

**The New York City Charter Revision Commission Public
Hearing**

Moderated by Sharon Greenberger

Monday, May 19, 2025

5:20 p.m.

Medgar Evers College

1650 Bedford Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11225

Reported by: Chanyri Moh

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A P P E A R A N C E S

List of Attendees:

Sharon Greenberger, Chair

Anthony Richardson, Commissioner

Carl Weisbrod, Commissioner

Grace Bonilla, Commissioner

Anita Laremont, Commissioner

Leila Bozorg, Secretary

Valerie White, Commissioner

Diane Savino, Commissioner

Kathryn S. Wylde, Commissioner

Lisette Nieves, Commissioner

Julie Samuels, Commissioner

Maddie Labadie

Vishnu Reddy (by videoconference)

Sean Scott (by videoconference)

Sherease Torain (by videoconference)

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Hello.

3 Thank you for the call and response. And thank you
4 for coming out on this glorious day. Welcome to this
5 Public Hearing of the Charter Revision Commission. My
6 name is Sharon Greenberger, and I'm honored to serve
7 as vice chair of this Commission.

8 As New York City celebrates its 400th
9 anniversary, this is a fitting moment to take a fresh
10 look at our city's governing charter. How can we
11 ensure that New York City remains a cradle of
12 opportunity? How can we revise the charter to make it
13 a more effective tool for building the more inclusive
14 and affordable city that New Yorkers deserve?

15 It is this Commission's responsibility
16 to review the entire charter and suggest changes for
17 the voters' consideration. Only if the voters agree
18 to those changes at an election will any changes to
19 the charter go into effect. I know that I speak for
20 my fellow commissioners when I say that we are
21 committed to hearing from a broad spectrum of New
22 Yorkers and to pursuing the best ideas we can find.

23 This hearing is just one of many public
24 hearings across every borough to hear ideas from
25 experts, community leaders, elected officials, and

1 indeed any member of the public who wishes to testify.
2 Importantly, this is an independent commission. In
3 making our recommendations to the city voters, we are
4 bound only by our judgment and our values. We will
5 pursue ideas regardless of who proposed them and
6 regardless of who supports them.

7 Joining me in this task are 12 other
8 commissioners, some of whom are attending today's
9 hearing virtually. Chair Richard Buery, who,
10 unfortunately, is not able to attend today's meeting.
11 Secretary Leila Bozorg, Grace Bonilla, Shams DaBaron,
12 Anita Laremont, Dr. Lisette Nieves, Anthony
13 Richardson, Julie Samuels, Diane Savino, Carl
14 Weisbrod, Valerie White, and Kathryn Wylde.

15 Although, as I said, we will be
16 considering the entire charter. The Commission is
17 looking in particular at our charter's approach to
18 housing and planning. From my perspective, there is
19 no more urgent challenge for this body to take up.
20 Our city is in the midst of a profound affordability
21 crisis. For millions of low-income New Yorkers,
22 housing costs are the central struggle of their lives.

23 For millions more, especially
24 low-income New Yorkers, our housing crisis severely
25 limits where New Yorkers can live, what schools they

1 can attend, how they can get to work, and whether
2 their families can stay together. Our Commission is
3 also taking a close look at the problem of chronically
4 low voter turnout in city elections.

5 Although our city has a vibrant civic
6 life, we suffer from consistently low turnout in local
7 elections. We welcome proposals from the public to
8 boost voter turnout and have identified moving local
9 elections to even-numbered years and reforming the
10 city's closed partisan primary process as potential
11 avenues for reform.

12 The Commission staff recently released
13 a lengthy preliminary report summarizing what our
14 Commission has heard at public hearings so far and
15 identifying areas to explore going forward. That
16 report is available at nyc.gov/charter/. As the
17 reporter reflects, your thoughtful testimony has -- as
18 the report reflects -- and all of us as reporters,
19 your thoughtful testimony has driven and will continue
20 to drive this process as it unfolds.

21 Testimony on any topic is welcome at
22 today's hearing. So let me say a few words about how
23 this hearing will run. For members of the public, we
24 will first hear from those who have attended this
25 meeting in person. We will then move to testimony

1 from those attending the meeting virtually. Members
2 of the public are asked to testify for no longer than
3 three minutes. We will call for testimony from three
4 people at a time, followed by any questions from the
5 Commission. We do have a timer on that three-minute
6 mark.

7 I will ask commissioners to hold their
8 questions until an entire panel has finished. If you
9 wish to testify virtually, there is a form online.
10 You can find it on the meeting page for this hearing.
11 Go to nyc.gov/charter, click on the meetings tab, and
12 select the Brooklyn hearing. We will also drop a link
13 to the form in the chat. We will do our very best to
14 hear from everyone who wishes to speak today.

15 This meeting is scheduled to run until
16 8 p.m. I will say in the event that we don't hear
17 from you this evening, there are many more
18 opportunities to submit testimony. This is just one
19 of the many public hearings that have been announced.
20 Again, you can visit nyc.gov/charter to find
21 information about all of our public hearings and read
22 all of the testimony. You can also submit written
23 testimony to the Commission by emailing
24 chartertestimony@citycharter.nyc.gov.

25 If you cannot attend a hearing, each of

1 the Commission hearings will be public, live-streamed,
2 and recorded for archival purposes. I would also like
3 to say I think we have ASL abilities virtually only
4 tonight. Sometimes we have -- most other hearings
5 we've had people in person. If you need assistance,
6 please feel free to either come up front so that you
7 can see more directly. You can also go on your phone
8 so that you can follow virtually. Okay?

9 So first, I would ask for a motion to
10 approve the minutes from our May 14th public meeting.
11 May I have a motion?

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So moved.

13 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Is there
14 a second?

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Second.

16 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Is there
17 any discussion on the motion? All those in favor, say
18 aye.

19 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Aye.

20 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Any
21 opposed?

22 [No response.]

23 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Any
24 abstentions?

25 [No response.]

1 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Okay.

2 The minutes are adopted. Thank you so much.

3 Okay. So we are first going to start
4 with Assemblymember Robert Carroll to come up and join
5 us at the podium. Oh, he's -- you're virtually.

6 MR. CARROLL: I am. Good evening.

7 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Great.
8 Thank you.

9 MR. CARROLL: Good evening. I thank
10 you, Chair Buery and members of the Commission for
11 this opportunity to testify. My name is Robert
12 Carroll. And I represent the 44th Assembly. One of
13 my priorities since being elected to the Assembly in
14 2016 is to see policies put in place that make voting
15 easier in our state.

16 I am proud to have been a lead sponsor
17 and see enacted several election reform bills. Thanks
18 to my legislation, the Board of Elections can now
19 count absentee ballots prior to election day. My
20 walled church bill prevents voters from having their
21 ballots invalidated because they mistakenly appear in
22 the wrong polling place and vote by affidavit. My bill
23 also -- the deadline, the 25-day deadline for voter
24 registration has now been reduced to the
25 constitutional minimum of 10 days due to my

1 legislation.

2 And my Golden Day legislation
3 establishes protocols for registering and voting on --
4 on that day, on the first day of -- of early voting,
5 overlapping with the last day of registration.
6 Despite these and other reports, voter participation
7 in New York remains disturbing.

8 I believe we must take a bolder
9 approach to improving the quality of our democracy.
10 And I'm very encouraged by the preliminary report of
11 the Commission that identifies open primaries as an
12 area worthy of serious consideration. Increasingly,
13 voters, especially young people, are not registering
14 with any party. Unaffiliated voters now make up 22
15 percent of registered voters in New York City, with
16 the statewide figure closer to 26 percent.

17 In the city alone, this constitutes
18 over a million voters, almost double the amount of
19 registered Republicans. As the Charter Commission
20 report notes, New York's closed primary system
21 effectively shuts out these unaffiliated voters from a
22 meaningful role in our elections, since so many
23 elections are decided in the primaries. If we accept
24 that fairness and a healthy democracy require that
25 these votes not be excluded, the question then

1 becomes, what changes would be best?

2 The Commission report mentions various
3 models, citing examples from other states, such as
4 California and Alaska, which both have open primaries.
5 But I believe there is a better model for New York,
6 which the Commission report also mentions, and is set
7 forth in a bill I authored and introduced in 2022,
8 known as A90.

9 Under this legislation, all elections
10 in New York State, excluding presidential elections,
11 would be held with an open primary, utilizing ranked
12 choice voting, where the top two candidates would then
13 move to the general elections. Candidates would be
14 identified on the ballot by their party registration.
15 This system fixes the problem of excluding
16 unaffiliated voters from meaningful participation,
17 while building off the current ranked choice primary
18 that New York City voters are already familiar with.

19 The general election would remain a
20 head-to-head showdown, but between candidates that
21 have already demonstrated broad support, leading to a
22 much more meaningful and dynamic contest. I want to
23 be clear. My family has been active in local
24 Democratic party politics for over 50 years, and I am
25 a Democrat through and through. But we must be honest

1 that our current electoral system is misaligned with
2 how today's voters feel about our contemporary
3 political parties.

4 I urge you to move forward with
5 developing a proposal to put before voters for an open
6 ranked choice primary that identifies candidates by
7 party registration, and where the top two candidates
8 move on to the general election.

9 Thank you so much for your time, and
10 have a wonderful night.

11 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
12 so much. I will ask my fellow commissioners if they
13 have any questions for the Assemblymember.

14 Thank you. We appreciate you taking
15 the time --

16 MR. CARROLL: Thank you.

17 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Okay. We
18 will start our panel discussions. We'll do this in
19 pairs. So first, if I would ask John Avlon and Randy
20 Peers to come up and join us. And I'm putting -- oh,
21 I'm sorry. I wrote it down wrong. John Avlon. My
22 bad. Mr. Avlon and Mr. Peers. And I'm putting Tong
23 Galaxy and Winsome Pendergrass on notice.

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: [Unintelligible
25 response.]

1 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Yes.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We'll email you
4 copies --

5 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Fabulous.

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You're up,
7 brother.

8 MR. AVLON: All right. Thank you very
9 much, members of the Commission. I'm John Avlon,
10 Chairman of Citizens Union, which has been fighting
11 for reform in New York for over a century. We are
12 focused on issues of fair and open elections, honest
13 and accountable government, and a civically engaged
14 public.

15 Today, I'll be speaking on the topic of
16 open primaries. New York has a primary problem, but
17 it's within your power to help us fix it this fall.
18 For decades, our city and state has suffered from
19 falling voter turnout, especially in odd-year local
20 elections. More than 1 million independent voters in
21 New York City are effectively disenfranchised because
22 they're barred from participating in low-turnout,
23 closed partisan primaries where most elections are
24 decided.

25 This is a prime driver of polarization

1 and hyper-partisanship. It often empowers special
2 interests and breeds cynicism on the side. But in
3 2025, New Yorkers may have a historic chance to change
4 the game by voting for open primaries if this Charter
5 Commission puts forward your thoughtful and courageous
6 recommendation to open the door to all voters. And
7 it's hard to overstate how this would permanently
8 change New York politics for the better.

9 Voter participation in New York's
10 municipal elections has been dropping for decades. In
11 the '70s and '80s, turnout was above 50 percent, but
12 it hasn't been above 30 percent since 2009. In 2021,
13 just 9 percent of all registered voters in New York
14 City cast a ballot for Eric Adams [ph] in the
15 Democratic primary. Of course, he won the general
16 election in a landslide, but this is not an outlier.

17 In 2013, less than 7 percent of all New
18 York voters cast a ballot for Bill de Blasio in the
19 Democratic primary. This dynamic is bad for our
20 democracy. It leads to apathy and alienation, but it
21 doesn't need to be this way. There's a better way that
22 is tried, tested, and true. In fact, more than 80
23 percent of mayoral races in the nation are chosen in
24 some kind of nonpartisan election, including 42 of
25 America's 50 largest cities.

1 Cities like Los Angeles, Boston,
2 Houston, Dallas, and Chicago, all of which have
3 elected mayors from communities of color. According
4 to the New York City Campaign Finance Board, research
5 shows the primary systems that are open to
6 unaffiliated voters or entirely nonpartisan tend to
7 result in higher voter turnout and more representative
8 electorates. New York deserves no less.

9 That's why Citizens Union believes
10 strongly New York should adopt an open primary system
11 where all voters, regardless of party, can cast a
12 ballot in the primary and the top two candidates move
13 on to the general election. Under this system,
14 candidates can still list their party on the ballot,
15 but every voter gets a say. This would not just
16 complement ranked choice voting reforms that have been
17 put in place, it will complete them.

18 From the kickoff of the campaigns,
19 candidates would be compelled to reach out to all
20 voters and not just play to the base. It will reduce
21 incentives for negative campaigning, promote more
22 diverse competitive races. Voters get a clear choice
23 in the general election, but more voices are heard
24 throughout the process. It's simple and it works.

25 There's another reason to advance this

1 reform. New York City's closed partisan primary
2 currently shuts out nearly 22 percent of the
3 electorate simply because they're independent. These
4 unaffiliated voters are disproportionately young and
5 diverse. In fact, an analysis by the New York City
6 Campaign Finance Board found that 49 percent of
7 registered independent voters are under the age of 40,
8 and their numbers are on the rise at a time when the
9 party's current dynamics are either declining or
10 flatlining.

11 Research shows that nearly 90 percent
12 of independent voters would participate in primaries
13 if given their opportunity. So why are we turning
14 them away? New York has a once-in-a-generation
15 opportunity to finish -- to fix this broken system.
16 We should seize on a historic moment while frustration
17 of the status quo is high and place the question on
18 the November ballot. This is not a radical idea, but
19 a common-sense reform.

20 After all, the job of mayor is
21 essentially nonpartisan and problem-solving. As
22 Fiorillo La Guardia once said, "There's no Democratic
23 or Republican way to clean the streets." So now is
24 the time to open up our primaries so all New Yorkers
25 have a real and equal say in choosing who leads their

1 city.

2 Thank you.

3 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
4 so much.

5 Mr. Peers?

6 MR. PEERS: Good afternoon. My name is
7 Randy Peers, President and CEO of the Brooklyn Chamber
8 of Commerce, the largest chamber in New York State.
9 In my current role, I am fortunate to interact with
10 all levels of government on a regular basis, and I've
11 had the pleasure to get to know personally many
12 elected officials over the course of my 30 years as a
13 professional in the workforce and economic development
14 space.

15 I've seen many good public servants
16 during my time, and I've also witnessed others fall
17 from grace for various different reasons. I'm also
18 the face of a disenfranchised voter, having been
19 registered unaffiliated since 2017. Given my intimate
20 knowledge of and interactions with the political
21 system in New York City, you may be wondering why I
22 would deliberately choose to disenfranchise myself by
23 not registering in a party.

24 Simply put, I'm a registered
25 unaffiliated because that's truly where my politics

1 lie, personally holding opinions across the
2 ideological spectrum. So when I say I support open
3 primaries, it's very much because I care about
4 democracy itself and truly believe that enfranchising
5 the over 1,000,000 unaffiliated voters in New York
6 City will produce better results. Open primaries will
7 strengthen democracy by helping elect leaders that
8 truly reflect the majority opinions in the city.

9 In fact, we already have open primaries
10 that are called special elections. Open primaries
11 will not only lead to greater voter participation
12 overall, but general elections will also now actually
13 matter in New York City. It's worth noting that 24 of
14 the 30 largest cities in America have open primaries,
15 and the results have been exceptional, increasing
16 voter participation and expanding choices.

