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October 10, 2007

Chancellor Joel Klein
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Klein:

I am writing to express my opposition to Hunter College's proposal to acquire the Julia Richman Education Complex (JREC) from the New York City Department of Education (DOE).

I want to start by reiterating my strong support for Hunter College and the entire City University of New York (CUNY) system. Hunter's research and training programs have led to discoveries in cancer, drug design, and diagnostic imaging. Hunter is also a national leader in increasing the ethnic diversity of our country's scientific workforce. I understand that in order to remain competitive, and to properly educate and train the leaders and scientists of tomorrow, Hunter and CUNY need to expand and modernize their science education facilities. However, I do not believe the plan that has been proposed to locate these programs on the JREC site serves the long-term interests of DOE, CUNY, or my community.

Over the past year, I have met multiple times with community members, my colleagues in government, Hunter College officials, and officials from the Department of Education. It is only after listening carefully to all of the stakeholders involved and reviewing the facts, that I have come to the conclusion that I cannot support this proposal.

I have already relayed to you that I am gravely concerned about the population growth on the Upper East Side and the resulting overcrowding in our public schools. The loss of JREC would mean the loss of an important public educational facility right in the heart of District 2; a loss we simply cannot bear.

Other neighborhood schools are already operating well over capacity. PS 183, which is literally right down the block from JREC, has a legal capacity of 510 children. Yet, last year, 601 students were enrolled. PS 290, which is about a mile away, operated at approximately 130 % over capacity last year. To make matters worse, development is

continuing at a rapid clip and new large scale buildings are being built up and down the East Side.

In fact, in October of 2005, the Grier Partnership prepared a report for the School Construction Authority and found that District 2 is currently experiencing the greatest increase in elementary and middle school enrollment in the entire city. The report stated that District 2 was expected to gain enrollment growth of 9.1% during the years 2004-2009, and 24.7% in years 2004 to 2014. Nearly 25% in a decade is remarkable and significant growth.

That means that the Department of Education needs to be identifying new locations for schools in our neighborhoods, not giving them away. The DOE recently acknowledged the projected growth in District 2 when it issued an updated Five Year Education Capital Plan. The newly revised plan calls for the addition of 1260 seats in District 2. That means finding locations for 1260 new seats, which is no easy feat in one the hottest real estate markets in the country. So, to my mind, it does not make sense to give away land that we desperately need and could never replace.

I have great respect for Hunter College, its faculty, and students. It is an outstanding institution. And, like the Department of Education, it also has to update its outdated and overcrowded facilities. Its need to build a new state of the art health and science center is a pressing and real one. However, as part of this proposed deal, CUNY would sell its Brookdale campus, which can support nearly 1.2 million square feet of building space as of right under existing zoning, to a private developer. I am afraid that is a shortsighted solution to a long-term problem and represents poor planning by CUNY.

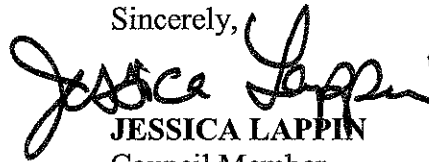
The amount of land available in Manhattan is a finite resource. I would anticipate that as our city's population grows, Hunter and CUNY's needs will continue to grow as well. Enrollment will rise and competition for NIH grants will only intensify. But once it sells this land it is gone forever. Future expansion becomes impossible.

I also have not been convinced that Hunter's new science complex has to be within walking distance of its main campus. While I understand that this would be more convenient for students and faculty, it does not seem to be absolutely necessary. Students can easily shuttle back and forth between the two locations. Plus, the Brookdale campus is geographically close to teaching hospitals and the planned East River Science Park, which would create synergy with a new modern and enlarged CUNY health and science center.

Finally, the community I represent is united in its overwhelming opposition to this proposal. The building that houses JREC contains a 1500 seat auditorium, gymnasiums, and a swimming pool that are open to the public. They are frequently used and beloved by local residents and community organizations. Hundreds of local residents have called me, sent letters or emails, and attended community meetings to voice their passionate opposition to this plan.

I sincerely understand and appreciate Hunter's need to build a new state of the art health and science center, and recognize the important role that Hunter plays in terms of public education and research. However, for the reasons expressed above, I cannot support locating this center at the JREC site. I will do everything in my power to help Hunter College find an alternative site that is appropriate for its mission and I will work closely with parents, students and educators in our Upper East Side community to ensure that our elementary, middle and high school students receive the education they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Lappin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JESSICA LAPPIN

Council Member

5th District - Manhattan