



THE COUNCIL  
OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
CITY HALL  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

CHRISTINE C. QUINN  
SPEAKER

TELEPHONE  
212-788-7210

January 12, 2009

Christopher Coates  
Chief, Voting Section  
Civil Rights Division, Room 7254 – NWB  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530

Re: A Local Law to Amend the New York City Charter in Relation to Term Limits

Dear Mr. Coates:

We write in support of the City of New York's section 5 preclearance submission for Local Law 51 of 2008, which would change the City's term limits law to render incumbent elected officials ineligible to be reelected after three, rather than two, full consecutive terms. We voted in support of Local Law 51 because we believe that it is in the best interests of the diverse communities that we represent.<sup>1</sup> As explained below, in our view, Local Law 51 is consistent with the goals of the Voting Rights Act and should be approved for preclearance.

First, Local Law 51 enhances voters' opportunities to support and elect the candidates of their choice. Many of these potential candidates are incumbents who are from ethnic and racial groups that have been historically underrepresented in our country and city. Re-election of these incumbents – if they are the choice of the voters – is fully consistent with the Voting Rights Act.

Second, our city presently faces enormous challenges relating to the economic crisis gripping our country. As in earlier crises weathered by the City, we can expect that many of our diverse constituent communities will be hit particularly hard by the downturn in the economy. It is imperative that voters who believe that these difficult times demand experienced leadership have the opportunity to choose that experience; those voters who believe a change of leadership is most important should likewise have their choice.

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<sup>1</sup> Thirteen of the signatories to this letter are African-American or Latino Council Members.

Third, many of us have long been concerned about the effect of term limits upon African-American and Latino communities, whose leaders have only recently attained the rightful seniority and influence that other communities attained many decades ago.

In closing, we want to respond to concerns that have been raised about the fact that Local Law 51 was accomplished by legislation rather than by referendum. We respectfully submit that the means by which Local Law 51 was enacted is not relevant to a determination of whether preclearance is appropriate. In enacting Local Law 51, we did what legislative bodies do: we passed legislation we believe to be in the best interest of the City as a whole and our constituents in particular. It is also important to note what we did not do: we did not vote to extend our terms or to redraw district lines that have already been precleared under the Voting Rights Act; we merely added to the choices that voters will have on the primary and general election ballots.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, we encourage the Department of Justice to preclear Local Law 51 as soon as possible.

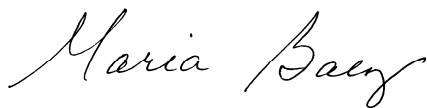
Sincerely,



Christine C. Quinn  
Speaker



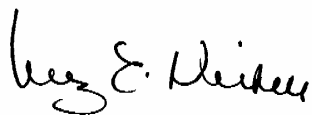
Maria del Carmen Arroyo  
Council Member, District 17



Maria Báez  
Council Member, District 14



Leroy Comrie  
Council Member, District 27



Inez Dickens  
Council Member, District 9



Erik Martin Dilan  
Council Member, District 37

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<sup>2</sup> Support for Local Law 51 was not limited to officials in their second term of office who would be immediately affected by its enactment. For example, three of the signatories to this letter were eligible to seek reelection without a change to term limits and voted in favor of the legislation.



Simcha Felder  
Council Member, District 44



Lewis Fidler  
Council Member, District 46




Helen Foster  
Council Member, District 16



Robert Jackson  
Council Member, District 7



Melinda Katz  
Council Member, District 29



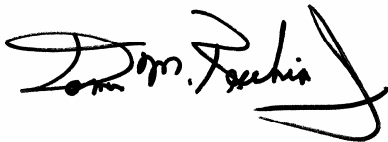
G. Oliver Koppell  
Council Member, District 11



Miguel Martinez  
Council Member, District 10



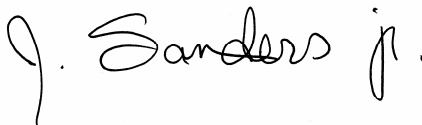
Michael Nelson  
Council Member, District 48



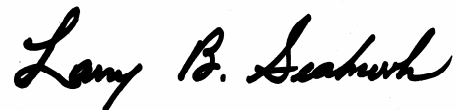
Domenic Recchia, Jr.  
Council Member, District 47



Joel Rivera  
Council Member, District 15



James Sanders, Jr.  
Council Member, District 31



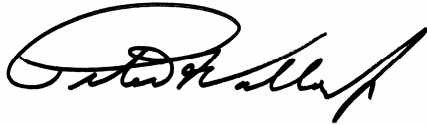
Larry Seabrook  
Council Member, District 12



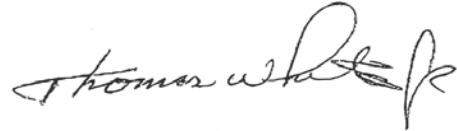
Helen Sears  
Council Member, District 25



Kendall Stewart  
Council Member, District 45



Peter Vallone, Jr.  
Council Member, District 22



Thomas White, Jr.  
Council Member, District 28