



**Testimony Before the New York City Council
Committee on Technology
Oversight: The LinkNYC Program
November 15, 2016**

Good afternoon Chair Vacca, members of the Technology Committee and staff. My name is Jarret Hova and I am the Policy Director at Tech:NYC, an industry group that represents technology and startup companies in New York City. Tech:NYC launched in May of this year with the mission of supporting the technology industry in New York. One of our primary objectives is to increase engagement and dialogue between our industry and New York City government.

As part of this process, we hope to work with our more than 300 member companies to help elected officials and policymakers learn more about the technology industry and how we can harness its ingenuity to address the day-to-day issues that impact our city. At the same time, we believe our member companies can learn from the people and policymakers of New York City, especially about how new and innovative ideas can adapt to the challenges presented by a large, diverse, and complicated city.

Our ultimate goal in engaging in this dialogue is to demonstrate that New York City is the best place for technology companies to grow and develop. We believe that New York's unique business ecosystem, as a global center for so many industries such as finance, media, fashion, art, and real estate, will serve to strengthen the technology businesses that call New York home; and that in turn, technology will further strengthen those incumbent industries and the City at large.

We are here today to speak in support of LinkNYC, a first-of-its-kind program that gives New Yorkers access to ultra-fast public Wi-Fi while also connecting users to a host of other services including calling anywhere in the U.S., accessing maps and City services, or charging their cell phones. From our perspective, the LinkNYC program exemplifies the value of the dialogue between technology and government that I referenced earlier, in which both sides benefit from working with the other. As many know, there were some issues with the program upon rollout, which is to be expected -- especially when a civic project is the first of its kind and so large in its undertaking. But we think this is part of the inevitable learning process that results from these partnerships, and ultimately LinkNYC will provide a significant benefit for all New Yorkers.

This is because LinkNYC achieves two very important objectives: first, it makes Wi-Fi accessible in literally thousands of locations and therefore helps to bridge the digital divide; and second, it demonstrates New York City's forward thinking when it comes to municipal technology policy.

From the perspective of our organization, addressing the digital divide is of paramount importance. As a greater part of our lives revolve around access to broadband, the value of access to Wi-Fi grows. This is especially true for children as more tools for learning and growth are found through digital means. For this reason, our organization and several of our members have been frontline supporters of the City's CS4All initiative, a program that aims to bring computer science education to every school in New York City in the next decade. We believe technology education will only grow in importance in the future economy and it is therefore essential to provide this type of education for the children of New York City.

In this context, we can see the value of LinkNYC delivering high-quality Wi-Fi free of charge. Each LinkNYC kiosk can support hundreds of Wi-Fi users simultaneously within a range of 150-250 feet. And the actual internet service is of high quality, delivering speeds up to 100 times faster than the internet that most New Yorkers pay for in their homes. In order to deliver this high-quality internet service, hundreds of miles of new fiber optic cable is being installed throughout the city.

Perhaps most notably, LinkNYC will not cost users or City taxpayers any money. Apart from the actual access to Wi-Fi, LinkNYC promises to deliver several other local benefits. Five percent of the advertising generated by the system is dedicated to City agencies for public service initiatives, including space reserved for Community Boards. And the advertising can be specially programmed to support small, local businesses in neighborhoods throughout the City. The LinkNYC program will also be a source of employment for New Yorkers as the program is expected to create up to 800 jobs in New York City. And, we've already observed the LinkNYC system as a tool for civic engagement as it allowed people to register to vote and provided polling location information in the lead-up to Election Day.

Beyond these very worthwhile local benefits, LinkNYC increases New York's profile as a city that embraces technology and solidifies its place as one of the primary tech hubs in the United States. From the perspective of Tech:NYC, this is no small feat and, in fact, one of LinkNYC's greatest promises. The fact is that jobs in technology are vitally important for New York's continued economic health. Recent statistics indicate that the

average annual salary for New York City-based workers in the technology industry was \$118,000, compared to an average of \$79,000 for all other private sector jobs in New York City and \$65,000 for all industries excluding the securities industry. In New York City, employment in the technology industry after the Great Recession grew at four times the rate of the rest of the economy, and overall employment in tech industry jobs increased 71 percent between 2004 and 2014. We cannot emphasize the point enough: when technology companies decide where to set up shop, programs like LinkNYC matter because they demonstrate that New York City takes technology seriously and will be a partner to the industry.

In conclusion, we believe that the LinkNYC program will deliver enormous benefits to the residents of New York while elevating the city's profile as a preeminent place for technology. We look forward to the continued expansion of the program and offer our assistance to help ensure it is as successful as possible.