17 Over that time, open primaries have led
18 to encouraging more people to step up and run for
19 office given the fact that the playing field is more
20 equal. In fact, combined with ranked choice voting
21 and public financing of campaigns, New York City has
22 the potential to once again lead the nation in
23 expanding democracy and voter rights. As we see an
24 unraveling of democratic institutions on a national
25 level, now is the time to act decisively in defense of

1 more democracy, not less.

2 I urge the Charter Commission to
3 include open primaries recommendation on the ballot
4 this year.

5 Thank you.

6 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
7 so much. Another three minutes. Thank you.

8 Any questions?

9 Yes, Diane.

10 MS. SAVINO: Thank you both for your
11 testimony. So I think I'll start with you, John. I
12 have a question that maybe you can -- maybe you guys
13 have considered at Citizens Union. So 23 years ago, I
14 think, or 22 years ago, the city attempted this, but I
15 always like to say that was then and this is now. It
16 was a very different city, a very different two-party
17 structure at the time as well.

18 And I always -- like, also say that
19 voters vote with their feet. And what we've seen
20 since then is more and more people are making a
21 conscious decision to not enroll in one of the two
22 major parties. And in fact, more and more are not
23 enrolling in a party at all. And as we've seen, the
24 city is part -- the primaries process has literally
25 become the general election in New York City.

1 But there's a concern among some that
2 perhaps we don't have enough time to consider this,
3 that this is too monumental of a shift in New York
4 City's politics and the way we govern to be able to
5 take this on in this short period of time. So I'm
6 just wondering what your opinion is with respect to
7 whether or not this is something that has been studied
8 ad nauseum. Can we possibly do it this year?

9 MR. CARROLL: I appreciate it,
10 Ms. Savino. And thank you. As you allude, this has
11 been something that has been studied across the
12 nation. New York is the outlier. The vast majority
13 of American cities have some form of open primaries or
14 nonpartisan elections. As you indicate, this is
15 something that charter revision commissions have
16 looked at for the better part of this century.

17 And I do think the fact that we have
18 fewer and fewer competitive general elections
19 indicates the need also, as you indicate, nationally
20 as well as locally, more and more, particularly
21 younger voters are choosing to register as
22 independent, to not enroll in a political party.
23 Their voices should be heard. And almost every
24 conversation we have about elections, we say we ought
25 to lower barriers to participation. We've got to open

1 the process. This is what that's about.

2 And anyone who's read your preliminary
3 report, I don't think can credibly say this has not
4 been a thoughtful, well-considered process. Having
5 served on charter revision commissions in the past,
6 this charter revision commission has done its homework
7 and it builds on the work of past charter revision
8 commissions. We learned from the examples of so many
9 other cities where it's proven its success.

10 So the idea that this is a rush job,
11 that this hasn't been adequately studied, I think that
12 is an argument effectively for keeping a broken status
13 quo in place. It may benefit people who benefit from
14 that, but it doesn't actually benefit the vast
15 majority of New Yorkers, including the 1,000,000
16 independents who are currently effectively
17 disenfranchised in our city.

18 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
19 so much.

20 MS. SAVINO: I have one question for
21 Randy. So you're an individual who made a conscious
22 choice that you did -- even though you operate within
23 the government world in many respects, but you made a
24 conscious choice that you did not want to enroll in a
25 party. When you made that decision, you obviously

1 understood that you were going to be shut out of the
2 process, but I'm sure it's gotten harder and harder
3 with each passing year that you feel that you have no
4 role in the selection of your government.

5 MR. PEERS: Yeah. I'm also -- it's
6 hard for me to be a phony, so I have to be true to
7 myself.

8 MS. SAVINO: It's important in life.

9 MR. PEERS: And that's kind of how I
10 live my life. And, you know, look on the timing
11 thing, if not now, when; right? We have to start this
12 reform now. I mean, the other thing I'll say while I
13 got the mic is that the notion that we can't register
14 independent is ridiculous. That has to be addressed
15 on the state level, but I mean, I don't even think
16 that's constitutional, to be quite honest.

17 But for whatever reason that the
18 governor chose to disassociate with the word
19 "independent" is to me silly. So that's another thing
20 that we can look at for reform.

21 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
22 so much --

23 MS. WYLDE: Hi. Thank you both for
24 joining us. I'm curious, given the amount of thought
25 you both put into this, why -- what do you see as the

1 benefits of the fully open primary versus some of the
2 other systems we've seen, like the party-specific
3 primaries that are open to unaffiliated voters? Could
4 you talk a little bit, particularly from both your,
5 and the perspective of Citizens Union on that would be
6 helpful.

7 MR. AVLON: Sure. I think when you
8 speak to many people involved in politics, the
9 argument that they will make against this, ignoring
10 the experience of the vast majority of American
11 cities, is they're afraid that people will try to game
12 the system; right? That is particularly, I think a
13 scenario which may have a shred of credibility, though
14 I actually disagree with that, in a semi open primary
15 system; right?

16 Whereas if you open it to everybody and
17 have people run with their party affiliation, but
18 everybody gets to vote in the first round using ranked
19 choice voting. And then in the general election, it's
20 a clear choice, whether it's top two or you would use
21 ranked choice voting with top four. And I know you're
22 looking at both. I think that simply, it is
23 "ungameable" in the way that I think some people who
24 are trying to defend the status quo might fear or
25 argue.

1 I think actually semi open primaries is
2 more inclined to that outcome. So I actually think
3 that just opening the process, leveling the field,
4 fair and open to everyone is the best way to go for
5 our city. Representative elections have
6 representative results.

7 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
8 so much. Any other questions? I'm going to ask that
9 we keep our applause to a minimum. Thank you. Any
10 other questions from my fellow commissioners?

11 MS. SAVINO: I want just also on the
12 same issue. Do you have any preference on top two,
13 top three, top five?

14 MR. AVLON: You're the expert.
15 Citizens Union has put forward top two. I think
16 there's a certain clarity to it. Other organizations
17 have advocated top three, top four, top five. If
18 there's ranked choice voting in a general election,
19 the key thing is to make sure that we have a mayor who
20 receives a vote from a majority of people. I think,
21 you know, getting a mayor who's elected, supported by
22 less than 50 percent, I think becomes a strain on
23 their legitimacy.

24 So that is eminently "dealable."
25 Regardless of where we've seen these reforms be put

1 forward, it actually does have a positive effect on
2 the politics. It encourages; it discourages negative
3 campaigning. It encourages more coalition building.
4 Just because at its nature, at the outset, you're
5 trying to win over other people's votes. So Citizens
6 Union has proposed top two. I think there's a certain
7 clarity to that. But good people can disagree. And
8 if you all choose to say top three, you know, I think
9 as long as there's a ranked choice voting component,
10 it will achieve the same end.

11 MS. SAVINO: But would top three give
12 an opportunity for somebody winning the election with
13 less than 50 percent of the vote?

14 MR. AVLON: No, because in that
15 scenario, you would still use a ranked choice voting.

16 MS. SAVINO: On -- well, you have
17 ranked choice in the primary.

18 MR. AVLON: And you would have ranked
19 choice in the -- if the general election is more than
20 two people, you have to have ranked choice voting, in
21 the general, in effect if the principle of making sure
22 that a mayor gets, you know, the mayor gets 50
23 percent. So, I mean, again, if it's top two, it's
24 just a traditional, you know, we've already done
25 ranked choice voting and it's a binary choice.

1 If you choose to take a route which is
2 more expansive than that, then the general election
3 would need to use ranked choice voting as well.

4 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: That
5 would be one option.

6 MR. AVLON: I think it is the most
7 logical option if you want to make sure folks get to
8 50 percent. And I'll just say also, feeling the
9 gentleman's pain, I'm a registered Democrat. I was an
10 independent for many years. I didn't change
11 parties -- affiliations for that reason. But I do
12 think the argument that you need to participate in the
13 process, you have to join the party, doesn't feel like
14 it's consistent with the best American traditions.

15 MR. PEERS: Yeah, I'm actually -- I
16 don't think two cuts it. I think you've got to go
17 above two. I think there's what, four official
18 parties right now in New York State; right? We've got
19 Democrat, Republican, Conservative, Working Families
20 Party. Those are the only four official. So I'm
21 saying four minimum and then take it from there. But
22 it also -- I think the more you have, the more it
23 encourages -- in a ranked choice system would
24 encourage also the building of the coalitions. So I
25 think that that piece is strengthened by having more

1 in the general election.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Building a
3 better politics.

4 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Go ahead.
5 Last question.

6 MS. NIEVES: Thank you. I just want
7 to --

8 Hi, Randy.

9 Hi, John.

10 I just want to be clear. When --
11 Randy, when you say four, you agree that if you get to
12 four, it should be ranked choice at that part? Or are
13 you --

14 MR. PEERS: The general election should
15 be ranked choice.

16 MS. NIEVES: Okay. Because right now,
17 technically we could have, in our current system, we
18 could have multiple candidates and have less than 50
19 percent.

20 MR. AVLON: And that's the problem. I
21 think we have the opportunity and the obligation to
22 fix.

23 MS. NIEVES: Okay.

24 MR. AVLON: That could be very what
25 we're facing.

1 MS. NIEVES: Got it.

2 MR. AVLON: Well, what we're facing as
3 well. Yeah.

4 MS. NIEVES: Got it. Thank you. Yeah.

5 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
6 you. Thank you both so very much.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you for
8 your work.

9 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: I know I
10 asked Tong and Winsome to be ready, but we are
11 actually going to hear from Lincoln Restler first, who
12 is joining us virtually.

13 MR. RESTLER: Great, thank you so much.

14 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Council
15 member, the floor is yours.

16 MR. RESTLER: I really appreciate it.
17 Thank you for the opportunity to say hello and
18 speaking me in. My name is Lincoln Restler. I'm with
19 a Council Member with the 33rd District in Brooklyn.
20 And I chair the Governmental Operations, State and
21 Federal Legislation Committee.

22 This Commission was appointed by the
23 Mayor in December with a directive to focus on
24 housing. But I do think it's worth noting at the
25 front end of my remarks that the real reason that this

1 Commission was appointed was to block advice and
2 consent, which was the speaker's priority proposal.
3 You know, that being said, whatever the political
4 rationale for creating this Commission was, it doesn't
5 prevent you all from doing the work. I appreciate the
6 thoughtfulness that went into your report. And on a
7 personal level, I have a great deal of respect for
8 many of the people on this Commission, especially the
9 chair, vice chair, and others.

10 I do have to say, though, I am
11 concerned that this Commission is lacking a compass
12 and lacking -- and is not tethered to political
13 leadership in the city. We all know that many of the
14 members of this Commission were directly asked to join
15 it by then-First Deputy Mayor Maria Torres-Springer,
16 and we know that she's no longer in government and the
17 reasons why.

18 I think it is valuable for a commission
19 to be connected to elected leadership in New York City
20 because we are the ones who are accountable and
21 responsive to our -- most accountable and most
22 responsive to our communities. You know, reflecting
23 on the 1989 Charter Revision Commission, the last
24 great charter commission in our city, Fritz noted --
25 Fritz Schwarz, of course, the chair, noted that a

1 Charter Commission's job "Is to provide a structure
2 and process for governmental decision making. Not to
3 make the decisions itself."

4 A commission is not for legislation,
5 nor should it act as one. And I think that's a really
6 important reminder for this Commission, considering
7 the breadth of what you all have included in your
8 preliminary report and exceptionally wide range of
9 topics: Housing, general elections, city maps, and
10 the infrastructure, resiliency, et cetera. And I
11 agree these are all valid issues that the city
12 leaders -- the leaders of New York City should be
13 confronting and tackling. These are arbitrary topics
14 that do not seem right for a comprehensive charter
15 review.

16 Many could be addressed through other
17 avenues: legislation, agency policymaking, budget
18 allocation, et cetera. I urge this Commission to
19 carefully consider whether you are acting as a process
20 for decision-making or attempting to act as a
21 legislative body. No one elected this Commission, and
22 without the support and substantial education and
23 outreach and funding to engage and educate New York,
24 to inform New Yorkers, it seems likely that New
25 Yorkers will not have a great understanding of the

1 ballot questions that are coming before them in
2 November.

3 As it relates to balance of power, I am
4 concerned. I would even say deeply concerned that the
5 unified thinking behind all of the proposals in the
6 preliminary report appears to be increasing the power
7 of the mayor and limiting the power of the council and
8 other elected officials. From limiting the council's
9 power in ULURP -- the city, and the president's role
10 and the city map, et cetera. Our last major charter
11 review, again in '89, followed one of the worst
12 corruption scandals in our city's history, Term 3 of
13 the Consular Administration.

14 Thirty-five years later, our city, of
15 course, again is in a moment of crisis, with a growing
16 series of deeply troubling allegations affecting the
17 mayor and the innermost senior ranks at City Hall.
18 It's clear that the mayor's ability to serve our city
19 is compromised, and the exodus of senior
20 administration officials unprecedented. This begs the
21 question of whether we currently have the right
22 balance of power in city government.

23 Charter experts have voiced that the
24 power has gradually shifted over these past 35 years
25 to more and more and more power on the mayor's side of

1 City Hall. The 1989 Charter Revision Commission
2 intended for the council to be a powerful check on a
3 strong mayoralty, and it is essential that we strive
4 to maintain that balance of power. Ten years ago --
5 I'll -- again, you know, quote Fritz Schwarz, who I
6 have so much admiration for, that "Any charter
7 revision commission that further increases the power
8 of the mayor by limiting the role of the council
9 should and would face a high hurdle, both
10 substantively and politically."

11 I do not think that this Commission has
12 met that hurdle of demonstrating why additional
13 power -- I meant, additional mayoral power would best
14 serve New Yorkers.

15 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
16 so much.

17 MR. RESTLER: On elections, as the
18 chair of the Government of Operations Committee, if I
19 could just continue for a moment.

20 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: -- thank
21 you.

22 MR. RESTLER: Well, sure, but I just
23 have to say that we are in the -- we are approaching
24 the second city-wide election for ranked choice
25 voting. I do think it's an -- and I'm appreciative

1 that this Commission has expressed support for it.
2 But before we do a major revision to our voting
3 process, I think we should give ranked choice voting a
4 little bit of time to play itself out.

5 I am highly concerned about proposals
6 that you all have made. And I'll just say I really
7 think the right focus is on housing. If our focus is
8 on streamlining the ULURP process, ensuring that
9 there's a greater opportunity to address our housing
10 crisis today, that is a meritorious focus for this
11 Commission.

12 The attempt to do everything and the
13 kitchen sink in you all's proposals I think is
14 ill-conceived, and I hope you'll reconsider as you
15 work toward a final set of proposals.

16 Thank you for the extended time. I
17 appreciate the opportunity to say what I want to say
18 hello to you.

19 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
20 for your perspective. I will ask my fellow
21 commissioners if they have any questions for the
22 Council Member.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you.

24 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
25 for your time. Appreciate it.

1 We will return to Tong Galaxy and
2 Winsome Pendergrass.

3 MR. GALAXY: Hi, Sharon. Thank you so
4 much.

5 So first of all, I really appreciate
6 the Commission's work. I thought the preliminary
7 report, the intro letter, Alec [ph], beautifully
8 written. I was moved. Thank you for writing it.
9 Thank you for all your work on contributing this. I
10 have nothing new to add to the open primary stuff, the
11 housing stuff.

12 I'm sure you guys are going to figure
13 out what is potentially political feasible as well as
14 the right way forward. I just want to put it out in
15 the public record that I am someone who is curious
16 about how can we solve the problem of getting the --
17 developing political will. How can we generate a
18 public understanding and awareness of whatever ballot
19 measures y'all promote in that? How can we use
20 technology? How can we use Instagram, LLMs? How can
21 we make the public actually understand it when it
22 comes up to the ballot initiative?

