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2	2018 NYC CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING
3	FORDIC HEAKING
4	FLUSHING LIBRARY
5	41-17 MAIN STREET FLUSHING, NEW YORK 11355
6	MAY 3, 2018 6:25 P.M.
7	6.25 P.M.
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9	APPEARANCES:
10	COMMISSIONERS:
11	COMPLESSIONERS.
12	CESAR PERALES, Chair DEBORAH ARCHER KYLE BRAGG MARCO CARRION
13	
14	MENDI MIKOCZNIK ANNEITA SEECHAKKAN
15	
16	
17	ALSO PRESENT:
18	ALEX CAMARDA JAMES HONG
19	MOHAN AWALI SETI SHIRLEY FIPPS TOM SPEAKER JOBI JACOB
20	BRENT WEITZBERG JOHN PARK
21	ROXANNE DELGADO ADRIANNE KIVELSON JOHN KELLY EDWARD KIERNAN SAUL HERNANDEZ
22	SAUL REKNANDEZ
23	
24	
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1	CHAIRMAN PERALES: My name is Cesar Perales.
2	I am Chair of the 2018 Charter Revision
3	Commission. This is our borough meeting in
4	Queens. I am about to call the meeting to order.
5	This is the third of five borough hearings.
6	We're holding two more next week in Brooklyn and
7	in Manhattan and I'd like to begin, at this
8	point, by calling on a couple of our Queens
9	commission members to say a word or two.
10	Kyle Bragg.
11	COMMISSIONER BRAGG: Good evening, everyone.
12	Good evening, Chair. I'd like to take the
13	opportunity to welcome my honorable and
14	distinguished fellow commissioners to the great
15	Borough of Queens, a borough that represents what
16	this city truly is; the diversity of the city
17	both by culture and economics.
18	I'm very proud to be a resident of Queens
19	for all my life. I've grown up here, I went to
20	school here in Queens, and raised my children
21	here in the Borough of Queens. So thank you
22	again and welcome to our borough.
23	COMMISSIONER SEECHARRAN: Good evening. I,
24	too, would like to welcome my fellow
25	commissioners to Oueens and Chair Perales. I'm a

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1	proud resident of Queens, have been for the last
2	14 years, and I've also worked in Queens for the
3	last 14 years. As a famous sign on Northern
4	Boulevard and 80th Street says, "Queens is the
5	future."
6	Queens is also the world. Here in Queens,
7	800 languages are spoken; 48 percent of our
8	population are foreign born and it's an
9	absolutely dynamic space for small businesses. I
LO	would also say that in these times, I believe the
11	future of Queens is somewhat threatened by
L2	displacement and gentrification, overcrowded
L3	schools, and low civic participation, so I'm
L4	personally really eager to hear what my fellow
L5	Queens residents have to say about how we can
L6	improve democracy in Queens and the rest of New
L7	York City.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you. I will ask the other commissioners to briefly introduce themselves. I'll start with Debra on my extreme right.

COMMISSIONER ARCHER: Good evening, everyone. My name is Debra Archer and I am a professor at New York Law School.

COMMISSIONER HO: Good evening, everyone.

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1	My name is Dale Ho and I am the director of the
2	ACLU's Voting Rights Project.
3	COMMISSIONER MIROCZNIK: Good evening. My
4	name is Mendy Mirocznik. I'm the president of
5	COJO of Staten Island.
6	One brief Queens thing, Mr. Chairman: I
7	grew up in Queens at age 15 in the Rockaways, so
8	coming off the train today, I had one thing in
9	mind, to go to the water, go to the beach; I
10	needed it. It's an honor to be here in Queens.
11	Thank you.
12	CHAIRMAN PERALES: My name is Cesar Perales.
13	As I indicated, I have the honor of serving as
14	Chair. I, too, have roots in Queens,
15	specifically Corona where I lived as a from
16	the age of 14 to the age of 24 but that's not
17	really the only thing that qualifies me to serve
18	as Chair.
19	I've also been a former secretary of state
20	where I had responsibility for oversight of local
21	governments. I served as deputy mayor of New
22	York City and I actually litigated issues
23	regarding elections in New York City, held by New
24	York City.
25	COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Good evening. My name

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is Una Clarke. I am a former member of the New York City Council. I am a trustee for the City University of New York and it's my honor and privilege to be able to serve.

I am the product of a Charter Revision in 1989 that caused the election when the City
Council moved from 32 to 51 and I was one of the lucky ones that was elected for the first time that really talked about the diversity of the City of New York. When an immigrant from Jamaica, West Indies, could become a New York
City Council member as the first immigrant woman ever to be elected, so I take this very seriously.

And as we look at to make sure that our democracy works for everyone in the City of New York and we pay close attention to the testimony that we hear and that we can come together and make sure that we make this city the place that all of us want to live and have our children raised and born.

