**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Lenni Benson, Professor of Law and Executive Director of Safe Passage Project, testifies in front of New York City Council**

NEW YORK – On June 27, 2016, Lenni Benson, professor of law at New York Law School and Executive Director of the Safe Passage Project, testified in front of the New York City Council in support of two pending resolutions: Resolution 1105, seeking to support the admission of Syrian refugees, and Resolution 1097, seeking Congressional improvements to the “U Visa Status.”

Regarding Resolution 1105, Professor Benson supported expanding protections for Syrian refugees, citing that state and local communities and Refugee Resettlement Agencies are better prepared to provide coordinated services when people are admitted through the formal refugee process. She discussed how communities throughout New York State have been enriched by the arrival of refugee communities both economically and culturally.

Also in support of Resolution 1105, Professor Benson urged the New York City Council to go further in addressing the needs of other refugee communities, namely unaccompanied minors, citing the New York City council and government’s leadership in funding nonprofits to aid this community. In October of 2014 the federal government announced the creation of the overseas Central American Minors Program that authorizes the grant of refugee status inside Guatemala, Honduras, or El Salvador for children who have a parent residing with a form of legal status within the United States. The federal government asked the Refugee Resettlement Agencies to process the preliminary applications of the parents for the children, however these agencies were not given any additional funding to handle the processing of the documents. To address the needs of this population, Professor Benson urged the City Council to amend its current resolution or to consider adopting an additional resolution calling for robust funding of the Central American refugee processing and to dramatically increase the admission of refugees from the region. These admissions through the refugee system will allow New York State and New York City government to better prepare for the resettlement of the populations and to receive small amounts of federal assistance to help face potential special funding demands on schools or communities of resettlement

Professor Benson asked the New York City Council to continue supporting the Immigrant Children’s Advocates Relief Effort by funding legal services and coordinating other city agencies to provide integration support to address the needs of immigrant city children.

Finally, Professor Benson urged the New York City Council to expand Temporary Protected Status to include Guatemala, citing that, especially in times of great turmoil and government instability, this solution may be both legal necessary and essential to humanitarian protection.

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*Safe Passage Project, a registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit housed at New York Law School, was created to address the unmet legal needs of indigent immigrant youth living in New York by providing them with basic legal advice and immigration assistance. Safe Passage Project works with volunteer attorneys to provide free representation to children in immigration court. Safe Passage Project provides training, resources, and mentoring to volunteer attorneys on immigration law and procedure.*

*To learn more, visit www.safepassageproject.org.*