23 If anyone is out there is curious on
24 how you actually get the electorate to understand the
25 problem, to vote for it, please reach out to me. My

1 name is Tong Galaxy. I'm pretty easy to find online.

2 The thing that I wanted to talk about
3 today is it seems like what's possible politically,
4 the window seems larger than ever. And the window of
5 change seems larger than ever. It seems like the
6 potential for crisis, we can all imagine back to the
7 start of March 2020 -- March 13, 2020, right before
8 New York City declared the lockdown. We can all
9 imagine how unprepared we are for the massive changes
10 to day-to-day life we would experience. I think we
11 can all agree that the crises of climate change, of
12 AI, wiping out massive sections of the labor market
13 and the labor force, of other crises, I think we can
14 all agree that the amount of crises and potential
15 shocks to the systems that we all rely on only
16 increase, not decrease.

17 And the capacity for government to
18 solve them needs to increase, not decrease. And/or
19 the ability for government to move nimbly and with a
20 strong, fast approach needs to increase, not decrease.
21 So I respectfully disagree with the council member's
22 suggestion that we wait. I don't think any of these
23 things can wait. What I do think is really important,
24 though, is I think it's totally possible in the realm
25 of the next couple of years for something like AI to

1 dramatically change our labor force.

2 Smart people, people way smarter than
3 me, are predicting unemployment numbers in the double
4 digits. There are -- so I'd like to propose the
5 council do two things. One is establish an agency
6 that is dedicated to strategic foresight and crisis
7 management. There needs to be someone thinking about
8 these problems to figure out how can we build latent
9 capacity? And how can we loosen the knots of
10 institutional inertia? We're not going to solve all
11 these problems until the next crisis comes and the
12 electorate wakes up.

13 But how can we develop something that
14 New York City already has thinking about the
15 infrastructure that we need to have in place? The
16 second measure is to establish a citywide data and
17 software systems inventory for every agency. Where
18 does all of the information live so that we can make
19 quick decisions when the next COVID hits, when the
20 next crisis comes?

21 Thank you so much, y'all. Really
22 appreciate your time and your hard work on the
23 commission.

24 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
25 so much.

1 MR. GALAXY: Great. Thanks.

2 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Could you
3 just sit for a second?

4 MR. GALAXY: Oh, yeah.

5 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: While I
6 ask Winsome to testify first and then we'll open it up
7 for questions for both of you.

8 MS. PENDERGRASS: Good evening, ladies,
9 and gentlemen. My name is Winsome Pendergrass. I am
10 a resident of the Brownsville community. I am a
11 member of NYCC, New York Communities for Change, WFP,
12 Working Families Party, HJA for All, Housing Justice
13 for All, and the New York Tenants Block. Today, I am
14 testifying for the tenants who are disabled.

15 I am testifying for the tenants who are
16 at work during the second and third shift and can't be
17 here to stand or sit in front of you. We have seen
18 firsthand what organized money, dark money, looks
19 like. It can be seen in the landlord's association
20 called REBNY. Due to our elections -- yes, we have
21 seen firsthand what organized money, dark money, does
22 in places like REBNY in our election.

23 The only thing that stands up to them
24 is organized tenant in joining people's organization
25 and fighting back. Our power comes from working

1 together under a common banner, making collective
2 decision, and fighting as one for our values, ideas,
3 and policies. That is why the changes being
4 considered to the NYC elections are so dangerous. The
5 only way to fight back against organized money in our
6 country, in our state, is through organized people.

7 Political parties stand for something
8 and communicate that, but it's up to the members of
9 that party to make the collective decision about what
10 candidates are going to represent the party. What is
11 being proposed is an attack on people's organization
12 by the billionaires. They have tried it in Colorado,
13 in Arizona, and New Mexico last year. Bloomberg tried
14 it here in New York City 20 years ago.

15 They want to do this because it's so
16 much easier for them to buy the election. When
17 people's organization, like political parties, don't
18 get to elect their own candidates, when Republicans
19 get to vote in these elections, the billionaires'
20 money will prevail, but it will be the tenants across
21 New York City who will suffer. We need to protect our
22 tenants in New York City, our tenants' organization,
23 ensure -- and ensure that we don't make it easy -- too
24 easy for people like Elon Musk, Mike Bloomberg, and
25 others like REBNY to buy our election.

1 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
2 you.

3 MS. PENDERGRASS: The Commission should
4 reject, must reject this jungle primary proposal, and
5 the open primary proposal that allows Republicans to
6 select Democrat candidates. How can we forget the
7 IDC?

8 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
9 so much.

10 MS. PENDERGRASS: Also --

11 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
12 for your time. I appreciate that.

13 I do -- Tong, I have one clarifying
14 question. You said I would like to ask the council to
15 consider. You mean this Commission?

16 MR. GALAXY: Yeah --

17 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Okay. I
18 just wanted to confirm that. And I would ask if you
19 have specifics that you can put in writing and submit,
20 that would be super helpful to us. Thank you.

21 MS. SAVINO: I do have one question.
22 So, Winsome -- I'm sorry. I forgot your last name, so
23 I apologize.

24 MS. PENDERGRASS: Pendergrass.

25 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER:

1 Pendergrass.

2 MS. SAVINO: I just want to be clear.
3 You don't believe that we should change the -- we
4 should keep the closed primary system, and we should
5 not allow open primaries.

6 MS. PENDERGRASS: Yes.

7 MS. SAVINO: But I'm just going to ask
8 you a simple question. As a member of the Working
9 Families Party, not -- I was at the Working Families
10 Party when we created it in 1998. I was on the
11 executive board of the Working Families Party before I
12 got elected to the Senate. But out of curiosity, how
13 do we square this circle? The Working Families Party
14 has made 25 years of trying to influence the
15 Democratic primary.

16 They endorse candidates that run in the
17 Democratic primary. They campaign for them. They run
18 campaigns for them. They created a whole mechanism to
19 try and elect Democrats that run on their line. Do
20 you not see that as interference in the Democratic
21 Party?

22 MS. PENDERGRASS: I don't see it as an
23 interference. I think we're helping the Democratic
24 Party. The WFP is the progressive section that the
25 Democrats doesn't seem to -- they still want to hold

1 on to old politics and don't want to expand and -- to
2 bring in more progressive people.

3 MS. SAVINO: Then why not just run
4 their own candidates on their own line and not attempt
5 to influence the Democratic primary?

6 MS. PENDERGRASS: But we do have --
7 yes, but right now I think we see it fit. We do have
8 the D-line on all -- on the ballot that goes towards
9 the Democrats, but we are helping to shore up the
10 Democratic Party. I don't know. I can't tell you
11 exactly when we are going to step out to be a third
12 party. It is yet to be seen. I guess I myself am
13 asking the question, when are we going to be strong
14 enough or be bold enough to step out and say "We are
15 the third party"?

16 MS. SAVINO: It's 27 years since the
17 establishment of the ballot line.

18 MS. PENDERGRASS: Yeah. And I'm
19 sorry -- for you. Yeah, but that's something for me
20 to take back to them.

21 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
22 you. Any other questions?

23 [No response.]

24 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
25 so much, we appreciate it. I'm going to ask Alice

1 Rydel and Christine Helm [ph] to join us at the front,
2 and I will put Sara Penenberg and Kaitlyn Schuster on
3 notice. Alice Rydel and Christine Helm [ph].

4 MS. RYDEL: Good evening. Do you want
5 us to go in the order that said --

6 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Whichever
7 you prefer.

8 MS. RYDEL: Okay.

9 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Please
10 introduce yourself.

11 MS. RYDEL: I'm Alice Rydel. And I've
12 been a registered independent voter in New York City
13 for decades. I grew up in Chicago, and I knew of the
14 Daley machine before I was old enough to vote, so I
15 always had a sense that ordinary people didn't have
16 much of a say in how things were run. I do think -- I
17 hope, when people aspire to be public advocates,
18 that's exactly what they want to do, to be advocates
19 for the public. And unfortunately, they often get
20 caught up in focusing on a smaller group of party
21 influencers, fundraising, party politics, their own
22 careers, and they lose track of what their purpose is.

23 Because it's not about controlling
24 voting, it's about listening to all the voters, and
25 open primaries is a good step in that direction. You

1 know, I made a note of this. I volunteer to make
2 calls for independent voters to testify before this
3 Commission, and one person I spoke with told me that
4 when she went to a primary to vote, she was an
5 independent, she was turned away. She didn't know
6 this, and she was humiliated. So that just shouldn't
7 happen.

8 It's also -- it's been 20 years, I
9 think someone more official was talking about this
10 before, since the possibility of open primaries was
11 brought before a Charter Revision Commission. And I
12 think it got caught up in should it be the top two,
13 the top three? Should it be -- whatever it is, it
14 needs to be open primaries. They got bogged down, and
15 it's been 20 years. So New York is just such a
16 diversified, progressive city, and I love it very
17 much. And I think it's time to break out of how
18 controlled and conservative our voting process is,
19 because it's having an impact.

20 Our public advocates, politicians, and
21 the news media can get so focused on particulars, they
22 can't grasp the larger picture. You know the phrase,
23 "You can't see the forest for the trees"; right? So
24 we're the forest, the 1,000,000 independent voters,
25 and please open up the primaries. Please put that

1 before us. I know you're not making the final
2 decisions, but you can put it on the ballot. Thank
3 you.

4 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
5 you. Please go ahead.

6 MS. HELM: Hello, my name is Christine
7 Helm [ph]. I'm, again, also a longtime independent
8 voter. First, thank you. I'm delighted that the
9 Commission is listening to independent voters, and
10 hopeful that we will one day have open primaries here
11 in the city. For me, it's simple. In a democracy,
12 the more that we citizens can participate in choosing
13 our leaders, the better. And the closer we come to
14 the assertion in our Declaration of Independence that
15 governments derive their just powers from the consent
16 of the governed. In our system, consent of the
17 governed comes via voting. We have a history in this
18 country of both expanding and restricting access to
19 the vote.

20 When slavery was abolished, the 15th
21 Amendment enfranchised African American men. Hooray.
22 And, as we know, immediately literacy tests, poll
23 taxes were put into place to restrict that vote.
24 Finally, thanks to the courage and persistence of the
25 Civil Rights Movement, in 1965, Congress passed the

1 Voting Rights Act, intended to eliminate voter
2 suppression efforts. Another expansion. It's hard to
3 believe now that it wasn't until 1920, my grandmother
4 was 35, that women had the right to vote. A suffrage
5 amendment did not pass the House of Representatives
6 until 1919, and then was ratified in 1920. And that
7 is also the result of a long and arduous struggle.
8 Decades of activism and protest.

9 Let's keep opening the process. Our
10 elections are mediated by private political parties,
11 to the extent that some elections are private, but
12 paid for with my tax dollars. And if I choose not to
13 join a party, to be an independent voter, I'm locked
14 out of a critical stage of the election process.
15 Candidates are chosen without my input. For a New
16 Yorker, once the primaries are over, casting my vote
17 is of little consequence. The real competition
18 happens in the primary, rather than the general
19 election.

20 I'm not alone. As you know, 22 percent
21 of cities' voters are unaffiliated. And what concerns
22 me most is that 49 percent of those independent voters
23 are under the age of 40. While I support the right of
24 people to join parties, and parties to support
25 candidates, a growing number of citizens are

1 dissatisfied with the parties, with partisanship, and
2 are choosing to be independent. Let's make sure
3 they're included. Let's give all the governed the
4 means to consent.

5 Thank you.

6 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
7 both so very much.

8 Any questions from the Commission?

9 [No response.]

10 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: We
11 appreciate you taking the time. Thanks so much.

12 I'm going to ask Sara Penenberg and
13 Kaitlyn Schuster to join us, and I'm going to tell
14 Mary Fridley and Yvonne Lee that you will be following
15 them.

16 MS. SCHUSTER: Good evening, members of
17 the Charter Revision Commission. My name is Kaitlyn
18 Schuster. I'm here on behalf of SEIU Local 32BJ.
19 32BJ is the largest union of property service workers
20 in the country. We represent over 175,000 members
21 across 13 states, including over 90,000 in New York.

22 32BJ understands the urgency of the
23 housing crisis, and our union recognizes that the
24 city's ability to maximize housing production is
25 constrained in part by the land review process in its

1 current form. At the same time, we believe that the
2 city's uniform land use review process is an important
3 democratic institution, through which community
4 members and groups, including labor unions, have the
5 opportunity to engage developers on the projects that
6 shape New York City.

7 Through decades of involvement in
8 ULURP, our union has been able to defend hard-won
9 industry standard wages and benefits and to educate
10 the real estate industry and legislators about the
11 importance of creating good jobs in the property
12 services sector. Of the proposals discussed in the
13 Commission's preliminary report, 32BJ is concerned
14 with proposed changes to the land use review process
15 which would apply to all actions, regardless of
16 project size, such as those contained -- some of those
17 contained in the section of the preliminary report
18 titled General Changes to ULURP.

19 Similarly, 32BJ would not support
20 blanket proposals which would allow affordable
21 projects, regardless of size, either to bypass the
22 full ULURP or to access a separate approval process,
23 such as one governed by the Board of Standards and
24 Appeals. While 32BJ emphatically supports the
25 construction of more affordable housing, this

1 objective does not need to come at the expense of the
2 public's ability to weigh in on large projects which
3 employ hundreds of New Yorkers and have great impacts
4 on the communities where they're built.

5 On the other hand, our union is
6 generally supportive of proposals which would
7 streamline ULURP for modest projects, including
8 upzonings which remain in low-density R1 to R5
9 districts, small-to-medium-sized developments in
10 transit-dense areas, and small-to-medium-sized
11 developments in neighborhoods which fail to meet
12 housing production goals, such as those outlined in
13 the Fair Housing Framework.

14 And with that, we look forward to
15 continuing to work with the Commission to ensure that
16 its proposed revisions will balance the pressing need
17 to build more housing with the preservation of
18 representative democracy and the land use review
19 process.

20 Thank you.

21 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
22 you.

23 MS. PENENBERG: Good evening. My name
24 is Sara Penenberg. I'm also here on behalf of SEIU
25 Local 32BJ.

1 Among 32BJ members are thousands of
2 contracted workers at city facilities, including just
3 under 5,000 security officers who work and protect
4 city-contracted shelters. These are frontline workers
5 in some of New York's most challenging workplace,
6 serving the most vulnerable of our neighbors. These
7 officers, the majority of who are Black and Brown, the
8 security vendors who work for them, many of which are
9 MWBES, experience significant downstream impacts of
10 the city's delayed payment to social service
11 providers.

12 Today, there are thousands of security
13 officers who are owed collectively tens of millions of
14 dollars in back pay for a period stretching as far
15 back as late 2021, an issue for which we believe
16 insufficient and delays in city contract payments
17 practice are at least partially to blame. 32BJ echoes
18 the calls to reform these systems and, in particular,
19 register our support for proposals discussed in the
20 Commission's preliminary report to codify the Mayor's
21 Office of Contract Services to empower the agency with
22 greater authority over city contracts.

23 We look forward to working with the
24 Commission and stakeholders to advance these proposals
25 that would lead to contract workers at city

1 facilities, including shelter security guards, getting
2 the respect they are due.

3 Thanks for your time.

4 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
5 both, and thank you both for returning with additional
6 testimony.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

8 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Any
9 questions?