I would like to let you know that following my own election to the New York City Council, my daughter, Yvette Diane Clark, succeeded me to the New York City Council and she is now a member of

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1	the House of Representatives; so she went to
2	Congress. And I just want you to see what the
3	possibilities are when communities work together
4	and we are looking forward to a city that has
5	everybody participating, so this is my roots for
6	one, to serve. Thank you.
7	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Did the Queens
8	commissioners get a chance to say what they do
9	for a living?
10	COMMISSIONER BRAGG: Again, I'm Kyle Bragg
11	and I'm secretary treasurer of SEIU-32BJ, a union
12	of 165,000 members throughout New York City and
13	across the East Coast, from Florida to
14	Massachusetts. Here we have thousands of our
15	members who live and work right here in the
16	Borough of Queens and hopefully, shortly, we'll
17	hear from a few of you.
18	COMMISSIONER SEECHARRAN: My name is Annetta
19	Seecharran, again, and I am the executive
20	director of Chhaya Community Development
21	Corporation.
22	COMMISSIONER CARRION: Good evening. My
23	name is Marco Carrion. I'm the commissioner of
24	the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs. Thank
25	you for inviting me to Queens today.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: Let me now say, for the
record, that we have a quorum. Let me begin by
explaining that in New York City, under the home
rules, the mayor gets an opportunity, when he
feels it's appropriate, to form a charter
commission.

This is a commission made up of what I think are very distinguished members. They are volunteers, they don't do this for a living and we are giving of our time because we very much believe in what the mayor gave as his principle reason for forming a Charter Revision Commission.

By law, this commission can examine any part of the city charter and we intend to do that.

But every mayor has a reason for appointing a commission and Mayor de Blasio felt very strongly that we, as a city, had to look at our charter to see if there was anything that we could do to improve democracy in our city, to get more people to vote, to make it more fair for people, and even to get more people more opportunities for people to run for office.

So most of the comments we've heard so far, relate to this making New York City more democratic and making elections more fair. Let

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me also say, that we have conducted extensive outreach in advance of this meeting and in advance of, actually, all of the meetings that we're having and we'll continue to have meetings through the summer. So this is only one. We will be back in Queens.

The meeting is also being lived streamed and there are lots of folks watching us; not just the commission but listening to the questions that our being asked by the audience. We also have sign language interpreters for those who need it and with that, I think we are ready to begin.

The public testimony is open to anyone who wants to speak, as long as they comment to some aspect of the charter. We don't want to waste your time talking to us about something that has nothing to do with the City Charter, over which, we have absolutely no ability to change. I will limit the length of time for each speaker to three minutes. We have a significant number of people who have signed up.

With that, let me call the first speaker.

It is Alex Camarda from Reinvent Albany. He is their senior policy adviser.

MR. CAMARDA: Good evening, Chairman

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Perales, members of the Charter Revision

Commission. My name is Alex Camarda, I'm the senior policy advisor for Reinvent Albany.

At the commission's first hearing in Staten Island, Reinvent Albany testified that among the fastest growing areas of undue influence, or its perception in city government, is donors who contribute to city affiliated nonprofit organizations and also do business with the city.

In our previous testimony at the first charter commission hearing, we called for more transparency of these types of donations and also to restrict their size and in tonight's testimony, we wanted to provide some more specific recommendations on this topic in part of their response to questions that commission members raised in Staten Island and also some additional conversations we've had since then.

So our first recommendation is to limit contributions to all nonprofits that are considered affiliated with elected officials. So the city, in 2016, passed Local Law 181 and what that does is, it makes donations to nonprofits affiliated with elected officials limited to \$400 but only if those nonprofits spent 10 percent of

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their budgets on public facing communications
featuring the elected officials. And the city's
Conflict of Interest Board, actually issued rules
on the affiliation of nonprofits of elected
officials, which I listed in the footnotes but
they go to the definition of what affiliated with
an elected official means, which was asked by the
commission in Staten Island and so thought that
would be helpful for you to have.

We believe that the donations should be limited more so than they are currently, even if the public facing communications do not feature the elected official; however, we believe the limit could be higher than the current \$400 doing business limit but we do not have a specific number to recommend at this time.

We also believe that donations should be restricted to a longer time period to 180 days after a donor has ceased doing business with the City.

Our second recommendation is to restrict donations beyond nonprofits affiliated with elected officials to those donors who are doing business with the city and making donations to the City agencies, public authorities, public

1	benefit	corporations	and	local	development
2	corporat	cions.			

So, as I mentioned, the law I spoke of in 2016, only really relates to nonprofits affiliated with elected officials but what we have seen is that many donors actually give contributions directly to governmental entities while they are doing business with the city and so we think that needs to be addressed.

Third, is a transparency item we would like to see published as open data: The exact amount of all donations by donors doing business with the city, not only to nonprofits affiliated with elected officials. That transparency will begin January 2019. We'd also like to see it extended to these other governmental entities I already mentioned.

I did mention at the testimony in Staten

Island, that if there is disclosure currently,

it's under a different regime; it's advisory

opinions of the Conflicts of Interest Board.

That disclosure is in the form of a 500-page PDF issued every six months and the dollar amounts are in ranges.

It does include contributions not only to

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nonprofits seemingly unaffiliated with elected
officials, affiliated with elected officials, and
also some governmental entities but we think the
open-data element is very important because
currently, we can't do analysis of all those
contributions and then compare them to the doing
business database bus they are not in the
spreadsheet format that makes that easy to do.
Anyone looking at those contributions, would have
to go through them by hand and actually, either
scrape the PDF using technology or enter them
manually in a spreadsheet to begin that analysis.

And our last recommendation is related to volunteers. We have seen select instances of what we're calling volunteers doing major policy work for the city, making appointments. We'd like to see instances where that occurs to have those individuals follow the city ethics laws, at least in some form and so that, for example, you are all members of this commission; I assume you're all volunteers.

