



May 7, 2008

The Honorable Christine C. Quinn
Speaker
The New York City Council
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Dear Speaker Quinn:

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) represents the professional interests of America's architects. As AIA members, more than 83,000 licensed architects and allied design professionals express their commitment to excellence in design and livability in our nation's buildings and cities. Members adhere to a code of ethics and professional conduct that assures the client, the public, and colleagues of an AIA member architect's dedication to the highest standards in professional practice.

On behalf of the AIA and its members, I strongly urge you and your fellow councilmembers to retain the requirement that the New York City Buildings Commissioner be a registered architect or a licensed professional engineer.

Professional architects and engineers possess an unmatched combination of education, on-the-job training, licensure, and professional experience that makes them uniquely qualified to ensure the safety and security of the public. Professional architects and engineers understand the integration of structural, technological and life safety elements into buildings to assure their usefulness. Through their training and practice, they are capable of balancing the requirements of building codes with the goals of historic preservation, energy efficiency, sustainability and accessibility.

Today New York is undergoing the largest construction boom since the city's founding, featuring buildings that push the boundaries of technology and design. From the new Bank of America Tower at One Bryant Park – one of the most environmentally advanced green skyscrapers in the world - to the towers at the World Trade Center site, New York's buildings are being designed to be more productive, healthy, safe and energy efficient than ever before. As a result, these structures are more complex than ever before. The Department of Buildings needs to be at least as knowledgeable about buildings as the private sector that is designing and constructing them.

We fully agree that the Building Commissioner must possess the extraordinary management capabilities necessary to run a massive department and oversee staff, budgets and projects in ways that maintain the confidence of the public. The health and safety of the general public and those who build buildings must always be the top priority of the Commissioner.

At the same time, the people of New York City need to be assured that the individual in charge of ensuring the safety of their buildings is eminently qualified to understand how structures work. It is essential that the Commissioner has the highest degree of knowledge and experience in building safety, an attribute that professional architects and engineers earn through extensive education, training and licensure. We believe, therefore, that the Buildings Commissioner must possess a combination of both management experience and the skills that come with being a licensed architect or engineer.

As you are well aware, New York City is not just any city – it is an international symbol of the vibrancy, innovation and aspirations of the American people. Its skyline is known and revered around the globe, drawing entrepreneurs, leaders, visitors and visionaries to its five boroughs.

In order for New York to remain a global leader and a truly international city, it must remain at the vanguard of building design and construction. This demands that the next Buildings Commissioner have the education, training and experience that by definition professional architects and engineers possess.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine W. McEntee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Christine W. McEntee
Executive Vice President/Chief Executive Officer

cc: The Honorable Simcha Felder, Chair, Committee on Government Operations
Rick Bell, FAIA, Executive Director, AIA-New York