10 MS. NIEVES: Yes. Okay. Thank you
11 both for your testimony. I'm curious if you could
12 talk a little bit more about the specific concerns of,
13 you know, finding, and first of all, a lot of the
14 changes to ULURP that are proposed are not really
15 upending ULURP in any really significant way. It's
16 about kind of trying to bring citywide perspectives
17 into maybe hyperlocal projects or decisions.

18 And I think the end result of providing
19 kind of citywide or boroughwide perspectives on
20 projects could be more projects getting built, so --
21 and especially more affordable projects, which would
22 mean more work for your members. So I'm a little bit
23 curious how to square what the goals here ultimately
24 being about creating more housing and more affordable
25 housing, which ultimately will create more jobs, with

1 the concerns of having a process that goes
2 efficiently, faster, and ultimately trying to address
3 the housing crisis.

4 MS. SCHUSTER: Yeah. I would say that
5 we recognize that all of these things are sort of in
6 this messy tension. And I think where I'd like to
7 sort of highlight is that, like, we are interested in
8 job creation, but we also are interested in, you know,
9 the opportunity to make sure that jobs that are
10 created are good jobs. And I think ULURP has been a
11 place for us where we're able to ensure that big
12 projects that go up in the city and that the
13 developers that benefit from big upzonings, like our
14 developers that are benefiting from something that the
15 workers who will be employed at those sites will get
16 to partake in, you know, the financial gain that those
17 developers see.

18 And I think, you know, we recognize
19 that those big projects are much different from the
20 small projects and medium-sized projects, which are,
21 you know, for which ULURP is cost and time and
22 resource prohibitive at this point.

23 I don't know if there's anything you'd
24 want to add, Sara.

25 MS. PENENBERG: I just want to add the

1 point that our members are able to be a voice for
2 their, you know, public and their representation. And
3 so ULURP gives them the possibility to have that voice
4 in this decision process and then also for them to
5 see, like Kaitlyn was saying, good projects with
6 credible commitments from developers.

7 It also is a really great pathway for
8 us to educate developers and newer developers about
9 what a union is, what property service work is, what
10 the standard wages are, and what family-sustaining
11 benefits and wages are, and also for them to learn
12 about programs such as 45X and things like that. So I
13 think that that's a really important part of the
14 process when it comes to these approvals.

15 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Yes --

16 MS. SAMUELS: I just want to say I
17 appreciated talking about the downstream effects about
18 the late payments. I think you're the first union or
19 organized labor that we've seen actually speaking to
20 that. Can you talk roughly about how many, excuse me,
21 security guards are used through vendors right now?
22 And do you have that number?

23 MS. PENENBERG: Yeah, so we have about
24 5,000 security guards at city-contracted sites, and
25 that is, like, private shelters, migrant shelters,

1 newcomer shelters across the city. And then we do
2 have, you know, other guards at office facilities
3 where there are, like, city contracts. It's kind of a
4 universal number.

5 MS. SAMUELS: Got it. And they're
6 directly impacted by the delays. I get that.

7 MS. PENENBERGER: Yeah, yeah.

8 MS. SAMUELS: Thank you. That was
9 helpful --

10 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Yes,
11 Anthony.

12 MR. RICHARDSON: Thank you both for
13 your testimony. I wanted to be clear on your -- that
14 I'm summarizing or describing what your testimony is
15 correctly is that you believe that ULURP gives you the
16 time to engage on various issues, but you support
17 fast-tracking or some truncated ULURP for more modest
18 proposals. That is correct?

19 MS. SCHUSTER: Yes.

20 MR. RICHARDSON: And is there -- do you
21 have a specific proposal around, like, projects of a
22 certain size? Should -- you know, I just want to
23 understand if you have a specific --

24 MS. SCHUSTER: I would say we're not
25 prepared with a specific size, but that the

1 preliminary reports identifying the R1 to R5 districts
2 sort of makes sense to us. But, you know, I don't
3 think we have, like, a unit count in mind --

4 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Any other
5 questions?

6 [No response.]

7 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
8 so much.

9 I'm going to ask Mary Fridley and
10 Yvonne Lee to join us. Good evening.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Good evening.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Good evening.

13 MS. LEE: Okay. Well, good evening
14 again, Commissioners. My name is Yvonne Lee, and I
15 live in Harlem. I am a lifelong New Yorker and a
16 lifelong independent voter. I recently retired from
17 Housing Preservation & Development, and I am glad to
18 see that you are working on the housing crisis in the
19 city. Very important.

20 I am very glad to see that you have
21 been listening to folks from across the city and are
22 considering the issue of opening our primaries. I
23 wanted to talk to you about the democracy crisis in
24 our city caused by having closed primaries. Anytime
25 you have an election that excludes over 1,000,000

1 people from voting, to me, that's a crisis, especially
2 when 49 percent of those independents are New Yorkers
3 under the age of 40. We need all New Yorkers to have
4 a say in who our leaders are.

5 Right now, we have a system that is
6 coincide and out of step with our voters, where our
7 voters are. I have been active in politics in our
8 city since I was a young woman. I'm 79 now, so I have
9 worked for many candidates and have fought for many
10 issues. I have testified at Charter Revision
11 Commissions in the past on the same issue. I pay
12 taxes. I am a community organizer. To be told that I
13 cannot vote in the primary is a real slap in the face,
14 and un-American. It is time for all New York City
15 voters to have equal rights.

16 I want to thank you and urge you to do
17 the right thing and put open primaries on the ballot.
18 We have a right.

19 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
20 you.

21 MS. LEE: Thank you.

22 MS. FRIDLEY: Hi. I'm Mary Fridley.
23 It is an honor to be here and to speak on behalf of
24 independents across the city. I also want to thank
25 the Commission for giving us an opportunity to help

1 shape the future, including the electoral future of
2 New York, and I actually think the two are closely
3 related.

4 And because this is a city that I
5 have -- I love, even with all its flaws, and have
6 proudly called home for about 45 years. I currently
7 live down the road in Flatbush, Brooklyn. I make my
8 living as a nonprofit fundraising consultant. I am a
9 longtime community organizer, a dementia rights
10 activist, theater director, and a member of the LGBTQ
11 community. I too, as so many have said before, am a
12 lifelong independent. I actually never believed that
13 two parties' equal democracy. It just seems silly to
14 me.

15 And I really hope that you'll
16 understand, and I don't think it's just mine, the pain
17 that we feel about living in a city that is denying so
18 many millions of people the right to vote. I mean,
19 it's just, as Yvonne said, it's a basic American
20 tenet. You have the right to vote. Particularly in
21 the primaries, which everybody, we're not stupid,
22 knows is the only meaningful election in New York.
23 And I know this figure, that there's 1.1 million
24 independents in New York, and I know everyone said it,
25 but when that was -- somebody said that to me the

1 other day, it was kind of like, "Wow, that's a lot of
2 people." And so of course, I went to Google. That's
3 where you go. And I learned that 1.1 million is more
4 people than live in -- I think it's like a dozen
5 cities in the country have more than 1.1 million
6 people.

7 So we're actually -- we could be our
8 own 13th largest city. Which, you know, sometimes we
9 might want to consider that. And again, I don't know
10 about the popular -- the percentages in the Black
11 community, the Latino community, but I just want to
12 say, speaking, I don't know, honestly, I'm not going
13 to throw out a -- I didn't Google this. I don't know
14 how many independents there are in the LGBTQ
15 community, but I guarantee the number is rising
16 because, speaking for myself, we did not fight for
17 liberation just to be told that the only way we could
18 vote is to remain in what effectively is a two-party
19 closet. And, you know, I've been advocating for open
20 primaries a long time. So I know -- I've learned kind
21 of two things.

22 One, ordinary people are not stupid.
23 Contrary to popular belief or what some people say,
24 we're not so easily confused. We get it. We get
25 fairness. We understand that, yeah, there might be

1 not a lot we can do about it, but we get it. And the
2 other thing that I've learned is the people who
3 oppose -- oh, no. But anyway, it will confuse and
4 complicate things. So I really hope, to me, the
5 question is simple. Please, please, please put on the
6 ballot that we open up the primaries so that they're
7 as free, they're open and independent as possible.

8 Thank you.

9 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
10 you.

11 Thank you both for your service.

12 Any questions for our panelists?

13 [No response.]

14 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: No? We
15 so appreciate you taking the time.

16 I'm going to ask Jasmine Marie and
17 Sarah Prinsloo to come up and join us, and I'm putting
18 Sophia Cohen and Melissa Fisher on notice that you are
19 next. So Jasmine and Sarah.

20 Hi, there.

21 MS. MARIE: Hello. Okay. I'm using my
22 phone and not paper, so --

23 Hello.

24 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: It's all
25 good.

1 MS. MARIE: My name is Jasmine Marie,
2 and I've been a part of this community for about five
3 years now. I'm not a native, but I absolutely love
4 Brooklyn, and I call it home. I have never testified
5 here before, so I just want to thank you all
6 individually and collectively for the work you are
7 doing to make New York a better place.

8 I'm here today to speak with the
9 council about the alarming lack of police
10 accountability. I've had friends and neighbors
11 experience police misconduct from unlawful search and
12 seizure to profiling and assault. These moments are
13 devastating, especially when they're met with no
14 recourse. I understand that the CCRB, the Civilian
15 Complaint Review Board, was established to hold the
16 police accountable, but there needs to be some
17 changes. These complaints take way too long to be
18 investigated due to lack of police compliance with
19 things like gathering worn body footage.

20 Also, the vast majority of valid
21 complaints go unpunished because the police chief has
22 to agree with the punishment. I believe the CCRB is a
23 well-intentioned organization doing their absolute
24 best, and I do believe they're vital to protecting
25 public trust in our law enforcement. In order for the

1 CCRB to be able to make an impact, I'm asking the
2 Commission to please consider two very important
3 reforms.

4 The first being giving the CCRB the
5 power to make binding disciplinary decisions without
6 the need of the police chief to approve. The second
7 is to allow the CCRB access to body camera footage or
8 worn body footage to be able to conduct investigations
9 without waiting for access to be granted to them,
10 which is why some of these complaints end up timing
11 out because they don't get the footage they need to
12 actually conduct an investigation in a timely manner.

13 I want to be clear that this is not an
14 attack on the police, but rather accountability so
15 that we can put our trust in those who are meant to
16 protect us. I am by no means an expert. I am a
17 producer and project manager. But as the CCRB stands,
18 so many people will continue to lack trust, and that
19 is not a world that any of us want to live in.

20 Thank you.

21 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
22 you.

23 MS. PRINSLOO: Good evening. First of
24 all, I want to thank you all again for allowing us to
25 speak. This is so exciting to be able to hear some

1 people that I'm meeting for the first time tonight
2 speak on behalf of open primaries. So I want to thank
3 you all for considering it so strongly. As you can
4 tell, there's a lot of passionate people behind this.
5 There were some wonderful statistics, I think, that
6 everybody has spoken about tonight, so I'm going to do
7 more of a personal story for me. And it really
8 happened.

9 I moved to New York City eight years
10 ago. I've always wanted to live in New York City.
11 I've always felt like it's the greatest city in the
12 world. And I'm an independent, and I showed up to
13 vote in the primaries not realizing that I had to be a
14 registered voter in one of the parties. So I showed
15 up, and it was actually a Democratic primary. I gave
16 them my name, and they looked at me like I was stupid
17 and said, "You can't vote. You're not registered with
18 a party." And the devastation that I felt when I
19 heard that, knowing that my voice wasn't going to be
20 heard in that election, was so hard. And I think for
21 me, I was raised to do my civic duty, to always vote.

22 I had a grandmother -- a
23 great-grandmother that I knew, who was 103 when she
24 passed away. And she went through the women's right
25 to vote. She was born in 1899. And she knew what it

1 was like not to have that right. And so that was
2 always instilled in me, to make sure you always show
3 up, make sure that your voice is heard. And so it was
4 extremely disappointing for me to get turned away and
5 not be able to vote.

6 And I think the other concern that I
7 see in the city, and also really almost nationally, is
8 that we are seeing more and more people not affiliate
9 themselves with a Democrat or Republican party. And
10 we're just -- we're seeing also in, especially the
11 younger generation, where they're losing faith in
12 democracy because their voice isn't being heard. And
13 that's really concerning to me.

14 And there's a saying that, you know,
15 there's -- Democracy is the worst form of government,
16 except for all the others." And so we have to keep
17 the faith in that. We have to make sure that
18 everybody has the right to vote. And this is the way
19 that we can allow to do that. I think some great,
20 again, statistics were proven tonight. And some
21 wonderful ways on how to present it. And I think the
22 smart minds will figure that out. But it's important
23 that it at least goes to ballot so we have the --
24 another right to vote on how the system is done.

25 So thank you again for your time.

1 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
2 so much. And for the record, could you just share
3 your name?

4 MS. PRINSLOO: Oh, yes. I'm so sorry.
5 Sarah Prinsloo.

6 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
7 so much.

8 Any questions for either of our
9 panelists?

10 [No response.]

11 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
12 you.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you.

14 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
15 you. Appreciate it.

16 Sophia Cohen and Melissa Fisher, if you
17 could come join us.

18 And Gwen Lowenheim and Sheryl Williams.
19 You'll be up next.

20 Go ahead.

21 MS. COHEN: Yes, my name is Sophia
22 Zaharie [ph] Cohen. Just to let you know, I'm
23 nervous. I'm not good at public speaking. I have a
24 phobia, but --

25 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: You're

1 already doing great.

2 MS. COHEN: I think it's very important
3 for me to be here. So thank you for giving me the
4 opportunity to speak here.

5 I am fully in favor of New York City
6 adopting an open primary system because I think that
7 it will encourage voters to become more engaged in the
8 process. For example, I'm a registered Democrat, but
9 consider myself to be an independent-minded voter.
10 The current closed primary process often results in a
11 candidate who seems to be pre-chosen by the party.
12 While sometimes I may like that candidate, the closed
13 primary system has already made its choice for me.

14 As a result, I feel like I have very
15 little say in this part of the process. So when that
16 happens, it's human nature to become less engaged,
17 unfortunately. My belief is that open primary
18 system -- an open primary system will help alleviate
19 this issue and result in voters becoming more engaged
20 because they will feel like they have a stronger voice
21 in the process.

22 Thank you so much for considering
23 putting open primaries on the ballot. It's very
24 appreciated.

25 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank

1 you. Thank you for testifying.

2 MS. FISHER: Hi. My name is Melissa
3 Fisher. I wanted to thank everybody for considering
4 open primaries as part of the Commission's work. I
5 have recently retired, having served as a director of
6 development for several non-profits in the city.

7 On a personal level, I've been an
8 independent for most of my voting life. Despite the
9 fact that I grew up Irish Catholic in Massachusetts
10 during the Kennedy era. And early on, I was also a
11 registered Democrat. As I learned more about
12 politics, I realized that neither party really truly
13 represented me, and I became an independent.
14 Unfortunately, because of the closed primaries, at the
15 beginning of the year, I felt so strongly about the
16 upcoming mayoral election that I reluctantly decided
17 to take the time in decades to register as a Democrat.

18 I shouldn't have to be a member of a
19 party to exercise my constitutional right to vote in
20 our elections. New York thrives on diversity. It's
21 one of our greatest strengths. It's a city of
22 millions of voices, speaking different languages,
23 carrying different stories, and shaping different
24 visions for our future. Yet, when it comes to local
25 elections, too many voices are silenced before the

1 general election even begins.