We would not want to see a scenario where task forces, commissions, city board members, would also be raising money, at the same time, for affiliated non-for-profits. We think a

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1	choice should be made and volunteers should do
2	one task or another. So I'll leave it at that
3	because of the restrictions of time and I thank
4	you for your time tonight and I welcome any
5	questions you have.
6	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Frankly, if anyone who
7	was not an expert in this area heard your
8	testimony, they would think it was very esoteric.
9	Maybe you can give us an example, without naming
10	names of not-for-profits or anything else, of
11	what it is you are concerned about that is
12	currently allowed by law.
13	MR. CAMARDA: Yeah, I am reluctant to name
14	names in part because we haven't done a systemic
15	analysis, but what we are concerned about is, we
16	have a very strong campaign finance system.
17	There are limits on the contributions made
18	directly to candidates and we think that the
19	nonprofits, particularly when they're tied to
20	elected officials
21	CHAIRMAN PERALES: But how would a nonprofit
22	be tied to an elected official? Would it be Una
23	Clarke would have created her own not-for-profit?

MR. CAMARDA: So I think in two ways: You

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I'm not sure what you mean by that.

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can have an elected official that has a
nonprofit; we've seen instances of that, and
there are also nonprofits that are tied to city
agencies and we are concerned about entities or
individuals doing business with the City and
making a large contribution to one of those
nonprofits and having, either business before the
elected official or business before the agency,
which when we go through this spreadsheet I
mentioned before, that makes some of the
donations available now, we see instances of
that.

And so that's concerning given the low contributions in a strong city campaign financial system that seemingly could be circumvented through contributions to the nonprofits or at least creates an appearance of that.

MS. CLARKE: I am looking for some clarification. In 1991 when I became the first elected -- the districts that were around us, which was, I think, the representatives were Mary Pinkett, who was an African-American, Williams who was an African-American because we're also African-American but immigrants, we made sure that the district lines would not create a

1 competition among them.

And so we look at our numbers within our community and we made sure that the district would begin at Empire Boulevard, where everybody thinks that people didn't vote and that's where I wanted to represent because I wanted to empower. So there was not a nonprofit in the community that I know of, so that I created a Vendors Market at (inaudible) and Flatbush Avenue and I have to give money to a non-for-profit agency.

So I had to help them think out how would we do this without a conflict and to make sure there's accountability to the city and that books and records would be kept open, so that at any time anybody wanted to do an audit, they would know that we are doing it for the betterment of the community.

What would you say about a member who feels that there's not enough in his or her community and wants to help to create an engine that drives the community?

MR. CAMARDA: That's not something that we specifically have a position on. I think -- I mean, we have seen instances, obviously, where elected officials have started nonprofits. I

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1	think some of the factors that the Conflict of
2	Interests Board laid out are important.
3	If an elected official is currently serving and
4	they also control a nonprofit, and contributions
5	are made to that nonprofit by donors who are
6	doing business with the city or specifically with
7	the body the elected official serves in, I think
8	that at least creates a perception issue if the
9	donations are significant.
10	COMMISSIONER HO: Thank you for coming here
11	to testify Mr. Camarda. I was just wondering if
12	maybe you can speak as to why you think some of
13	these changes should be substantiated in the City
14	Charter as opposed to, say, just the local law
15	enacted by the City Council?
16	MR. CAMARDA: Well, we have seen that the
17	Council obviously did address this, we think, in
18	part, through local law and the question about
19	the Charter versus administrative code, I think,
20	is a tricky one. You know, to my knowledge, the
21	finance campaign system is mostly in the

I understand in 2010, when the Charter

Revision Commission put on the ballot, the voters

approved disclosure of independent expenditures

administrative code.

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L	that was actually put in the charter and I think
2	it was because the Charter Revision Commission at
3	that time wanted to address it.

I think if the council was to have taken that on, they might've put it in the administrative code. So I think the balance between the administrative code and the Charter, is something that has belonged and talked about in this city and I'm not sure the Charter is kind of the framework or a constitution it might be envisioned to be.

It seems like there's a lot of -- between the administrative code and the Charter, there's a lot of fluidity.

COMMISSIONER HO: I guess one of the things that I was thinking about is, we're talking about setting precise dollar limits on things. You know the process of revising the Charter is a lot more cumbersome than say, amending the administrative code.

I'm not that familiar with campaign finance in particular, but I just wonder if, you know, if it makes more sense to put specific dollar limits in the code if possible. Whether there may be some inertia there that prevents that from

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1	happening there, instead of in the Charter, could
2	be hard to revise and maybe over time, those
3	numbers would need to change more frequently than
4	the Charter gets changed.

MR. CAMARDA: I think ideally the structure and functions and duties of the agencies would be in the Charter and the manner in which elected officials are chosen. I think city government has evolved such that, as I mentioned, there is a lot of fluidity between the Charter and the administrative code.

You know part of our role is to raise these issues and then leave it to the commissioners to do what they feel is best, in terms of where it should go and then also is the issuing of a report, is an opportunity to raise these issues whether you address them or they're addressed by the Council.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you very much.

