify the economic impact of Open Data. These benefits come in many forms, ranging from improving agency efficiency and cost avoidance, to the creation of new jobs and businesses made possible by the release of this data. We are confident that this analysis will demonstrate that the City's investment in Open Data makes economic sense and look forward to presenting the result of this effort the next time we have the opportunity to testify.

I would like to thank the Council Technology Committee for providing me the opportunity to testify today. At this point I'd like to turn it over to Albert Webber from the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications to walk you through some of the finer details of the implementation and the new enhancements we have released in response to feedback from the community. After Mr. Webber's testimony we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.