2 Every voice should count not just at
3 the finish line, but at the start of the democratic
4 process. I'm not going to go through all the
5 statistics that everybody has already gone through.
6 But, you know, particularly important in a city like
7 New York where Democrats outnumber Republicans two to
8 one, many races are essentially decided in the
9 primary.

10 Open primaries would ensure that every
11 voter, regardless of party affiliation, has the right
12 to participate in shaping our government. And this
13 reform, as many people have spoken about, will
14 encourage greater political engagement, reduce extreme
15 partisanship, and lead to elected officials who
16 represent all New Yorkers, not just those belonging to
17 a single party. You know, I think -- as I think about
18 it more, I think about there was probably a time in
19 our history where being a Republican or a Democrat was
20 what people did. I think that now it's pretty clear
21 that's an outdated system, and we need to find a way
22 to have everybody being able to participate in all
23 levels of our elections.

24 The heart of democracy is choice. In
25 these times, democracy is more important than ever.

1 We need leadership that reflects the full spectrum of
2 voices in our city. New York City is a global leader
3 in innovation, inclusion, and progress, and we should
4 be leaders in democracy as well. Open primaries help
5 us come closer to ensuring that every vote counts,
6 every perspective is heard, and every community is
7 represented.

8 I ask you, the members of the
9 Commission, to make democracy in New York City as
10 welcome, vibrant, diverse, and open as the city
11 itself.

12 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
13 so very much.

14 Any questions?

15 [No response.]

16 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
17 very, very much.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

19 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: I will
20 ask Gwen Lowenheim and Sheryl Williams to join us.

21 MS. LOWENHEIM: Hello.

22 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Hello.

23 MS. LOWENHEIM: Can you hear me?

24 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Yes, we
25 can.

1 MS. LOWENHEIM: I'm very, very glad to
2 be here.

3 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: And
4 please make sure you share your name.

5 MS. LOWENHEIM: I'm Gwen Lowenheim. I
6 live in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn. I grew up in
7 Borough Park and have spent most of my life in this
8 area. I'm very happy to be here and to be able to
9 speak directly to the New York City Charter Revision
10 Commission, and I'm honored to contribute to these
11 hearings on open primaries in the city where my
12 grandparents immigrated, my parents raised their kids,
13 and I raised my daughter, and she now has three
14 children.

15 I was raised to always take our
16 democracy seriously, and yet my political views have
17 never been represented by either of the two parties,
18 an exclusion I take very seriously. From a young age,
19 I wondered why two parties was related to as
20 interchangeable with democracy, so I never registered
21 in either.

22 And as we know, the impact of that is
23 that I have not been able to really vote in the
24 elections. I've been an educator since the 1980s and
25 currently teach at Pace University, where I'm also the

1 coordinator of an international conversation groups
2 and facilitator training for undergraduate and
3 graduate students from the U.S. and around the world.
4 I also train teachers in innovative approaches to
5 student retention, which we know is a big issue.

6 And when I'm not in the classroom, I've
7 been a grassroots organizer, and I actually first
8 experienced grassroots organizing as a student at
9 Erasmus Hall High School, like right here. I'm
10 inspired by the students I work with. They're in
11 their 20s and in their late 30s. They see ways out of
12 the polarization of the two parties and are
13 enthusiastic about creating new possibilities. I hope
14 they do not become as alienated by this whole process
15 as I have been.

16 And as we know, it's been spoken about
17 a lot tonight, people in this age bracket are
18 overwhelmingly independent. If we opened our
19 primaries and gave independence a real voice, we'd
20 unlock a flood of fresh ideas and practical solutions
21 for our economy, for housing. I really support the
22 passionate direction about what needs to be done for
23 housing tonight. Let some innovation come through.

24 The two parties are too connected to
25 real estate interests. I just walked down downtown

1 Brooklyn. Everybody should do it. Go downtown
2 towards the bridge. There's a whole new city there.
3 And where is all the housing of the people that grew
4 up there?

5 I don't think the two parties are going
6 to solve this issue. So bring in the new voices, the
7 new ways of seeing what's possible. And that's really
8 what I had to say.

9 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Perfect.
10 Thank you.

11 MS. LOWENHEIM: So thank you.

12 MS. WILLIAMS: Good evening,
13 commissioners. My name is Sheryl Williams. I'm a
14 longtime resident of New York City and a proud
15 independent voter.

16 I'm here today to ask a simple but
17 fundamental question. Why can't every registered
18 voter in New York City vote in every election? We
19 talk a lot about democracy in this country, government
20 of, by, and for the people. But what kind of
21 democracy excludes over 1.1 million of its own
22 citizens from the first round of decision-making?

23 Closed primaries are a quiet form of
24 voter suppression. They don't shout, but they shut
25 out. They dampen enthusiasm, limit choice, and

1 reinforce a status quo that keeps too many people
2 disillusioned and disengaged. I recently had a chance
3 encounter with former Comptroller Scott Stringer. One
4 of his campaign aides asked if I wanted to meet him.
5 I said, "Sure."

6 Mr. Stringer greeted me warmly, but
7 then when I raised the issue of open primaries, of
8 letting all voters vote in every election, he started
9 to talk over me, stating, "Everyone can vote in the
10 general election. Of course we can." But by then,
11 the choices have already been narrowed. Mr. Stringer
12 suggested that maybe I should change my registration.
13 That suggestion, that I change who I am to fit into a
14 broken system, is part of what's wrong.

15 New ideas and new voices are trying to
16 be heard and the doors keep getting slammed shut. As
17 a citizen, I'm not interested in kissing rings or
18 playing party games. I want a system that respects
19 the people first. Open primaries, the right to vote
20 in all elections paid for by tax dollars are not a
21 radical idea. They're a basic expression of
22 democratic fairness.

23 So in closing, commissioners, I urge
24 you, use this charter revision process to affirm the
25 sovereignty of the people, not the convenience of the

1 parties. Access to voting is a civil rights issue.
2 It's due process. It's about equal protection. Rule
3 in favor of participation. Rule in favor of
4 transparency. Rule in favor of New Yorkers. All of
5 us.

6 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
7 so very much.

8 MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

9 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER:
10 Appreciate it.

11 Any questions?

12 [No response.]

13 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
14 you. Thank you for your passion.

15 I'm going to ask Vanessa Rudin and
16 Dr. Jessie Fields to join us. And next up will be
17 David Belmont and Yvonne Murray.

18 So, Vanessa and Dr. Jessie Fields.

19 Oh, we'll take them. Yeah, thank you.
20 Thank you so much.

21 MS. RUDIN: Hi. My name is Vanessa
22 Rudin. My phone has died, so hopefully I can remember
23 what I was going to say. I've always been an
24 unaffiliated voter. And actually, I thought that I
25 was one of, like, 1 percent in the country until the

1 pandemic. For some reason, it came out that there
2 were at least 30 percent. It was growing. It might
3 be 40 percent or 50 percent nationwide. I'm like,
4 "Oh, my gosh, there's all these people like me. I had
5 no idea. I really thought I was alone."

6 And I will say that I've never come to
7 a city-level meeting and very rarely a state-level
8 meeting until today because this so inspired me. To
9 me, it's like a nonpartisan issue, if you will, so
10 that all of us can vote. So sorry. I have to
11 remember what I was going to say. Probably out of
12 order, but I think that in response -- I'm a mom, a
13 renter. I'm absolutely not a billionaire, and I'm
14 sure I never will be. I'm not worried that having
15 ranked choice voting will promote billionaires.

16 In fact, I think it would work the
17 opposite because if you have ranked choice voting, you
18 need to, you know, consider more of the population to
19 get them to choose you and rank you, and you will have
20 more than 50 percent of the vote, and you will
21 probably have more people voting because what is the
22 point if it's really already decided? Whereas in this
23 case, it wouldn't already be decided, and so people
24 would be like, "Oh, I better go down and put in my
25 voice."

1 So to me, that's not a consideration
2 with all due respect to the other speaker. And then
3 in response to the council member, I mean, I guess
4 it's a little bit ironic because I understand the
5 concern over giving a mayor, any mayor, too much
6 power, but in essence, the Commission putting this on
7 as a choice for the people, that actually absolutely
8 gives the power to the people, not to the mayor. And,
9 in fact, once again, it gives more power to the people
10 because the mayor has to be responsive to more of the
11 population because more than 50 percent would have
12 chosen them first or second choice.

13 And then the final thing I'll say,
14 which is interesting just hearing everyone speak,
15 although I definitely think it would be great to have
16 ranked choice voting at the primary level and then
17 either the two choice or ranked choice if there's more
18 than two choices, I think either one of those could
19 work well.

20 I think, almost ironically, I'm not
21 suggesting this, but if you didn't have ranked choice
22 in the primaries, if for some reason the parties
23 wouldn't agree to that, if you even had ranked choice
24 after that, it would probably make an improvement
25 because some of the smaller parties would have a

1 bigger chance. It's not my favorite choice, but I'm
2 just saying that would be another option. I think the
3 ranked choice and then either two choices or ranked
4 choice and three or four is the best option.

5 So thank you so much for letting me
6 speak.

7 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
8 you.

9 DR. FIELDS: Good evening. It's great
10 to be here. I really appreciate this opportunity for
11 so many ordinary people to come and speak before the
12 Commission. My name is Dr. Jessie Fields, and I'm
13 happy that the Commission in your charter revision
14 preliminary report that you're considering reforming
15 our closed primary system that disenfranchises
16 unaffiliated independent voters and allowing
17 independents like me to participate.

18 I'm a medical doctor in Harlem, and I
19 serve on the New York City Maternal Mortality Review
20 Committee. I've been an independent voter for most of
21 my adult life, and I've been involved in campaigns to
22 open the primaries to independent voters here in New
23 York City. I served on the board of independent
24 voting, and I'm on the board of open primaries. I've
25 run as an independent candidate for Congress and for

1 Manhattan Borough President.

2 As we know, as has been said, New York
3 City has 1.1 million independent voters, a majority of
4 whom are people of color, Black, Latinx, and Asian.
5 And as we've heard, nearly half, 49 percent of New
6 York City independents are under age 40. Overall,
7 according to the Pew Research Center, 49 percent of
8 veterans identify as independents. Independents are
9 the second largest voting bloc in New York City, over
10 21 percent. Eleven percent of New York City voters
11 are registered Republicans, so Democrats are the first
12 largest voting bloc. Independents are the second
13 largest voting bloc in New York City. Yet, we are
14 disenfranchised from voting in primary elections.

15 Of course, the primary substantially
16 impacts on and determines who will ultimately be
17 elected to public office. And the fact that we
18 independents are barred from voting in primary
19 elections disenfranchises us, disenfranchises
20 independents from having a voice in choosing the
21 elected officials who govern at the local level. And
22 having a voice is so important. It's so important in
23 terms of the public policy that our city has, the
24 conditions in which our people live. We are required,
25 like everyone else, to pay taxes, but we are not

1 allowed to vote in primary elections.

2 I'm a doctor of the community, and I'm
3 very concerned about the health of New York City
4 communities. Those communities that are
5 disenfranchised and segregated have been found to have
6 poor health for decades and decades and decades.
7 Let's end the political segregation and exclusion of
8 certain voters who happen to choose not to register
9 with any political party and who want to remain
10 unaffiliated and independent and be able to vote in
11 primaries.

12 It is so important that communities
13 have full representation. If we really want to
14 increase voter participation and have a more healthy
15 democracy, we should open up our elections, open up
16 our primaries to all voters. I'm certain where Medgar
17 Evers would have stood on this matter.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's right.

19 DR. FIELDS: Here we are at Medgar
20 Evers College, and I'm certain of that.

21 Thank you.

22 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
23 both so very much.

24 Any questions?

25 [No response.]

1 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: I know I
2 asked for two others to join us. If David and Yvonne
3 would join us, but I am going to ask Council Member
4 Pierina Sanchez to join us virtually first while the
5 other two come and join us up here.

6 Council Member?

7 MS. SANCHEZ: Can you hear me?

8 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Yes, we
9 can.

10 MS. SANCHEZ: All right. Thank you.
11 Thank you so much.

12 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: And we
13 can see you.

14 MS. SANCHEZ: Thank you, Chair Buery
15 and members of the Commission. My name is Pierina
16 Sanchez. I am the City Council Member representing
17 the 14th District in The Bronx. Home to the
18 neighborhoods of Kingsbridge, Fordham, University
19 Heights, and Mount Hope. I am the Chair of the
20 Council's Committee on Housing and Buildings.

21 I was born and raised in a community
22 that I now represent, a community that faces
23 significant housing challenges on nearly every level
24 from my childhood in the West Bronx to now serving as
25 a City Council Member. I've held several roles that

1 have given me the perspective I hold today on matters
2 of housing and land use.

3 I served -- and by the way, I'm going
4 to do the disclaimer that my staff convinced me to say
5 all of this about me before launching -- thank you --
6 I served four years as the Director of the Regional
7 Planning Association where I authored Inclusive City,
8 which is a report focused on equitable planning and
9 land use strategies as well as pushed out a regional
10 analysis of housing displacement risk and residential
11 segregation.

12 In my own community of the West Bronx,
13 I co-founded the Jerome Avenue Revitalization
14 Collaborative in response to the Jerome Avenue
15 Rezoning during which I served on The Bronx Community
16 Board 5. And in its seven years of existence, JARC's
17 task has been two-fold to ensure implementation of the
18 rezoning's point of agreement and to advance inclusive
19 growth along the Jerome Corridor.

20 In my time at City Hall during the De
21 Blasio administration, I negotiated several rezonings
22 including the Bay Street Corridor and neighbor plan in
23 Staten Island and a number of smaller projects
24 throughout the five boroughs. And finally, in my
25 first four years as a Council Member, I have

1 championed bold steps that we must take to confront
2 the housing crisis including supporting the City of
3 Yes Zoning Tax Amendment in tandem with a \$5 billion
4 investment in City for All that the Council secured
5 and is working with the administration to implement.

6 I mention all of this to ground my
7 testimony and the experience that has spanned many
8 sides of the land use process as a community advocate,
9 a planner, a City Hall negotiator and now as a City
10 Council Member. Tonight, I would like to offer my
11 perspective on managed reforms to the City Charter
12 that will bring us closer to a just city where all New
13 Yorkers, regardless of background, have the
14 opportunity to put roots down and call this place
15 home.

16 I sincerely hope that the Commission
17 will think big as it considers structural reform and
18 that you do so with a faith in New Yorkers. Faith
19 that when equipped with the right rule -- tools and
20 when treated with respect by the city government, our
21 neighbors can be invaluable partners in planning for
22 our collective future. First, the Commission should
23 consider charter reforms that build on the speakers
24 for housing framework passed in December 2023.

25 This legislation was an important first

1 step toward addressing a striking inequity that in the
2 past decade just ten council districts, including
3 mine, have built more than the other 41 combined.
4 That is unacceptable. For too long, the same
5 neighborhoods have been asked to bear the entire
6 city's burden. While city-wide tax amendments are an
7 important step, we should pursue system changes that
8 ensure every community does its part. The framework
9 requires starting next year that the city set
10 five-year housing targets for each of our 59 community
11 districts.

12 These targets are to be incorporated
13 into the city's Fair Housing Plan and are accomplished
14 with a strategic equity framework that will identify
15 barriers to ensuring that every community contributes
16 to their fair share of housing and affordable housing.
17 Setting targets is a good baseline, but what comes
18 next? What happens if a community district
19 consistently does not reach their targets? What
20 happens to those that do? What combination of
21 characteristics can the city establish to incentivize
22 compliance? How can we empower communities to chart
23 their own path to reaching their housing targets?