MR. CAMARDA: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: It is something we're thinking about because we will be writing a report. Not everything is going on the ballot but we'll be hearing about issues that will not necessarily be on the ballot but we may want to

1	say something about it.
2	Mohan Awali (phonetic). I'm having trouble
3	you represent the Pali-American community.
4	MR. SETI: Yes.
5	CHAIRMAN PERALES: So will you pronounce
6	your name.
7	MR. SETI: Good evening, sir and respected
8	person. My name is Mohan Awali Seti (phonetic)
9	and originally I came from the Pali all the way
LO	to the (inaudible).
L1	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Could you put that a
L2	little closer?
13	MR. SETI: Sure. And now I'm working in the
L4	nonprofit organization, Pali American Community,
L5	and there are hundred, more than hundred thousand
L6	people, are in the New York City and Buffalo,
L7	Syracuse, Long Island and the five boroughs, as
L8	well, and due to the lack of language, some of
L9	them are not going to school, or working; they
20	are staying home, you know, because of the
21	language.
22	So I like to request to your end, the
23	respective ones, please add our Pali language and
24	other language, Asian language, to the New York
25	City option in the hospital or library, in

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1	school, and that way we can more easy life for
2	the next generation. Thank you.
3	CHAIRMAN PERALES: I mean here in the
4	Borough of Queens seems to be the right place to
5	raise the issue of the government's ability to
6	respond to the citizenry in different languages.
7	Any comment from one of our commissioners.
8	COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I would think that any
9	barrier for language do you have a lead person
10	that would help to interpret the language so that
11	to put in the mother tongue of the United States,
12	which is English, to give to translate and to
13	strengthen what you're trying to do.
14	MR. SETI: Recently, one of our
15	representatives, Assembly Member Mike Millory
16	(phonetic)introduced the one bill, Pali Language
17	Bill, in the DMB and other officially
18	(inaudible). It's still pending in Albany.
19	Hopefully it could be working in the future.
20	COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Do you have a sense of
21	how many of your nationals are here and where
22	they reside?
23	MR. SETI: It's recorded in Census 2010. It
24	says only 9,000 in the record but they are, I

think, 90,000 that are missing because they

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1	scared to register the census and if you go
2	really in the specific in their apartment,
3	every living room, they are living; every
4	basement, they are living because of the language
5	as well, too.
6	COMMISSIONER BRAGG: Thank you for your
7	testimony. I'm Kyle Bragg. The city has
8	initiated language access in a lot of their
9	bureaucracies and institutions.
10	Are you saying that Pali is not one of those
11	languages that are offered to the city's language
12	access?
13	MR. SETI: No.
14	COMMISSIONER SEECHARRAN: I, too, would like
15	to thank you for your testimony and for raising
16	this very important issue. As somebody who works

COMMISSIONER SEECHARRAN: I, too, would like to thank you for your testimony and for raising this very important issue. As somebody who works with the South Asian community, I see everyday how this is a problem and language access remains a very, very serious issue for our city. So I just want to thank you for raising the issue and I want to encourage you to continue to advocate on this matter.

I don't know if it's in the realm of the Charter Revision to address this specific issue but I want to acknowledge that your issue is

1	important and it's heard.
2	MR. SETI: Thank you.
3	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you very much. The
4	next speaker is Tom Speaker.
5	MR. SPEAKER: Good evening. My name is Tom
6	Speaker and I'm a volunteer member of the
7	leadership team for the New York Chapter of
8	Represent Us; it's the anticorruption
9	organization. Represent Us's mission is to pass
10	tough anticorruption laws in cities and states
11	across America and to illegalize the corruption
12	that has come to define modern politics. Thank
13	you for holding this hearing today and allowing
14	me the opportunity to testify.
15	New York City currently has one of the best
16	public matching systems in America. Currently up
17	to 55 percent of the campaign spending to be
18	provided by the city, and that's 55 percent more
19	than many others cities in America, but despite
20	our progressive systems, City elections are still
21	significantly influenced by wealthy donors.
22	So through an analysis through Represent Us
23	in New York conducted with (inaudible)Albany, we
24	found that nearly 90 percent of New York City
25	council members campaign funds for the 2017

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elections came from donations over \$175. So some
might not think that \$175 is a large contribution
but in the context of everyday New Yorkers'
lives, it is a large contribution.

Consider a 2016 study by the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development; that study found that nearly 60 percent of New Yorkers don't have enough savings to cover three months of household expenses. It's unlikely that any of those residents are able to donate more than \$175, let alone just \$100 or \$50 to a political campaign. So this signals that the vast majority of campaign funds are not coming from everyday constituents but rather from wealthier donors and the influence of big money in New York campaigns is even more alarming when you raise the threshold.

Our analysis found that 68 percent of council members' campaign funds came from donations over \$500 and 54 percent come from donations over \$1,000. So basically, in order to run a competitive campaign, it's much easier for candidates to solicit funds from wealthier donors. Case in point: The spending limit for city council candidates is \$182,000 and so even

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if they enroll in a matching system, they need to raise 81,900 of that on their own. If they wanted to run a campaign solely on donations of \$20, they would need to find 4,095 people to make a donation. It's far easier to convince 41 people to make a contribution of \$2,000.

So the role of big money in politics may result in policies that do not benefit ordinary voters and can discourage residents that want to become involved in civic politics and while we cannot say for sure whether larger donations impact a candidate's decisions in office, a lot of the recent corruption trials and investigations in New York State do not inspire much confidence.

We think that one way to rectify this imbalance, is to increase the available amount of public spending in elections. Doing so, would involve more citizens in the political process and relieve the pressure to solicit donations from those with the deepest pockets.

Represent Us supports a stronger public matching system as embodied in Council Member Ben Kallos' proposed 2018 Bill, introduction number 732. That bill would raise public finance cap

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1	for New York City elections to 85 percent from
2	55 percent. The new City Council's term has
3	begun after another election with low voter
4	turnout.

We really think that by bolstering its public matching system, the city has an opportunity to boost civic engagement and build greater faith in our elected officials. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: Does anyone have a reaction?

COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I am fascinated by the fact that you're young, you're bright, you're smart and I think that your generation is going to do a lot of good in terms of putting folks on notice about being corrupt, big money in politics, but I wanted to ask you how would you think -- because the playing field is never level.

The variety of persons who offer themselves for public office comes from the very poor to the very rich. How do you balance the scale? For a person -- I always use myself, since I don't want to criticize; when person like myself offered myself for office, I ran in a community that

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1	never gave political contribution, on a whole,
2	from when they came and to switch it and say you
3	need to write me a check for \$25, \$15, \$20; how
4	would you educate the electorate about how to
5	become involved and how to make their
6	contribution?
7	MR. SPEAKER: Well, one way would be through
8	a system that notified citizens about the public
9	matching system. Like basically, Seattle
10	recently introduced a voucher system and they
11	don't have everybody participating in it right
12	now but there are more people participating in it
13	as the program has progressed. Basically you
14	need to have
15	CHAIRMAN PERALES: What is a voucher system?
16	MR. SPEAKER: A voucher system is where
17	every single citizen will get up to \$100, like
18	maybe four vouchers with \$25, to give to people
19	in a political campaign to candidates. Basically
20	Seattle invests around \$2,000,000 in that kind of
21	system.
22	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Who qualifies? I mean
23	anybody who raises their hands and says give me
24	some of your vouchers? What does a candidate
25	have to do to qualify?

1	MR. SPEAKER: They do need to receive a
2	certain amount of vouchers to qualify for that
3	system. If they just get one voucher, it's \$25;
4	they need to hit a certain number. I don't know
5	the specific number.
6	CHAIRMAN PERALES: But they don't have to
7	raise any money on their own?
8	MR. SPEAKER: So technically they would not
9	have to. There are campaigning spending limits
10	in Seattle for how much each person can spend and
11	receive but if they just ran solely on vouchers
12	alone, they can just use those.
13	COMMISSIONER CLARKE: What would prevent a
14	millionaire from saying "I don't need a dollar to
15	finance my campaign. I just want to be a
16	political mogul; pay for my campaign." While a
17	poor person whose going in heart in hand to
18	improve the quality of life in their community.
19	How do you level that playing field.
20	MR. SPEAKER: Well, under the current
21	elections, under the current system like this, we
22	can't guarantee that's not going to happen.
23	Basically, what a better matching system would do
24	and what the current system does, in my opinion,
25	it gives people from without as much money,

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1	more opportunities to participate in the
2	elections because the city will provide those
3	funds for them. Again, we don't have any
4	guarantee that a wealthier candidate will come
5	into the process.

COMMISSIONER BRAGG: I'm just interested in knowing has the voucher produced the outcome with which it was created to produce? I assume that the purpose is to have the electorate now, because they're given these vouchers, to participate in the process; right. That without using their own money, they can now take these vouchers and give it out to the candidates of their choice and I guess, the result should have been to increase the participation of the electorate and I'm interested in knowing has that happened or have people engaged more in politics now and has it, as my sister Una Clarke indicated, been able to still level the playing field at the same time?

MR. SPEAKER: Yeah, I think that's happened. They send out, I think it was two million vouchers to be specific, and about 73,000 ended up being used. To be clear, I'm not advocating for us to switch to a voucher system. I just

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1	believe more in improving the system that we
2	have.
3	One thing that was shown in our data, is
4	that people that participate in that public
5	matching system get a lot more money from small
6	donors than people who are not participating in
7	that system.
8	CHAIRMAN PERALES: I think we're very
9	interested in looking at public matching and I
10	think all of us in the commission are interested
11	in that subject, so I, for one, very much
12	appreciate your comments.
13	MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
14	CHAIRMAN PERALES: We have a representative
15	from an elected official; Chief of Staff
16	Assemblyman Hevesi from the New York State
17	Assembly. Your name is Brent Weitzberg?
18	MR. WEITZBERG: Yes, sir. How are you
19	today?
20	CHAIRMAN PERALES: I'm doing well.
21	MR. WEITZBERG: Just to be clear, I'm not
22	here in my capacity as a chief of staff. I'm
23	here as a lifelong of resident of Queens,
24	specifically, a resident of Forest Hills and I am
25	also just very happy to be here. Thank you for

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1	giving me the oppo	ortunity.	Commissioner Carrion,
2	good to see you.	Thank you	for hosting us.

The topic I'd like to discuss today is the need for voter reform. As I stated before, I am a lifelong resident of Forest Hills, New York, Queens; I live there now and I work there now.

Assemblyman Hevesi's office is a five-minute walk from where I reside. So recently, I have (inaudible) border for the City of New York as well as the Borough of Queens in particular.

Even more now Forest Hills in and of itself and being that I have been a voter in this city for as long as I've been able to vote, there are certain things that I see that, in my opinion, I feel do need to change and the City Charter is right for being the area to have that change.

Specifically I believe that voter reform, to my knowledge, falls under Section 1053 of the Charter, which is addressed as voter reform. Now one of the things that we could say or we could look at, when I say voter reform, it's more accessibility to vote and engaging more individuals to vote.

So, for example, there is a Daily News article published by Greg Smith on November 8,

2017, and in Mr. Smith's article he stated that
only 21.7 percent of the five million people
eligible to vote in the City of New York did, in
fact, vote.

So what does that mean? That means, in my opinion, that people are just not getting out there or there are barriers created not allowing them to vote. So some of the ideas that I, just doing some quick research, have maybe suggested is, maybe switching or having an alternative system of being able to register to vote.

