

Good morning Chair Westermann, ranking member Melanie Stansbury and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Jaime Williams and I represent the 59th Assembly District in New York State.

Last September, without any input from the surrounding communities, National Parks Service entered into an agreement with New York City to house migrants in tents at Floyd Bennett Field. No thought was put into how it would affect tax paying New Yorkers, who live and work in Marine Park, Mill Basin, Gerritsen Beach, Mill Island, the Rockaways and other parts of the surrounding area. No care was given to the how this would affect our already depleted police precincts; how our transportation would be affected; how the conditions of our park would be affected; what this would do to our local businesses or what an influx of 2000 people meant for residents in the surrounding areas. No one who was making those decisions cared about the answers to those questions.

Over the last nine months we have seen the answers to those questions come to life. We see increased response time to crimes, overcrowded buses where fights break out among the migrants. We see people illegally selling food in our streets with babies strapped to their backs, young school aged children who instead of being in class are sitting on a median or walking in and out of traffic selling chocolate bars. We see migrants begging at our doors and trying our door handles at all hours of the day and night. We have seen migrants attempting to jump in front of cars. Illegal, unlicensed and unregistered scooters zooming in and out of lanes of traffic carelessly. We see residents unable to shop at our local stores without being harassed by the migrants who are aggressively panhandling in our store parking lots. We see our schools inundated by more students, who rarely show up to class on time, disrupting the day for the children who come on time ready to learn.

We have seen the conditions at our park deteriorate with garbage strewn everywhere. Trash going into our waters after “beach” parties. Illegal unregistered cars parked all over our grassland area. We have had fights breaking out, where the security guards are running for their lives. A slashing and a strangulation within the confines of the basecamp. And let me make it clear. These are the events that we know about. Reports from local police officers and park police have stated that the staff at the compound are hiding what is happening in the base camp, often times not calling in criminal activity and are unwilling to allow law enforcement into the tents.

The powers that be knew that this was a recipe for disaster. They knew that putting 2000 people who claimed they were desperate and seeking asylum in a different place of desperation was not going to go well. So what do they do? They act like everything we are saying is exaggerated or tell us that they will “circle back to us” when we have a complaint and are looking for a resolution.

The only thing I can say to those who made this decision is we told you so. We told you that this was no place to house people. We told you that this basecamp would negatively affect the communities and residents. We told you that it would affect our transportation and our quality of life. We told you that housing 2000 people in tents in the middle of a field was a bad idea for everyone.

The National Park Service mission is to “preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.” With garbage strewn about, old cars leaking into our grasslands and dangerous ebikes and scooters carelessly being used in the Park, the agency has failed that mission.

As we near the end of the lease, we again say no more of this. This lease cannot be renewed. We need to restore our National Park, and bring back the quality of life that the residents of the communities I serve deserve.