24 To allow the Fair Housing Framework to
25 reach its full potential, the Commission should

1 again -- should consider a charter mechanism that
2 gives Framework T some kind of enforceability or
3 expedited review for districts that falls short of
4 meeting their fair share.

5 If very little new housing is being
6 built in an area not because of market conditions, but
7 because of a refusal to approve even a modest number
8 of new homes, our land use process must be able to
9 solve for that scenario. Similarly, the Commission
10 should consider whether existing community planning
11 tools in a charter can be better integrated with the
12 Fair Housing Framework so that districts who want to
13 meet their targets are empowered to do so through
14 planning and not just zoning.

15 The Commission, second, the Commission
16 should consider charter reforms that allow for
17 accelerated review processes for projects that are A,
18 affordable and target neighborhood level incomes, B,
19 fall below a certain density threshold and are
20 disincentivized under ULURP today, C, align with an
21 adopted community plan, borough plan, for a
22 comprehensive plan.

23 What I am suggesting here is that there
24 are certain kinds of housing that are badly needed in
25 this moment of crisis. Whether they're meeting the

1 needs of low-income New Yorkers, adding gentle density
2 or aligned with strategic planning. ULURP should not
3 treat these projects the same way they treat a market
4 rate development that needs its zoning changed. An
5 accelerated -- unaccelerated review for the
6 "dislimited" universe of projects would, of course,
7 need to be -- to, excuse me, would, of course, need to
8 preserve robust opportunities for public engagement,
9 including a role for the council.

10 But it would recognize that our land
11 use process can and should reflect the urgency with
12 which we must act to house our neighborhoods. Third,
13 the Commission should consider charter reforms that
14 strengthen accountability for city commitments or
15 points of agreement made as part of large-scale
16 rezoning. The potential of neighborhood rezonings to
17 build large chunks of housing integrated with
18 community needs unfortunately received very little
19 mention in the Commission's preliminary report, which
20 focused almost entirely on private applications.

21 When the council adopts a neighborhood
22 rezoning, it often comes after weeks of intense
23 negotiation that culminate in a points of agreement.
24 These documents state that the administration's
25 commitment to making significant investments usually

1 on the capital side in the neighborhood that it seeks
2 to rezone. This can range from park improvements to
3 sewer upgrades, small business support, to public
4 housing renovation.

5 It is one of only a few ways in which
6 these neighborhoods receive the investments they
7 deserve. But there's a problem. These commitments
8 are often massively delayed or outright disregarded.
9 As I mentioned earlier, I co-founded the JARC after
10 the Jerome Avenue Rezoning. And now it represents a
11 large section of the area that was rezoned. Some of
12 the city's commitments are way behind schedule, and
13 others have been unfulfilled because the
14 administration claimed that they expired.

15 For instance, seven years after the
16 rezoning, there is still no design, let alone
17 construction, for the promised renovation of the
18 Davidson Community Center. And a funding gap remains
19 without a clear proposal from the administration on
20 how they will close it. Small businesses along the
21 Jerome Corridor were also supposed to receive robust
22 targeted support, but those commitments were
23 disregarded. A promised Jerome Avenue business grant
24 program, while in its latest report of the
25 commitment's tracker, the administration explained

1 that the funding was repurposed -- "repurposed by OMB"
2 and then expired in fiscal year '22. That is
3 unacceptable, and I expect the commitment to be fully
4 funded as promised.

5 Finally, our city often engages in
6 piecemeal planning across agencies. The Commission
7 should revisit the idea of implementing a
8 comprehensive planning framework like the one
9 considered by the 2019 Charter Revision Commission
10 that aligns existing plans and centers for housing,
11 racial, economic, health, and climate justice, all
12 grounded in robust community engagement. A
13 comprehensive plan with enforceable district-level
14 targets would also help ease the burden on the ULURP
15 process and reduce the outside's influence of -- in
16 blocking projects that benefit the broader city.

17 Thank you, Commissioner, for your
18 attention to these critical issues and also
19 acknowledging. Thank you for your time.

20 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
21 for your thoughtful testimony.

22 Any questions for the Council Member
23 from our commissioners?

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Shams has a
25 question.

1 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Oh,
2 Shams. Go ahead.

3 MR. DABARON: Yeah. I just wanted to,
4 one, commend you, Councilwoman, for bringing that up,
5 and I appreciate your service as well. So all I
6 wanted to ask is, if you were submitting your
7 testimony in writing also, and had other information
8 that I could look at specifically, and I would
9 appreciate it.

10 MS. SANCHEZ: Yes. Thank you, and
11 great to see you, Shams.

12 MR. DABARON: Thank you.

13 MS. WYLDE: Hi, Council Member, and
14 thanks for your testimony. I also just wanted to
15 thank you for your leadership on all housing issues,
16 from all the various seats you've held, and really
17 think that we had -- if all Council Members kind of
18 approached projects in their district as you had, we
19 would be probably in the situation we're in, having to
20 find ways to kind of balance these city-wide and
21 borough-wide perspectives with the practice of kind of
22 hyper local decision-making.

23 You mentioned a couple of ways that you
24 think that this balance can be struck, and I'm curious
25 if you think the, you know, the Fair Housing Framework

1 with teeth or these fast tracks, if in follow-up
2 testimony, if there's any other avenues you've heard
3 of that you think are compelling ways to kind of
4 strike this balance, we really welcome that testimony.

5 I think some of the ideas you raised
6 were really interesting, and would love to kind of
7 continue hearing from you and your constituents on the
8 best way to strike this balance, given that we know
9 it's a severe need.

10 MS. SANCHEZ: Thank you.

11 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: And,
12 Carl.

13 MR. WEISBROD: Thank you, Council
14 Member, for your testimony.

15 I was particularly struck by, and this
16 has been an ongoing problem for decades of
17 administration after administration, failing to meet
18 commitments that they make with regard to points of
19 agreement for infrastructure to be run parallel to
20 housing growth. And I'm just curious as to whether
21 you have any recommendations regarding enforcement of
22 that.

23 MS. SANCHEZ: Yeah. Send them to jail.
24 No, I'm kidding. I'm kidding. That's an excellent
25 question. I mean, points of agreement should be

1 immediately sort of, codified is not the right word,
2 but included in the budget; right? So in the expense
3 budget and then in the, you know, 5-, 10-year capital
4 plan that the city has by agency. That wasn't
5 immediately the case for many of these commitments.
6 We were told that when the time comes, we'll see it
7 reflected sort of thing. So I think that's one area.
8 And then, you know, it's accountability; right? So
9 maybe it's a matter of empowering and empowering,
10 assigning, empowering, and then charging neighborhood
11 organisms. It's a thing in Spanish. But neighborhood
12 entities that are responsible for holding the
13 administration accountable; right?

14 So one reason that, you know, this
15 Jerome commitment for the automotive businesses on
16 Jerome is so top of mind for me is because we have the
17 JARC. And the JARC is constantly bringing this up,
18 constantly saying we need to -- the administration
19 needs to be held accountable; right? But they aren't
20 a formal government entity. It's not a charge of
21 the -- maybe we charge the community boards with this.
22 I'm not sure. But, you know, maybe another way to
23 sort of diffuse the accountability and make sure that
24 there's more entities chiming in.

25 MR. WEISBROD: Thank you. And any

1 further suggestions as you think about this
2 enforcement mechanisms, I think, charter or otherwise,
3 I would appreciate.

4 MS. SANCHEZ: Thank you. Yeah.

5 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
6 so very much. Thanks for taking the time. Appreciate
7 it. Back to David Belmont and Yvonne Murray. And I
8 just want to make sure Latoya Benjamin [ph] and Benny
9 Rosenberger know that they are not in this.

10 MR. BELMONT: Hello. My name is David
11 Belmont, and I'm most happy to be here before the
12 commissioners. I'm a lifelong New Yorker, born here
13 in Brooklyn, raised in Queens. I currently live on
14 the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

15 I've been an independent voter my
16 entire voting life. I've been active in New York and
17 national politics since 1979, running ballot access
18 drives and doing statistical analysis for insurgent
19 and independent candidates. I wholeheartedly support
20 opening up the primaries to independent voters. I
21 testified in support of and voted for open primaries
22 the last time it was on the ballot in 2003.

23 I think allowing independence into the
24 first round of voting is simply a question of
25 fairness. That round is where the overwhelming

1 majority of races are decided. We've heard this
2 figure, 1.1 million independent voters in New York
3 City. That's a lot of folks to lock out of the most
4 important election in determining who represents us.

5 In closing, I'd like to say, in regard
6 to barring independence from primaries, New York City
7 is an outlier. Eighty percent of the fifty largest
8 cities in the United States have some form of open
9 primary. I think it's high time for New York to get
10 in step.

11 Thank you.

12 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
13 you.

14 MS. MURRAY: I agree. I totally agree.

15 Good evening, commissioners. My name
16 is Yvonne Murray. And I'm a proud independent for
17 over 40 years. I reside here in Brooklyn, and I've
18 lived here for the majority of my life.

19 And I came here today to express my
20 concerns about our elections. I am appealing to this
21 Commission to put open primaries on the ballot for all
22 New York voters to be able to take a vote. I was once
23 a registered Democrat and changed my party affiliation
24 because I felt overlooked and taken for granted. And
25 as a proud Black American and knowing the importance

1 of voting, and to be denied the right because I'm an
2 independent, to participate in elections that I also
3 pay for is appalling and totally undemocratic.

4 I see this as another form of voter
5 suppression. And we talk about voter suppression in
6 other parts of the country, but it's been happening
7 here forever. There are 1.1 million independents who
8 are being discriminated against, and this is supposed
9 to be a democracy we live in. I have been a poll
10 worker with the BOE [ph] since the '90s, and as a poll
11 worker, I have witnessed firsthand independents being
12 turned away from the ballot, being so annoyed, being
13 so frustrated, as one young person -- young lady in
14 here spoke about this evening.

15 And as an independent myself, it's
16 totally upsetting. It really, really is. I was told
17 that in order to work the polls, which I've been
18 doing, that the only assignment you can have since
19 you're not a registered Democrat or Republican is a
20 poll door clerk or an information clerk. And I have
21 worked in those assignments, but I've worked every
22 other assignment at the poll. I had one coordinator
23 even say to me, "You know, you would be a great, great
24 coordinator if you would only come out of that party
25 and become a Democrat," which I decided I wasn't going

1 to do.

2 In any event, I am really appealing to
3 "yous" to make this the issue on the ballot because
4 it's long, long overdue.

5 And I would also like to thank you for
6 hearing me out this evening, and thank all these folks
7 that came out, because that's how important it really
8 is.

9 Thank you for your time.

10 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
11 so much. And thank you for having perfect timing.

12 Anyone else?

13 [No response.]

14 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: I'm going
15 to ask Benny Rosenberger and Barbara Blair to come up
16 front. And Karen Wharton and Suwen Cheong will be
17 after them, followed by Jessica Rosenfield. And then
18 we will move to virtual -- and Susan Lerner -- sorry.

19 MS. BLAIR: Hello, my name's Barbara
20 Blair. I work in Midtown Manhattan for a neighborhood
21 development organization, but I'm a Brooklynite, which
22 is why I'm here this evening.

23 Thank you so much for taking the time
24 to listen to us, and I never like to miss an
25 opportunity to speak to New York City's brain trust.

1 So we're counting on you. I'm here about a topic that
2 the Council Member actually spoke about; it's fair
3 share. And we have the concept of fair share right
4 now in the city charter, but we do not have a
5 mechanism for either codifying it in the planning
6 process, a ULURP process, some sort of approval
7 process at a community board level. And so what's
8 happened is there are neighborhoods in the city, and
9 the Garment District where I work is one of them, are
10 sacrifice zones.

11 And they're sacrifice zones because we
12 have allowed state and city government to place uses,
13 LULUs, Locally Unwanted Land Uses, in neighborhoods,
14 cluster them in neighborhoods where either there's not
15 a lot of pushback. In our case, we don't have
16 residents, so there's nobody to vote against them.
17 They're not part of the public process. So I have
18 colleagues also, for example, in Harlem that are in
19 the same situation I'm in.

20 We have methadone clinics, needle
21 exchanges, supportive housing, you know? Shelters.
22 Not to say that these uses should not be in the city
23 of New York. They should be in every borough, in
24 every district, not in sacrifice zones where you don't
25 have a strong counter-narrative to having them all

1 dumped in one place. So that's why I'm here. This is
2 an easy problem to fix. The Council Members spoke
3 about it with reference to housing.

4 The whole concept of fair share goes
5 across almost everything that we do in our
6 communities, and I look to you to solve it.

7 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
8 so much.

9 MR. ROSENBERGER: Hi, my name is Daniel
10 Rosenberger. I'm a member of Community Board 9.

11 I didn't come here to speak about the
12 open primaries. However, now that it was brought up,
13 I wanted to put in my two cents. I think that opening
14 up primaries is the wrong solution for a real problem.
15 To my understanding, primaries are for the people
16 that -- party be able to choose their leaders and
17 their party. I understand that the independents feel
18 that they're left out. I think that the alternative
19 and better solution would be to make it much easier
20 for independents to run for office or to create their
21 own separate party.

22 I've heard testimony from people who
23 have who have tried to run as an independent, and they
24 have many, you know, obstacles, and it's much more
25 difficult. So if you would make it easier, on par, if

1 you want equality, make it easier or as easy to run as
2 an independent, as a member of the party, I think that
3 would be a much better solution.

4 Now, my primary reason for coming here
5 was I wanted to speak about the ULURP process. I'm
6 currently on the ULURP Committee and Community Board
7 9. I was on transportation, and both in committees,
8 I've come across many times where, you know, we go
9 ahead and thrash through a, you know, something that's
10 happened or some legislation or some rule. And, you
11 know, because the community boards are just advisory
12 boards. I see our conclusions or solutions have been
13 overridden or ignored.

14 In particular, in ULURP, you -- you
15 know, it's -- considering a zoning situation where,
16 you know, the community was against a certain zoning
17 increase, and, you know, they're just overridden by
18 higher-ups. So I personally think that all of these
19 decisions, either -- whether it's zoning or if it's
20 transportation, the people who live next door to these
21 developments, you know, or these traffic and
22 transportation changes, should be -- should have to
23 sign off on it. They should -- every -- you know,
24 depending on how large the change is going to be, you
25 know, how high the building is going to be, or how --

1 what the density of the population is going to be, you
2 should have to increase the radius of the amount of
3 residents who actually live there, homeowners, you
4 know, property owners.

5 These decisions affect their -- you
6 know, the value of their property that they've
7 invested in. And, you know, most of them, their
8 entire -- their retirement investment, that's their --
9 you know, whole -- 80 percent of their net worth is
10 invested in their property. So making changes that
11 negatively affect the value of their property is, I
12 think, unfair.

13 And the same thing goes for
14 transportation. I mean, in particular, I can speak
15 upon, you know, they want to make a protected bike
16 lanes on residential streets. Now, I mean, this is a
17 decision by the city that they want to have more bike
18 lanes, but they're not taking into consideration that,
19 you know, if you live on a residential block, and, you
20 know, you open up a bike lane between the parking lane
21 and, you know, the sidewalk, you're literally creating
22 another lane of traffic, you know, that people have to
23 worry about as they exit the car.

24 So if you have families and you come
25 back from a long two-hour trip, and your kids are

1 anxious to get out the door, you know, they're very
2 likely to get hit by, you know, bicycles that are
3 riding at 15, 20 miles an hour. And there already
4 have been incidents where children have been hit and
5 are injured by, you know, such, you know, accidents.
6 So that's what I want to say.

