



# Queens Civic Congress

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## **Testimony to the City Council Parks and Recreation Committee**

on the

### **City's Lifeguards Program**

by

Barbara Larkin, Vice President, Queens Civic Congress and  
President, Belle Harbor Property Owners Association

Thank you, Chairwoman Foster, and members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Queens Civic Congress and my own Belle Harbor Property Owners Association (BHPOA) concerning the City's Lifeguards program. I am Barbara Larkin; I serve not only as a Vice President of the Queens Civic Congress but also as President of the BHPOA. The QCC, an umbrella organization of more than 110 neighborhood based civic organizations representing property owners, and tenants who reside in Queens, the 1300 households in Belle Harbor, a coastal community in the Rockaways, and the residents of our neighboring communities all share an interest ensuring the safety of beachgoers – whether they live near or visit our City beaches. In particular, we advocate for the hundreds of thousands of visitors from other parts of Queens County, as well as other beach-goers who flock to the Rockaway peninsula during the summer months for the sole purpose of having the pleasure of swimming in the ocean along Rockaway's seven mile shoreline.

Last week, while watching Wheel of Fortune which was telecast from Historic Radio City Music Hall in New York City, all contestants, when asked what they enjoyed doing most, stated without hesitation that they loved “going to the beach.” Why? Because of New York's fabulous shoreline – where memorable moments are cherished for a lifetime! Unfortunately, every summer, red flags assault Rockaway residents and visiting beachgoers where they ought to find well-trained lifeguards. In their place, individuals hired by the Department of Parks & Recreation ride along the shore in Urban Vehicles emitting gaseous fumes --- reminding good citizens to either - STAY OUT OF THE WATER because there no lifeguard covers that section of the beach - or to drag all belongings to a “covered” beach? Could the lifeguard shortage be due to less than stellar recruiting practices?

Could the lifeguard shortage exist because of unfair training and testing procedures of lifeguards? Could mediocrity have become an acceptable term at the Department of Parks & Recreation when it comes to beach coverage? As a retired teacher in the NYC School system I can report that when a teacher was not able to report for duty, the NYC Department of Education made certain the class was covered by a substitute.

-over, please -

**Queens Civic Congress testimony: City Lifeguards Program, November 13, 2007, page two of two**

Can you imagine the public outcry if a flag, red or otherwise, was put at the entrance of a classroom indicating no teacher coverage was available for the day – forcing each student to find a seat “in another area of the school? Indeed, with your help, I am certain responsibility will once again reign from Memorial Day through Labor Day when qualified lifeguards will guard every beach in New York City.

As a responsible citizen and community activist for over three decades, I respectfully request that this committee share the following suggestions with the full City Council and press City Hall and the Parks and Recreation Department to support their implementation – all in an effort to ensure adequate lifeguard coverage throughout the summer season:

- Allow hundreds of former lifeguards who are now members of the FDNY, NYPD Dept. of Sanitation, Dept. of Education, as well as other city agencies, to work as lifeguards on a part time basis. This suggestion, alone, would solve the lifeguard shortage.....
- Create a Junior Lifeguard Program which will help train future lifeguards...
- Open more training sites. With a new YMCA slated to open in the near future in the Rockaways, let’s ensure a 6-lane pool is built. Queens (not to mention the city) needs more swimming programs to offer the young people who could be doing these jobs the critical skill to get employed. There exists no reason not to nurture qualified youth who could serve as quality lifeguards without reliance of recruits from abroad...
- Adopt training and testing programs similar to that of the Nation Parks Service. Their system allows for a point system which assists administrators better identify qualified lifeguards...
- Open the doors. If testing is being done in a fair manner, there is no reason why parents/guardians should be shut out of the testing...
- Provide feedback. Pass or fail, everybody should know what skills they need to work on...
- Keep lifeguards close to home to increase likelihood of emergency availability should it become necessary to lengthen the lifeguard’s hours on a day when the ocean is rough, or extreme temperatures dictate beaches should remain open to the public...

Thank you.

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