

# Senators Serrano and Perkins Hold Public Hearing to Discuss Protections for Historic Harlem African Burial Ground

[JOSÉ M. SERRANO \(/SENATORS/JOSE-M-SERRANO\)](#) March 19, 2010



Senators José M. Serrano (D-Manhattan/Bronx) and Bill Perkins (D- Harlem) today held a public hearing to examine the impact pending public construction projects will have on what was once a colonial-era burial ground for African slaves and free blacks.

The burial ground was located where the MTA's 126th Street Bus Depot in East Harlem now stands, and occupied a quarter acre lot on the original Elmendorf Dutch Reformed Church grounds, on First Avenue between 126th and 127th Streets. Many community leaders fear the historic burial ground might be lost or defiled due to ongoing work expanding the Willis Avenue bridge and a plan, to begin in 2015, to entirely rebuild the bus facility.

This is the second time in New York City that an African Burial Ground has been discovered during construction. In 1991, while excavating the foundation for the Ted Weiss Federal Building at 290 Broadway, workers discovered the remains of 400 slaves and free Africans in what was once an African Burial Ground. Finally in 2005, it was memorialized as the African Burial Ground National Monument.

"We are doing everything we can to ensure that what occurred at the Federal Building downtown- where people waited for years without getting any results from the government that was in place to serve them- does not occur at the African Burial Ground in Harlem," said Senator Serrano, who Chairs the Senate Committee on Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation. "I strongly