7 Thank you.

8 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
9 so much. Thank you both.

10 Any questions?

11 Carl, yes. Please, go ahead.

12 MR. WEISBROD: Yeah, Ms. Blair. As you
13 know, there's been a fair share requirement in the
14 city charter since 1989 that has not worked as
15 initially intended. And I'm going to ask you, unlike
16 housing, the kinds of uses you're referring to, don't
17 lend themselves to such easy, equitable -- if housing
18 does -- fair share solutions.

19 But I'm curious as to whether you have
20 specific ideas regarding enforcing the existing fair
21 share requirement and with those of charter changes or
22 legislative, I'd be interested in knowing.

23 MS. BLAIR: Yeah, I mean, I do really
24 think it has to be part of a legislative or, you know,
25 planning ULURP process. My understanding right now is

1 that the concept of fair share is if government places
2 a social service entity in your neighborhood. So it's
3 a government building. But government subcontracts
4 out all these uses to contractors. And those uses,
5 you could have a contract with the city to provide
6 harm reduction or whatever it is. But it's not a
7 city-run program. So I think that's just one.

8 I mean, I'm not completely fluent in
9 what the issues are vis-a-vis where do we cite them?
10 But I think that the idea of having some kind of
11 mechanism where you can't have clusters. And a good
12 example is in our neighborhood. We have several harm
13 reduction and a methadone clinics that treat 750
14 people a day that come in to take methadone. But
15 they're also drug users.

16 And then I have two needle exchanges
17 right next to them. What that does is it brings in
18 all the drug dealers because you've created a
19 marketplace. So, I mean, I think the idea of making
20 sure that these uses are spread throughout all the
21 five boroughs and all the communities and you're
22 not -- the individuals that are coming in to use the
23 services, don't live in the Garment District. We
24 don't have residents in the Garment District.

25 So they're coming from all over New

1 York, Long Island, those sorts of things to access the
2 services. So that's really what I feel is that we
3 just have to, you know, whether it's some kind of
4 quantitative limit on the number of services you can
5 have in the neighborhood. I don't know, but --

6 MR. WEISBROD: Well, if you give it
7 some thoughts and if you have specific ideas, please
8 submit them.

9 MS. BLAIR: I will, indeed.

10 MR. WEISBROD: Thank you.

11 MS. BLAIR: Thank you.

12 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
13 both so very much.

14 Karen Wharton and Suwen Cheong will be
15 followed by Jessica Rosenfield and Susan Lerner.

16 Please go ahead.

17 MS. WHARTON: Good evening, everyone.
18 My name is Karen Wharton. I'm the Democracy Coalition
19 Coordinator for Citizen Action of New York. I'm also
20 the founder of the New York BIPOC Democracy Table.

21 Much of my work is focused on politics,
22 expanding and protecting voting rights, and looking at
23 voting rights reforms through a racial justice lens.
24 Most importantly, though, I'm a proud Black
25 Brooklynite who's lived here for over 30 years. I'm

1 here tonight because I care deeply about democracy.
2 But I also know what it looks like when democracy is
3 taken away from communities like mine. That is why I
4 am speaking firmly against the proposed jungled
5 primaries that is before us in New York City.

6 Let's look at the numbers. Brooklyn is
7 home to over 930,000 Black residents. That's more
8 than one-third of the entire Black population of New
9 York State. In central Brooklyn districts like East
10 Flatbush, Brownsville, Crown Heights, and Bed-Stuy,
11 Black residents make up between 60 and 80 percent of
12 the population. Brooklyn also has over 1.1 million
13 registered Democrats. The highest of any borough, and
14 Black voters are the cornerstone of that Democratic
15 base.

16 Why does this matter? Black Brooklyn
17 has helped build this Democratic Party. Shirley
18 Chisholm, William Clark, and yes, Eric Adams. It is
19 through the Democratic Party that we've built and
20 acquired political power. And because primaries are
21 where parties choose their candidates, the proposal is
22 very likely to reverse this, the power that we've been
23 building, by weakening the parties. And this would
24 weaken Black power in Brooklyn and perhaps result in
25 voter dilution.

1 Furthermore, jungled primary in New
2 York City is a solution in search of a problem,
3 because it certainly would not address voter turnout.
4 Here is why. There are approximately 3,000,000
5 registered Democrats in New York City. Yet, we
6 consider it a great day when 1,000,000 of them turn to
7 vote. But the solution that is being proposed is not
8 directed at those 2,000,000 Democrats who stay home.
9 This proposal is focused solely on non-affiliates. So
10 then the question is, whose turnout are you hoping to
11 improve? Folks, let's not trade real progress with
12 false promises. Let's protect the power we've fought
13 so hard in New York to build.

14 Ordinary New Yorkers aren't asking for
15 this. Recently, I served on a panel -- ordinary who
16 aren't in the room. Recently, I served on a panel
17 hosted by New York City Votes. The panelists, all
18 people of color representing communities of color,
19 were asked about improvements, RCV, and the changes.
20 We unanimously suggested that the current system be
21 kept in place without changes for a period of time.
22 Voters today are still grappling with RCV.

23 I know this because I'm a RCV advocate.
24 I'm also an education organizer on RCV. So now is not
25 the time to make change unless you want to further

1 depress turnout. I believe in democracy. I believe
2 in real reform, which is why, as I mentioned, I
3 advocated for RCV in 2019 and 2021. But this reform
4 is not suitable for New York City.

5 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Please
6 try to finish as --

7 MS. WHARTON: -- is not suitable for
8 New York City.

9 Thank you so much. On cue.

10 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
11 so much. Appreciate it.

12 MS. CHEONG: I -- my name is Suwen
13 Cheong. I'm a resident of this community and the
14 chair of Community Board 9's Land Use Committee,
15 though I'm speaking on my own behalf today.

16 I do support comprehensive planning,
17 but it must start and end at the community level.
18 There is a place for citywide comprehensive planning,
19 setting out citywide targets and values for housing,
20 economic development, green space, infrastructure, and
21 services, as well as setting citywide constraints such
22 as the budget. A regular comprehensive plan must
23 include environmental assessments of each community at
24 least once every five years, as one of the main
25 deficiencies of the current process is a lack of

1 cumulative environmental review and environmental
2 review of the accumulated consequences of as-of-right
3 development.

4 Ninety percent of all the development
5 in the city and our district has been as-of-right, and
6 by the way, that's been about 4,500 units since 2010,
7 which puts us about in the middle of all community
8 districts. What should be left to local communities,
9 working with city planners from all levels of
10 government or independent planners, is zoning and how
11 to use individual sites. What most communities and
12 community boards fear about comprehensive planning is
13 putting a tremendous amount of work into a balanced
14 and fair plan, only to see it transmogrified into
15 their worst nightmare by the time it leaves the City
16 Planning Commission, and I'll just say Williamsburg
17 Waterfront.

18 Since preliminary environmental reviews
19 take place pre-certification by DCP, let's prohibit
20 DCP or the Planning Commission from making
21 out-of-scope changes to community plans that are
22 passed by community boards. As a Community Board Land
23 Use Chair, I do not agree that our review period
24 should be shortened or combined with the Borough
25 President's review period. Sixty days is barely

1 enough time for us to get out and word for public
2 hearings and hold committee and full board votes given
3 holidays and quorum issues.

4 Instead, I suggest that the Borough
5 President's separate review period be used for the
6 Borough Board to review and vote on individual ULURP
7 applications if they choose. This would center a
8 borough-wide perspective in a democratic, rather than
9 an autocratic manner. The ULURP review period is
10 being unfairly blamed for delays in development. It's
11 limited in short at six months. By contrast, the
12 pre-certification and pre-filing periods, which take
13 place at the Department of City Planning, is
14 effectively unlimited. I suggest a charter change to
15 limit the pre-certification and pre-filing periods to
16 six months to one year.

17 Finally, while I support stronger and
18 more specific fair share requirements for each
19 community district, I oppose any builder's remedy to
20 shorten or eliminate ULURP, even for a district which
21 has not met its fair share requirements for public
22 land, for affordable housing, or small sites. That
23 just replaces community planning and city planning
24 with developer-driven planning.

25 Instead, I would suggest that districts

1 which fail to come up with an appropriate
2 comprehensive plan addressing housing and fair share
3 issues, should have a plan done for them by the city,
4 which can then go through the normal ULURP process.
5 While many have complained about Council Member
6 deference, as this is not law, I don't believe it's
7 appropriate to pass charter changes to prohibit member
8 deference. It's our responsibility as voters to hold
9 our elected officials accountable for their actions.
10 And likewise, a post-ULURP appeals process is
11 completely unnecessary. The variance process already
12 does that.

13 When they want more -- when developers
14 want more than what a variance offers, that's when
15 they go to rezoning.

16 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
17 both so very much.

18 I ask the commissioners if there are
19 any questions.

20 MS. WYLDE: Ms. Wharton, I'm curious --
21 I heard very loudly your concerns around the -- some
22 of the open primary ideas being considered. What are
23 your thoughts on the even-year -- the idea of moving
24 elections to even-year local elections?

25 MS. WHARTON: Thank you, Commissioner.

1 Entirely on board with it. I think that is a very
2 sensible approach to capture most or the point in time
3 when many New Yorkers are indeed voting. So 100
4 percent, which is why I said, "I'm for reforms, but
5 reforms that make sense." And this one does.

6 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
7 both so very much. I appreciate it.

8 Finally, I think we have Jessica
9 Rosenfield and Susan Lerner to join us.

10 MS. ROSENFELD: Good evening. My name
11 is Jessica Rosenfield, and it's a pleasure to be here
12 today. I'm here as a member of the general public
13 with New York's -- the City of New York's
14 affordability and future growth in mind is my primary
15 concern. And I want to applaud the Commission's
16 efforts to help the City of New York thrive.

17 Because I do support streamlining
18 development in transit-rich areas via ULURP and
19 landmark preservation reforms. However, it is my
20 position on voting that compels me to testify today.
21 Many have mentioned political polarization, political
22 disengagement. And a lot of testimony today comes in
23 support of an open primary on the argument put forth
24 that it would increase participation.

25 But the concerns outlaid in the

1 preliminary report reflect concerns about
2 participation in the general political election. And
3 while I am in support of a open primary, I don't
4 believe that it goes far enough to address that. The
5 testimony refers to the primaries as the most
6 important election, which party political primaries
7 were not designed to be that way. So given this
8 general sentiment, I believe it is a failure of both
9 the city, the way political parties are playing out in
10 the cities, and our election system. And I see the
11 proposal from Citizens Union as something that is
12 mentioned in the report that addresses this.

13 But it is a complex and unique system
14 where I would love the Commission to outline how risks
15 that these unique systems may have -- could come into
16 play to ensure that they are well addressed should
17 they go on to the ballot. Because I think while open
18 primaries and general -- sorry -- even-year elections
19 are easy to understand, systems that would make --
20 create a system that is more participatory and
21 representative are much more difficult and easier to
22 get right.

23 Thank you.

24 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
25 so much.

1 MS. LERNER: Thank you. My name is
2 Susan Lerner. I'm the Executive Director of Common
3 Cause New York. And thank you for the opportunity to
4 be heard on one of my favorite topics, which is
5 election reform.

6 And although I don't know my companion
7 here, I have to say that I think she has a point. I
8 think we are in the middle of a discussion of open
9 primaries. The National Conference of State
10 Legislatures identifies five different types of open
11 primaries. The Bipartisan Policy Center identifies
12 seven types of non-closed primaries. And we've really
13 only been focusing on one.

14 In deciding to put ranked choice voting
15 before the voters, earlier Charter Commissioners spent
16 a lot of time looking at different permutations of
17 RCV. They heard testimony from academics who had
18 concerns about RCV. Academics who had done research
19 and supported RCV. And as a consequence, what was
20 placed before the voters was specifically crafted for
21 New York City's peculiar requirements and the
22 requirements of New York election law.

23 So that means that that Charter
24 Revision Commission decided to restrict RCV to the
25 primaries because of the peculiarities of fusion

1 voting in our state. Now, the top two proposal hasn't
2 addressed the question of how it impacts fusion voting
3 and how our ballots are actually laid out in
4 accordance with state law. Because New York state law
5 requires our ballots to be laid out based on party.

6 So if we're going to a top two and you
7 have a candidate who actually is endorsed by two
8 different parties, are we going to design the New York
9 City's section of the ballot differently than the
10 state section? And that's a question that I frankly
11 haven't looked at in detail, but I don't believe has
12 been discussed. Especially when we're talking about a
13 proposal which we do support, which is the
14 consolidation to even years.

15 You are going to have city and state
16 and federal ballot races on the same ballot and ballot
17 design becomes a concern. We are concerned about
18 unaffiliated voters. And we did a poll in 2023 of
19 unaffiliated voters, and my written testimony details
20 what we found. And what we found is pretty
21 interesting in that they really hadn't thought about
22 open primaries. They kind of liked the idea, but they
23 didn't really understand the differentiations.

24 And they were most comfortable with
25 what we call a "semi-open primary," which is the

1 unaffiliated voter can walk in on primary day and
2 choose which party primary to vote under. And that
3 really raises the question of what are we trying to
4 achieve with primary reform? Are we trying to achieve
5 an increase in turnout? Well, the staff report
6 indicates that top two in California hasn't resulted
7 necessarily in an increase in turnout.

8 I would suggest Colorado's experience
9 with a semi-open primary is something we should be
10 looking at. But again, we're not seeing consistency.
11 Sometimes you get a bump up. Sometimes you don't.
12 And I think we need to be clear in terms of what our
13 reform is designed to accomplish, and then we should
14 go about designing a specific reform for New York City
15 to try and get us closer to that goal.

16 So I don't think it's time for us to be
17 putting an open primary measure on the ballot.

18 Thank you.

19 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
20 so much.

21 I will say this has been the most
22 popular issue; right?

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

24 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: I think
25 we are acting in response to what has been clearly the

1 topic that seems to be most urgent and top of mind for
2 all, which is why I think the staff has spent so much
3 time doing exactly what you said, which is looking at
4 models, considering options, thinking about those
5 downstream impacts on the city that it might have, and
6 using this public forum and the forthcoming meetings,
7 of which there are four or five coming up, to really
8 think through what are the implications for that.

9 And so I guess, my question for you is,
10 given that sense of urgency that we're hearing, what
11 is it -- why not now?

12 MS. LERNER: Well, what's interesting
13 is that while there is a sense of urgency in these
14 discussions, as my colleague Karen Wharton pointed
15 out, when we're actually out working with
16 organizations that talk day in and day out to voters,
17 what they tell us is this is not coming spontaneously
18 from the bottom up.

19 Voters are not coming to voting
20 advocates to say, "Oh, my God, I'm not able to vote in
21 the primary." And instead, what we're hearing from
22 our colleagues -- and we need a coalition of over 50
23 groups across the city who are actively involved in
24 different communities with non-English voters,
25 English, you know, Native American voters, and

1 everything in between.

2 And they tell us right now that they
3 feel that the voters are absorbing a lot of changes
4 and that there needs to be more time to really
5 understand the electoral landscape with the RCV change
6 and do a thorough analysis and then figure out what
7 the next step is.

8 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
9 you.

10 And, yes, Julie.

11 MS. SAMUELS: Thanks. Thank you both.

12 Susan, I just want to dig in for one
13 more second. Do you think that if we were to do open
14 primaries in one of these first ones, obviously,
15 there's a lot of permutations, and I think your point
16 about the balance is a very good one. Do you think it
17 might depress turnout?

