Testimony of

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before the

New York City Council Committee on Technology

Oversight Hearing on

311 Data Use and Collection

Good afternoon. I am Dominic Mauro, Staff Attorney of Reinvent Albany, a non-profit group which advocates for open and efficient New York State government and which co-Chairs the New York City Transparency Working Group. In that role we worked closely with Council, the Mayor's Office and DOITT to win passage of the NYC Open Data Law. We work with both city and state government to promote the use of everyday technology to make government more transparent and accountable.

We have strongly supported the NYC Open Data Law, which has opened up vast expanses of valuable government information to the public. One of the most important data sets on the Open Data Portal is 311 service request data. Publishing that data in an open format has opened a massive wealth of information about what services the people of New York are asking their government to provide. However, while very useful, 311 data does not show the public how their government responded to their service request. There is no "end to end" reporting on what exactly an agency did.

That data, which would shed a light on agency performance, and vastly increase public accountability, is currently only available to the Mayor's operations staff in the city's Databridge system. While we understand that this hearing is about 311 data, we think the intent of hearing is to help the Technology Committee and Council understand what the city is doing to be more transparent about how it responds to 311 requests – service requests in particular.

The reality is that without the data in DataBridge, the public does not have a very good idea of how City agencies respond to 311 requests. All we can see is the request, not the service provided.

The basic idea behind the Open Data Law was to get the greatest value from the data that the city already spends enormous sums collecting and compiling. The idea is that tax payers get a better value for the money they have invested in creating data, when that data is used by other parts of government, academics, advocates, journalists and businesses.

DataBridge is essentially the half of 311 that is missing from public view. Without it, 311 data is worth much, much less to the public – and to government. (We still live in an era in which government agencies FOIL each other for basic information. We need to progress beyond that.)

We estimate it would cost approximately $5 million for the city or its contractor, Accenture, to publish Databridge data in an open data format. This cost is a tiny percentage of the expense of gathering that data and collating it in Databridge. Yet, it is an investment which offers a huge return by allowing the public, elected officials, and agency staff to use the same operational data used by the Mayor's Office of Operations.

Problems with service delivery can be spotlighted and resolved in public view – a revolutionary idea, but one which could transform service delivery and create an unprecedented level of government accountability. It would be a boon to agencies, City Hall, and City Council to have innumerable experts in different fields providing what would essentially be free data analysis for government from public sources.

New York City should not have a two-tiered system with public data sets for the public to use, and private data sets for internal use only. To realize the maximum value of this data, it needs to be shared with the public.

The comprehensive agency data the city has access to via its DataBridge data management system is among the most valuable the city has. Our understanding is that only a small portion of 311 data is unreleasable due to privacy or security concerns, and the bulk is high-quality public data about

how agencies respond to 311 requests. Most of the data about 311 service requests does not affect security or impinge on individual privacy.

311 data without Databridge tells New Yorkers half the story. Let's get DataBridge data in the Open Data Portal, and launch a new era in public data, service delivery, transparency and accountability.

Thank you,

Dominic Mauro