For example, in Estonia -- miles away from

Queens, no doubt -- but in Estonia they allow

their voters to vote via online, through an

online resource. Maybe we try and implement

something like that through a pilot program here.

Maybe we create an app that's focused to the

city, something along those lines.

In Sweden, upon birth, you're automatically enrolled as a voter. There's no barriers to vote. Once you're born, you're a voter and you're registered into a system like that; so something like that. In addition, I think more awareness such as switching to an e-mail based system would help.

1	So like I said, as a resident of Forest
2	Hills, I was able to receive the packet that had
3	all the candidates, their platforms and so on and
4	so forth but I believe a digitized version of
5	that would also help encourage individuals to
6	vote.
7	CHAIRMAN PERALES: You got that package by
8	mail; is that what you're saying?
9	MR. WEITZBERG: I did, yes, by physical
10	mail.
11	Lastly, I believe that the time is apt to
12	engage young voters. In a recent poll that was
13	conducted, 60 percent of youth are wanting to
14	vote now, whereas previously, in the 2014
15	election I see my time is up 25 percent
16	only wanted to vote, so the time is right for
17	those individuals to become engaged. Thank you
18	for your time. I really appreciate it.
19	COMMISSIONER SEECHARRAN: With regard to
20	younger voters, do you have a specific
21	recommendation?
22	MR. WEITZBERG: Well, so younger voters, the
23	age range goes from 18 to 34, is what's
24	considered a young voter, and that's who's
25	polled. So what I alluded to before that, the

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1	60 percent of individuals that are now more
2	engaged since 2014 to vote, that's based off of a
3	6,000-person poll of voters 18 to 34; so that's
4	part of it. And also, one of the things I think
5	is important is to make people understand why
6	it's important to vote.

Even if it's an uncontested election, we see that a lot, even in Forest Hills, on the city level, there are uncontested elections but you still need to get people out to vote in primaries, to vote in general elections, and there is a lot of stuff going on this year, especially in the state legislature, about what our primary voting age should be. So I there needs to be better publicity about it and kinder publicity about it.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: If you wanted the Board of Elections or even the City of New York to e-mail individuals the information you say you received by mail, how would they get the e-mails of the voters?

MR. WEITZBERG: That's a great question. I don't know but that's something that we could discuss. It could be a kind of -- so I think it's better to be proactive than reactive. And

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1	with that being said, we have members of our City
2	Council that represent every part of our city.
3	There could be just like participatory budgeting,
4	there could be something where we do a marketing
5	campaign where individuals go out. They say
6	"hey, if you would like to sign up for this
7	e-mail, let us know." They are constituent
8	databases; my office has a constituent database
9	where we can do constituent outreach.
LO	There are ways that we can help engage
L1	individuals in our communities without stepping
L2	over boundaries that would violate their privacy.
L3	COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Do you see a role that
L4	our schools can play in engaging young people, so
L5	that by the time they graduate, they're already
L6	voters and they know how to vote? How would you
L7	see that and what would you recommend there?
L8	MR. WEITZBERG: Well, Ms. Clarke, I
L9	appreciate that question and I do think that we
20	do that to a certain extent. When you're a

appreciate that question and I do think that we do that to a certain extent. When you're a senior in high school, you'll have individuals come to the high school and try and register you to vote because you're either 18 or you're 17 and turning 18, so you'll take the form and you'll hold on to the form.

I think we have to do a better job of
engaging our of-age voters and one way we can do
that, just because we're targeting on a city
level, is engage the CUNY system. That's prime
targeting for that age range. You have likely 18
to 22 year olds not counting individuals going
for their masters, law degrees, and so on and so
forth that are in the 22 to 34 age range.

And we can go to those schools and you can table the student unions once a week for a period of -- I don't know -- four weeks or between the time -- between certain timeframe, X and Y, that would say this is important, this is our educational part, and that's how we can help.

Going even further than that and what my office has done on separate issues, we engage political science departments. I'm an alumni of Hofstra University for example. I still have a very good relationship with Hofstra University where if it was something, although it's in Long Island, this just goes to the greater point, is that you can engage the Chair of the Political Science Department at Hofstra and they will get the word out to their teachers, that would then filter down to their classrooms. So there are

different ways of engaging youths of this age.

One of the reforms you mentioned, was some form of automatic voter registration, which has been growing around the country and one of the concerns I sometimes hear about automatic registration when people talk about is that you might get people who are not eligible to vote inadvertently automatically registered and they can face civil even criminal liability as a result of that.

Sometimes I hear other people propose something like election day registration, which in theory, should be just as accessible as something like automatic registration but because of the voluntary component to that, you're less likely, I think, to inadvertently register someone who is not eligible and exposing that person to any kind of liability, but the pushback I hear on election day registration sometimes comes from candidates or civic groups that do get out the vote and they say well, we need people registered ahead of time so that we have lists. We use those lists to do get out the vote efforts and that's really important for civil engagement.