18 MS. LERNER: Well, I mean in Colorado,
19 what we saw was the first -- Colorado in 2018 for the
20 first time had what we call "semi-open primaries";
21 right? They had a closed primary system, and then
22 they went to a system where an unaffiliated voter
23 could come in and decide which primary to vote in.
24 They saw a bump up of approximately -- the difference
25 between the primary turnout and the general turnout

1 narrowed by about 7 percent.

2 But then they had a different result in
3 different election years. Generally, they are seeing
4 a higher turnout. And it's interesting that Colorado
5 voters presented with a top four, I believe, measure
6 on the ballot in November, chose not to change the
7 semi-open primary and rejected the top four change.
8 Turnout is a very complicated issue. It has a lot of
9 permutations. And that's why we have been such strong
10 proponents for the even-year consolidation because
11 it's the one thing where we can see consistently cycle
12 after cycle after cycle there is a larger turnout.

13 MS. SAMUELS: Thank you.

14 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank you
15 so much.

16 Lisette?

17 MS. NIEVES: Hi, Susan.

18 MS. LERNER: Hi.

19 MS. NIEVES: My question for you is --
20 has a lot to do with so many younger people by
21 choosing to be independent; right?

22 MS. LERNER: Yes.

23 MS. NIEVES: I mean, this is
24 something -- we could talk about housing, we could
25 talk about -- this is where I've seen more young

1 people saying something that I've heard before. And
2 they see it as a barrier to their engagement. So I'm
3 curious, on your data, how are you seeing that
4 breakdown as far as --

5 MS. LERNER: So -- yeah, we looked --
6 in '20, my written testimony, which I sent in earlier,
7 has a link to our full report where we have a series
8 of charts breaking down the unaffiliated voters on a
9 statewide basis based on 2023. And what was
10 interesting to me, going back and refreshing my
11 recollection, is that there is a distinction, at least
12 at that time, between what we were seeing in
13 unaffiliated voters statewide and unaffiliated voters
14 in New York City.

15 And the metric which stuck out to me
16 was a higher proportion of engaged, unaffiliated
17 voters outside of New York City. That goes to Karen's
18 point. We have a turnout problem. It's not
19 necessarily related to whether a voter is affiliated
20 or unaffiliated. It has to do with -- often it has to
21 do with if the contest is interesting to the voters.
22 If the candidates have done a good enough job reaching
23 out to a larger number of voters.

24 Often young people tell us they don't
25 hear from candidates, so they don't feel like they

1 have any investment. Changing what we do with
2 primaries isn't going to get at that problem. We have
3 a multifaceted problem. And when young people feel
4 that the candidate addresses their issues and the
5 candidate's done a good job of making that clear to
6 young people, the percentage of young people who vote
7 rises. So some of this can be addressed with changing
8 election procedure. A lot of it is basically more
9 political.

10 And we can keep jiggering with changes
11 that kind of get the voters somewhat confused if
12 they're one on top of the other when we have a more
13 political problem than an actual procedural problem.
14 And also the thing that's, you know, interesting about
15 the unaffiliated voter in New York City -- and this is
16 true statewide, but even more so in New York City --
17 is it is a higher percentage of White voters are
18 unaffiliated and a higher -- a lower -- than you see
19 in the general voter population.

20 You have a much smaller percentage of
21 Black voters who are unaffiliated than in the general
22 voter rolls and a much higher percentage of Black
23 voters who choose to enroll in a party than of any
24 other ethnic group. So again, you know, I'm glad that
25 the staff is aware of the voting rights questions. I

1 think that's a very open question, what the impact
2 will be in our multifaceted elections.

3 VICE CHAIRWOMAN GREENBERGER: Thank
4 you.

5 I'm going to turn it back to Julie.
6 I'm also going to relinquish the chair to Leila.

7 So thank you all.

8 MS. BOZORG: Thank you. I'll be quick.
9 It's mostly a statement, but I kind of want to hear
10 your response more than anything, Susan.

11 My feeling is that there's two -- as I
12 understand, there's about 2,000,000 registered
13 Democrats who consistently aren't voting in primaries.

14 MS. LERNER: Correct.

15 MS. BOZORG: And data showing about 1.1
16 million independent voters. If those 2.2 are
17 consistently not voting primary over primary, clearly,
18 we're having a problem getting to them, whether it's
19 the candidates, like you said, or whatever. If
20 untapping some significant fraction of this 1.1
21 million is significantly easier, because we're kind of
22 banging our heads against the wall on this other 2
23 million, why shouldn't we go after -- if -- I guess
24 what I'm saying is if there's a low-hanging fruit of
25 New Yorkers who want to vote in the primary and can't,

1 shouldn't we make it easier for them?

2 MS. LERNER: So then it's a question of
3 what is the simplest and easiest way to reach those
4 voters. And I would argue that the simplest and
5 easiest way is a semi-open primary, which leaves the
6 existing party structure in place, has the fewest
7 administrative changes, but allows for the
8 unaffiliated voters to come in and participate. And
9 then it's a question of whether the candidates think
10 it's worth their time to reach out to an unaffiliated
11 voter when they're doing such a bad job of reaching
12 out to the already registered. And that is beyond, I
13 think, all of our crystal ball ability.

14 MS. WHITE: Any other questions?

15 MS. BOZORG: Thank you.

16 MS. LERNER: Thank you.

17 MS. WHITE: Thank you very -- some
18 really important questions that we have been looking
19 at. And we'll just state for the record, too, that
20 the Commission has retained an election expert and
21 outside counsel to help us study these issues. So --
22 and it's been -- we have had a pretty extensive period
23 of time, and we will, by the end of July, too, have a
24 pretty extensive period of time to continue with any
25 of these issues. So thank you.

1 MS. LERNER: Thank you.

2 MS. WHITE: We're going to move to
3 virtual testimony. And our first three participants
4 are Vishnu Reddy, Sean Scott, and Sherease Torain.
5 We'll start with Vishnu.

6 MR. REDDY: Hi. My name is Vishnu
7 Reddy, and I'm so grateful that we're sitting here
8 today and talking about two of the most important
9 issues facing our city right now, which is the
10 underproduction of housing of all kinds and the need
11 for electoral reform. The report that the Commission
12 has produced has many thoughtful proposals that I
13 would love to see put on the ballot.

14 Let me start with housing. There are
15 many great proposals in your report, such as
16 fast-tracking the land use review process for modest
17 changes, consolidating the advisory portions of ULURP,
18 ensuring every part of the city does their fair share
19 in housing production, and getting out of our own way
20 when it comes to building housing on publicly-owned
21 land.

22 I'm in support of pretty much all of
23 the recommendations that the Commission has put
24 forward on the topic of housing, and I can't wait to
25 vote for them on the ballot. In fact, I would like to

1 see us tackling this issue even more aggressively than
2 what the plan -- and their report suggests. And we
3 can't afford to delay any longer because housing
4 delayed is housing denied, and we can't keep living
5 this way.

6 Millions of New Yorkers are suffering,
7 and we need to tackle this problem with the urgency it
8 deserves. Now let me talk about electoral reform. If
9 any one electoral reform is most important here, it
10 would be to do what we can on the city side to allow
11 for even-year elections. Our turnout numbers are
12 abysmally low, which harms the legitimacy of our
13 political system, and even-year elections would help
14 bolster turnout.

15 I'm also in favor of the Citizens
16 Union's proposal to have a ranked choice open primary
17 with a top-two general election. Barring that, I
18 would encourage the Commission to explore other ways
19 to elect city officials with majority support instead
20 of a mere plurality.

21 Lastly, I want to caution the
22 Commission against supporting curbside electric
23 vehicle charging infrastructure. We already have a
24 problem with getting the political will to reallocate
25 curb space for long-standing needs in our city. There

1 are so many better ways we can publicly use -- we can
2 use publicly-owned space by the curb than for storing
3 private vehicles.

4 Outdoor dining, neighborhood loading
5 zones, bus lanes, bike lanes, and containerized trash
6 are all things I would love to see more of, and that
7 requires making car storage at the curb less
8 entrenched, not more.

9 Thank you for your time.

10 MS. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Reddy.

11 Questions?

12 [No response.]

13 MS. WHITE: All right. We'll move on
14 to Sean Scott.

15 MR. SCOTT: Thank you, Your Honor.

16 I'm Sean Scott, resident of Phi Dive
17 [ph], speaking in my personal capacity. Thanks to the
18 Commissioner for all the great work, especially the
19 thorough preliminary report. I wanted to emphasize
20 the need for ambitious housing changes to address our
21 50-year-long housing emergency, so thank you for all
22 the suggestions there.

23 I wanted to throw out two somewhat
24 unconventional and yet -- and also not fully
25 fleshed-out ideas, so I'll keep it very brief. I was

1 thinking about carrots and sticks and listening to
2 Council Member Sanchez's testimony, and specifically
3 the fair share portion. And I want to offer a carrot
4 instead of many sticks. Specifically, new
5 developments bring tax dollars to the city but are
6 never really seen directly by their communities, and
7 so my suggestion is that we should consider giving
8 communities a percentage of the tax revenues to be
9 used in a similar fashion to participatory budgeting,
10 where the community directly feels ownership over the
11 net new tax revenue they bring in, so it's not just
12 the city benefiting.

13 Second, even more unconventional, I'd
14 love to think about how we can de-emphasize the focus
15 on or even remove FAR, Floor Area Ratio, caps -- in
16 favor of height limits. Floor area ratio contributes
17 to the rise of skinny supertalls that are very visible
18 and generally don't have a ton of apartments that can
19 be built in a specific lot and height envelope.

20 Thanks.

21 MS. WHITE: Great. Thank you for your
22 testimony.

23 Questions?

24 [No response.]

25 MS. WHITE: Great. We'll move on to

1 Sherease Torain.

2 MS. TORAIN: Yes. Hi, good evening.
3 I'm speaking in my -- like the gentleman just said --
4 I'm speaking in my own personal capacity as well. So
5 first I'd like to thank you all for the opportunity to
6 testify today.

7 My name is Sherease Torain, and I am a
8 lifelong New Yorker, Brooklynite, a housing justice
9 advocate, and a descendant of intergenerational Black
10 homeownership in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. I speak
11 today not only on behalf of my family, but for the
12 countless Black homeowners across the city who are
13 being erased by defraud, gentrification, and the
14 systemic failures of our current housing government
15 structure.

16 New York City charter must be revised
17 to address the blatant gaps in housing enforcement,
18 homeowner protections, and equity accountability.
19 While billions are invested in tenant protection,
20 which is fantastic, and housing development, there is
21 no centralized charter-mandated office or enforcement
22 mechanism to protect existing homeowners, especially
23 Black seniors, Black women, Black disabled, or a part
24 of the protected class from deed theft, equity fraud,
25 tax lien abuse, and illegal evictions.

1 This is not just policy neglect. It is
2 structural violence. Since this is a civil rights
3 issue which is not being addressed, let me repeat,
4 since this is a civil rights issue and a criminal
5 issue which is not being addressed by taxpayers, I
6 urge the Charter to revision -- I urge the Charter
7 Revision Commission to create a homeownership
8 protection division within the New York City
9 Commission on Human Rights with legal and
10 investigative authority, second, to mandate public
11 reporting on racial disparities in housing
12 enforcement.

13 Once again, to mandate public reporting
14 on racial -- real racial disparities in housing
15 enforcement by borough, zip code, and agency. Include
16 deed fraud. In order for anything to be equitable, we
17 have to include deed fraud, equity theft, and housing
18 displacement as enforceable violations of civil and
19 human rights in the city charter. Because Black
20 Brooklyn isn't Black anymore.

21 As the other woman had said previously,
22 the Black community makes up such a large portion of
23 the voting rights, I mean the voting population.
24 However, they have been displaced. They have been
25 erased, and they are no longer. When the -- you guys

1 are in the great mega-ethics. I grew up in this
2 community. I went to Bishop Rocklin. Yet, we have
3 been erased. This is no longer my community. I feel
4 like I'm someplace else. That's personal.

5 Let me move on. Include deed fraud,
6 equity theft, and housing displacement. It is a must.
7 It is our human rights. Establish a citywide
8 homeowner bill of rights integrated into the charter
9 to ensure due process, language access, and
10 trauma-informed legal care for families facing
11 property theft and displacement.

12 My beloveds today, if there's any
13 empathy in this room, if there's any care, if there's
14 any compassion, we cannot build a just housing future
15 while leaving Black families and long-time homeowners
16 to fend for themselves any longer with just talk and
17 light, fake legislation. The charter must reflect the
18 real values of equity enforcement and repair.

19 I thank you, my beloveds, for
20 listening. For we are the children. I'm the
21 granddaughter of the Civil Rights Movement. Everyone
22 is here because of the backs of my people. Malcolm X
23 birthday, yes, the beloved Malcolm X. It is
24 everyone's duty to do what's best for my people
25 because everyone is benefiting because of our people.

1 Yes, everyone here, do what's right for
2 the grandchildren and the children of the Civil Rights
3 Movement. Black Brooklyn is no longer Black anymore.

4 MS. WHITE: Thank you --

5 MS. TORAIN: And some people may be
6 happy -- please don't cut me off, beloved. I'm a
7 taxpayer. Let's just do what's right.

8 Please have equity for Black Brooklyn
9 homeowners as well because we are also the taxpayers.
10 Thank you for listening.

11 MS. WHITE: Thank you so much for your
12 testimony.

13 Any questions for Ms. Torain?

14 [No response.]

15 MS. WHITE: Okay. We'll do one final
16 call. Do we have any further testimony on Zoom?

17 [No response.]

18 MS. WHITE: No more testimony on Zoom?
19 Last call in the room?

20 [No response.]

21 MS. WHITE: Okay. I think we will move
22 to adjourn.

23 So thanks, everyone, for your testimony
24 and coming out today.

25 The next Public Hearing of the

1 Commission will be held in Queens on May 28th at 5
2 p.m. at Queens Borough Hall in the Helen Cultural
3 Center on Queens Boulevard in Jamaica, New York.

4 Is there a motion to adjourn?

5 MR. RICHARDSON: So moved.

6 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: So moved.

7 MS. WHITE: Is there a second?

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Second.

9 MS. WHITE: All in favor?

10 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Aye.

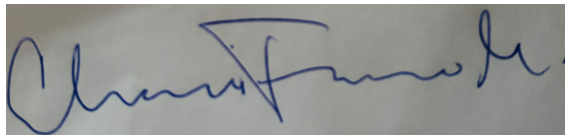
11 MS. WHITE: Thank you.

12 We are adjourned.

13 (Whereupon, the meeting concluded at
14 7:49 p.m.)
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CERTIFICATE

I, CHANYRI MOH, the officer before whom the foregoing proceedings were taken, do hereby certify that any witness(es) in the foregoing proceedings, prior to testifying, were duly sworn; that the proceedings were recorded by me and thereafter reduced to typewriting by a qualified transcriptionist; that said digital audio recording of said proceedings are a true and accurate record to the best of my knowledge, skills, and ability; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which this was taken; and, further, that I am not a relative or employee of any counsel or attorney employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chanyri Moh", is written over a light gray rectangular background.

CHANYRI MOH

Notary Public in and for the
State of New York

1 CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIBER

2 I, RAVINNA WILLS, do hereby certify that
3 this transcript was prepared from the digital audio
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8 nor employed by any of the parties to the action in
9 which this was taken; and, further, that I am not a
10 relative or employee of any counsel or attorney
11 employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or
12 otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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15 RAVINNA WILLS
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