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Contact: Stephanie Hoo (212) 669-3747

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**LIU: TIME TO BRING CLOSURE TO TRAGIC
AND COSTLY ‘CENTRAL PARK FIVE’ CASE**
Comptroller Offers Own Office to Settle \$250 Million Civil-Rights Suit

NEW YORK, N.Y. – Citing the decade-long litigation that has resulted in escalating legal fees and tied up valuable City resources, City Comptroller John C. Liu today called for the New York City Law Department and the lawyers representing the “Central Park Five” in their \$250 million civil-rights lawsuit to break their stalemate and conclude a settlement as soon as possible.

At a press conference in Harlem, Liu offered the legal expertise of his office and the around-the-clock use of his boardroom to help the parties to come together and work out a settlement for the five young men, who were wrongfully sent to prison for an April 1989 crime.

Following are Comptroller Liu’s remarks, as prepared for delivery:

“Nineteen Eighty-Nine was a painful period in New York City’s history. That year, the City recorded nearly 2,000 murders, countless other violent crimes, and was suffering the devastating effects of a national crack epidemic.

“On April 19th of that year, a 28-year-old female jogger was brutally attacked and raped in Central Park. Almost immediately after this heinous crime, police investigations began to focus on a group of five African American and Latino youths, aged 14 to 16, who came to be known as the ‘Central Park Five.’

“Following lengthy interrogations, the five teenagers – Yusef Salaam, Kevin Richardson, Antron McCray, Raymond Santana, and Korey Wise – confessed to the crime. The following year, the five were convicted and sentenced to terms ranging from 5 to 15 years.

“In early 2002, Matias Reyes, a convicted murderer and rapist, confessed that he alone was responsible for the attack on the Central Park jogger. On December 19, 2002, on the recommendation of Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau, the five convictions were vacated by Justice Charles Tejada.

“Since 2003, the ‘Central Park Five’ and the New York City Law Department have been engaged in complex and costly litigation that has yet to be settled. As of now, multiple causes of actions are pending in this federal case, including malicious prosecution, racial discrimination, and lack of due process.

“Both as a New Yorker and as the Comptroller, I am deeply troubled by the fact that this civil-rights case remains unresolved more than a decade after these convictions were vacated and nearly a quarter of a century after the occurrence of the crime that another individual has confessed to committing. These five kids may not have been angels, but that does not change the fact that they were imprisoned for a crime perpetrated by another person. Collectively, they spent more than 30 years in prison. While no monetary award could fully repay them for this imprisonment, the City must make an effort to correct this tremendous injustice, which robbed them of their youth.

“Their imprisonment also wreaked havoc on their families. Parents not only lost their sons to prison, but also had to live through the indignity of having their children compared to vicious animals, as the press labeled them with such racially charged expressions as ‘wilding’ and ‘wolf pack.’ They endured multiple trials: first by the tabloid media, which jumped to judgment, and then by prosecutors, who screened what later proved to be false confessions in the courtroom.

“The Comptroller’s Office has the authority and extensive experience settling claims before litigation and approving settlements proposed by the Law Department post-litigation. Last fiscal year, the City paid out \$550.4 million for the settlement of claims and payments of judgments; \$185.6 million of which were against the NYPD and an additional \$84 million of which involved a variety of civil-rights violations.

“As the financial steward of the City, my goal is to ensure that we strike a delicate balance between making those with meritorious claims whole while minimizing taxpayer costs. In the case of the ‘Central Park Five,’ I am extremely concerned that the longer we wait, the more the legal bills mount, and more valuable City resources are claimed. When the City loses a case, it is often required to cover all of the plaintiff’s legal expenses. While each case is different, based on our best estimates, a decade or more of legal fees for five plaintiffs could easily be in the seven or eight digits and this amount increases with every day that passes.

“Moreover, in many instances, the inability to arrive at a negotiated settlement, before a judge or jury renders a verdict, means higher costs for taxpayers. So I am urging the Law Department and the plaintiffs to sit down and negotiate immediately. Those involved need to contain the strong emotions engendered by this case and engage in meaningful discussions. All parties must come to the table – now. I will even provide the table; the Law Department and plaintiffs’ attorneys are welcome to use our boardroom around the clock until they reach a settlement.

“Again, my office stands ready to facilitate this process in any way. Enough is enough. The time has come for the City and these men and their families to put this behind them and heal.

“This troubling case has spanned the administrations of four Mayors – Edward Koch, David Dinkins, Rudolph Giuliani, and now Michael Bloomberg. In the last year of his third term, Mayor Bloomberg has an historic opportunity to provide closure to all those involved.

“Let’s hope that 2013 is the year when all parties help close this terrible chapter in our City’s history, so that New Yorkers can finally put an end to the tragic ‘Central Park Five’ saga.”

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