1	So as someone who works for an elected
2	official, I was wondering if you can speak to
3	that a little bit, and whether or not, you know,
4	having people registered in advance, is something
5	that's really critical or if election day
6	registration is just as good for your purposes as
7	compared to something like automatic
8	registration.
9	MR. WEITZBERG: And I appreciate the
10	question, Mr. Ho. I don't believe we should get
11	caught up in the ways as to what it is, whether
12	it's automatic registration or using an app or
13	whatever; i think the fundamental point is that
14	there needs to be easier access to voting. It
15	needs to be more accessible where
16	I personally like the idea of an app. I
17	just think we do I'm attached to my
18	smartphone, as I'm sure you all are. So I think
19	that if I can go online, register online through
20	an app, know my poling place, know who the
21	candidates are and I can see all of that through
22	an app on my cellphone, that will get me
23	energized to support a candidate. Now as far
24	as
25	COMMISSIONER HO: I agree with that entirely

1	but the concern, I think, is that and I'm
2	identifying as something that's separate you have
3	a registration cut off
4	MR. WEITZBERG: Right, and they're not going
5	to know
6	COMMISSIONER HO: Right. Even if you have
7	the app, you may not download until the
8	registration deadline but if you have some kind
9	of election day registration, sure that would be
10	great, you can use the app on your way to the
11	polls but I hear that sometimes elected officials
12	or politicians are skeptical.
13	MR. WEITZBERG: Right, because they want to
14	know who their prime are, your double prime,
15	triple
16	COMMISSIONER HO: Right, so I was wondering
17	if you could speak to that particular concern as
18	someone who works for
19	MR. WEITZBERG: So someone who works on
20	campaigns and works in the field, I don't see it
21	as a concern. If you have a good candidate and
22	they are presenting listen, the good candidate
23	doesn't always win; look at our president but,
24	you know, it's a risk that you take but any of
25	these programs when there's innovation being

made, you're always taking risks.

So, for example, I was in a district; my boss has been in office for 13 years. I don't necessarily know if same day registration would affect any challenges as opposed to not same day registration; that's not for me to say but as someone that has worked on campaigns and worked in the field, I only see it as being a benefit to someone.

This all goes back to someone having the ability to vote for somebody that represents their values and their voice, so if we get more people than 21 percent of the voting eligible population to come out and the person that the GOTV has supported and has been door knocking for, still ends up winning and now they just win by a larger margin or a larger percentage, I think that just goes to back their point and prove their point and each district and each constituency will get the leaders that they all or the majority of which approve of.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: Mr. Weitzberg, I want to thank you. We're really running late. Thank you very much.

MR. WEITZBERG: Thank you so much. I

1	appreciate it.
2	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Lance Burrell (phonetic).
3	Is there a Lance in the room? Roxanne Delgado.
4	MS. DELGADO: Hello. I came a long way from
5	here because you didn't respond to my e-mail.
6	CHAIRMAN PERALES: You sent me an e-mail?
7	MS. DELGADO: Yes, a Charter e-mail. I sent
8	it twice.
9	CHAIRMAN PERALES: It may be I didn't see
LO	it. I mean, I know I didn't see it.
L1	MS. DELGADO: Well, the e-mail was in
L2	regards to transparency and independence. I felt
L3	just like the Pay Raise Commission did two years
L4	ago when they held hearings throughout the city,
L5	that they every submitted testimony or
L6	communication with the Commission was posted
L 7	online for review by the public and I would
L8	request that this Commission does the same,
L9	please.
20	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Well, let me take that up
21	with the staff. This is the first time you've
22	hit me with that. I don't know how tough it
23	would be to do.
24	MS. DELGADO: It's not tough. It's not like
25	you're getting a lot of testimony to begin with.

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L	to be honest but any testimony should be posted
2	on the website, including myself and so I might
3	as well continue, please. Thank you.

And in regards to voter participation being low, it's because elections are not competitive. Again, you have to make the elections more democratic by levelling the playing field. It's never going to be even but make it more fair. Simply the CFB matching program, again, it's not the gold standard; this nonsense that's being repeated that it's the best program, it's not because if CFB did not exist in last year's Citywide and local races, the races would have been more even and therefore, more democratic.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: Is there a particular city or state where you think it's better than New York so that we can look at it?

MS. DELGADO: I could look for it later on tonight or tomorrow and send it to you. I didn't do that. I'm just criticizing my own city but I'll do that. I can look at the numbers. I mean, that's not an issue.

But again, if CFB didn't exist last year,
the Citywide and local races would have been more
competitive because all the opponents would have

that -- were not able to raise enough money or be qualified for matching funds, would have meant that the leader or the incumbent would have not received much matching funds to demolish their opponents. So again, that makes it more undemocratic not less.

And going forward it (inaudible) makes a way to improve voting participation is to make term limits stronger because New Yorkers voted three times in 1990, three in 1996 and 2010. This issue needs to be put to rest. People need to move on and accept it as the will of the land, as the will of the people. And the reason that it needs to be put to rest is because there's rumors that the following City Commission Charter, which is held by the City Council, will address term limits again.

So I think you should make term limits stronger by making it seem that it cannot be readdressed by at least 2035 and also that any of the elected officials that was termed out, should not be allowed to return to his old seat again after he's been termed out from that old seat. So we have people who resurface from the dead and return to the old seat and lastly --

1	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Well, given that you want
2	us to post your comments, why don't you just send
3	
4	MS. DELGADO: But the last thing even the
5	2010 City Charter Commission admitted that
6	elections were un-democratic because they
7	grandfathered the 2009 elected class by stating
8	that it will be unfair for them to be changed at
9	the last minute to two terms from three terms
LO	because three terms was the law of the land.
L1	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Ms. Delgado, we are not
L2	going to face that issue this time, so you don't
L3	need to worry about that.
L4	MS. DELGADO: I am worried, as you can see.
L5	Thank you.
L6	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you for testifying.
L7	MS. DELGADO: Can you please post this
L8	testimony on this website, please, for
L9	transparency?
20	CHAIRMAN PERALES: I certainly will try.
21	MS. DELGADO: Thank you.
22	CHAIRMAN PERALES: John Kelly.
23	MR. KELLY: Hello everyone. My name is John
24	Kelly and I'm a community board member of
25	Community Board 11. If you're going to quote me,

L	please	mention	that	tonight	I	speak	for	myself
2	and not	the cor	nmunit	y board.				

