



March 13, 2019

AIA New York Statement on Final Inspections

In August 2018, the NYC Department of Buildings (DOB) issued Bulletin 2018-008, which required that an architect or engineer perform final inspections for significant amounts of work, a service formerly performed by DOB inspectors. AIA New York has given the repercussions of this bulletin time to be felt, and our initial fears about it seem justified.

The privatization of building inspections and other duties of DOB represents a threat to public safety. Lapses in judgement or bad decisions can occur in design as in any other field. Limiting inspections by DOB, even in work that does not affect egress or occupancy, can put members of the public in serious physical danger. Final inspections provide another set of eyes to examine work. Without these, some mistakes may not be caught, threatening the safety of building users.

Removing the option of having final inspections performed by DOB inspectors is also an equity issue. Final inspections protect rent-regulated tenants from abuses by owners, especially in cases where work is self-certified. Furthermore, the firms most heavily affected by this bulletin tend to be smaller firms who can face pressure from owners to both act as the architect of record and perform the final inspection on the same work. This creates a liability concern, falling hardest on those firms who can least afford these risks.

The Directive 14 of 1975 (D14) program, which this bulletin would make mandatory for a significant amount of work, was instituted at a very different time for New York City. In 1975, the City was on the brink of bankruptcy, forcing essential services like building inspections to be cut. Today, the City is in far better financial shape. When essential services are cut, the most vulnerable, such as rent-regulated tenants, are more likely to suffer.

We hope that the new DOB Commissioner, whoever that may be, will rescind the bulletin. AIANY understands the budgetary concerns within DOB, and the desire to expedite processes. However, when privatization sacrifices safety and equity, we will oppose it.

Sincerely,

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