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email: [carib@courierlife.net](mailto:carib@courierlife.net)

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Ejim Dike from Urban Justice (in red) and Councilman Bill Perkins at City Hall rally.

Photo credit: New York Civil Liberties Union

## Human Rights Groups Call For Action, Not Lip Service

The New York Civil Liberties Union and leading city human rights organizations came together on the steps of City Hall Wednesday, Oct. 19 to demand action on Int. 512-A, the Human Rights in Government Operations Audit Law (Human Rights GOAL).

Citing overwhelming evidence of widespread inequality in New York City, the groups demanded that the city's leadership stand up and address the problem with meaningful long-term solutions that move past election season politicking.

Int. 512-A proposes changes to the way the City of New York currently handles discrimination and other human and civil rights issues.

"City administrators have to look for patterns of unequal treatment under the law, and when the data reveal inequality and injustice, city officials have to take steps with community input to put a stop to it," said Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union.

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# NYCLU, human rights groups call for action on local rights legislation

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"The human rights initiative says it's not good enough just to collect the data. The mayor and City Council must pass this bill," Lieberman added.

This legislation would move the city from a passive system that responds to individual complaints of discrimination to a comprehensive and proactive system that involves partnerships between city agencies and community advocates. Thirty-two council members have signed on as sponsors of the bill. If passed, the legislation would require city agencies to conduct periodic reviews of their programs and policies, using data and community input, to ensure that they do not have the effect of being discriminatory. "As we learned from Hurricane Katrina's vastly disproportionate impact on communities whose needs were long ignored by all levels of government, elected officials and policymakers must consider how policies and programs affect all segments of the population," said Cindy Soohoo from Columbia University's Human Rights Institute. Soohoo added: "This is especially true in New York City, where poverty rates and income disparities are among the greatest in the nation."

Participants at the press conference all demanded action to remedy pervasive inequality in the City, including the underemployment of Black youth, the glass ceiling in city managerial positions, voter disenfranchisement in the Asian community, limited access to affordable housing in Latino communities, racial and income disparities in health care, police misconduct against sexual minorities, pervasive residential segregation, underinvestment in low-income and immigrant communities, limited access to transportation and buildings for people with disabilities, and inadequate measures to address hate crimes, racial profiling, and sexual harassment.

"You've heard today about the scope and devastating impact of systemic discrimination in the city, and the inadequacy of the city's approach to addressing these problems," said Council Member Bill Perkins, who first introduced the legislation. "This is why we are calling for immediate action on Int. 512-A, which gives city leaders a bold new tool for tackling deep-rooted problems," the congressman added.

Int. 512-A has the support of former Mayor David Dinkins who, at the first hearing on the bill, urged that the City take



Ejim Dike from Urban Justice (in red) and Councilman Bill Perkins at City Hall rally.

Photo credit: New York Civil Liberties Union

steps to safeguard the rights of the people of our city rather than only seeking remedies once the damage is done.

Other individual supporters include: C. Virginia Fields, Rep. Jerry Nadler, Rep. Major Owens, Ronnie Eldridge, Ruth Messinger, Catherine Abate, Jerry Lopez, and Rev. Dr. James Forbes, Jr.

This legislation was developed by the NYC Human Rights Initiative (NYCHRI), a citywide coalition of over 80 community-

based organizations, service-providers, advocacy groups, policymakers, and labor unions, as well as individual clergy, elected officials and educators. A summary of the legislation, as well as other background and informational materials are available by accessing: [www.nychri.org](http://www.nychri.org) or by calling or emailing Ejim Dike at the Urban Justice Center's Human Rights Project at: (646) 602-5628/(917) 399-6945; or [eddike@urbanjustice.org](mailto:eddike@urbanjustice.org).