Before I joined the community board as a public member, and for a decade before, I worked in community boards in the different boroughs.

Of course the city and our community boards are failing in the same ways. Positions are functionally lifelong appointments which can create a culture of privilege. After decades on community boards, board members often act as judges of their neighbor's efforts instead of partnering to make their community better.

For a layperson to get a good idea through a community board, they often have to have connections with someone on the board, it's especially hard when the boards do not have the same culture as the areas they serve. Without strong oversight from the people that appoint them, community board members are given the right to only discuss issues that help them individually, either financially or personally.

One answer to this is to implement term
limits. By only being able to serve for 8 or
10 years, insures that the old guard is never so
engrained that it has the power to stop progress.

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By continuously changing our representation, we
make sure that new voices don't leave the process
because they're disillusioned from waiting
decades before they have served their time.

In our rapidly changing neighborhoods, term limits can help engage new residents into this great process, giving their communities some oversight of their surroundings. Most importantly, term limits shift the culture of the board themselves. If community board members know they're not going to be on the board forever, they may treat other non-board members with more respect because since they know they will be a non-board member soon.

Term limits help make corruption more difficult by diluting lifelong power, we decrease the judgmental culture and force cooperation.

Bribery would also decrease since any paybacks would be short lived. Without term limits we'll create a culture that slows community (inaudible) change. Younger voices are especially encouraged since the decades near to serve their time by definition, age people out of certain demographics.

I hope you agree that implementing term

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limits, we can help upgrade the community board
system to something that better serves our great
city. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: Let me just say that we're getting a lot of comments about community boards. This one about term limits is new but I think we're going to have to devote a great deal of time to the issue of community boards. Thank you very much.

I think there is a Mr. Hernandez. Is it Saul Hernandez.

MR. HERNANDEZ: Thank you for having me.

Good evening, Commissioner, Chair and Commission
members. Thank you for holding tonight's hearing
and on behalf of myself and my fellow members of
(inaudible) 32BJ, we applaud your efforts to
strengthen our city democracy and insure that
every New Yorker's voice is counted.

Our union is 163,000 strong here in New York City. We represent 85,000 building service workers and who keep our cities and residential building and schools, offices, stadiums, and airports clean and safe. Our union is hugely diverse and we hail from over 60 countries and speak dozens of languages but we are united in

our fight to insure all people, regardless of the color of their skin, their immigration status or their income, can live a safe and healthily with liberty and respect.

As a member leader in the union, one of the things that I am most passionate about is the democratic process in talking with my union brothers and sisters. When members come together, we can make a difference and win progress for working families.

However, New York City current campaign finance law that governs how I communicate with my fellow union members makes it harder to involve more of them in politics. For example, the expense of organize members to canvas and talk to their fellow members is counted as a campaign contribution, if the candidate has been briefed by the union and is present to talk to the member before him.

This law discourages (inaudible) for engaging members face to face on political issues and encourages to simply make a contribution directly to the candidates all by media ads.

The city's treatment of member to member communication is different from federal law in

other cities and states. This is a shame. In my experience, allowing members to hear candidates describe what they are fighting for if elected before going out to canvas their fellow members is one of the best ways for them to understand the issues and feel connected to the democratic process.

I strongly support using the Charter
Revision process, so that labor and membership
organizations and communities freely with their
members -- even if the community communications
are coordinated with candidates, we should be
doing everything we can to encourage more civil
participation.

Thank you for your time and your efforts to insure that our democracy works for all including working people and unions.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you very much. Any comments? Let me thank you because organized labor has been present at a numbers of these hearings and it's very important that we hear the voices of your brothers and sisters and I think you were very good tonight and I thank you for taking the time.

James Hong.

MR. HONG: Good evening, commissioners. My name is James Hong and in 2012 and '13, when the city was undertaking the redistricting of all 51 City Council districts, my then organization, the MinKwon Center for Community Action, led ACCORD, a coalition of 13 Asian-American organizations in advocating for an end to the gerrymandering of Asian-American neighborhoods.

That coalition actually included Chhaya CDC, as well as Commissioner Seecharran and together we engaged the states, city and federal levels of redistricting. During our efforts at the City Council, we witnessed tremendous pressure being exerted behind the scenes by political operatives, such as former a state senator who had held office for 40 years in Eastern Queens and whose protege was in the City Council at the time.

Amazingly, this politician of decades had been appointed to the New York City Districting Commission and in his role, he helped cement a more easily winnable district for the city council member who had been blatantly anti-Asian in his prior campaign against an Asian-American candidate.

1	Despite multiple organizations and
2	individuals speaking to the identity and the
3	shared understanding of Bayside, a neighborhood
4	in Queens, the Districting Commission actually
5	split Bayside even further moving portions of it
6	into the adjacent district and increasing voter
7	dilution.
8	Now I bring this up because Chapter 2A of
9	the Charter does support, in Section 52B, "fair

Now I bring this up because Chapter 2A of the Charter does support, in Section 52B, "fair and effective representation of the racial and language minority groups," in New York City protected under the voting rights act and lines "that keep intact neighborhoods and communities with established ties of common interests." This is great.

However, the directive, this directive was undermined by the political will of an incumbent and a long-time politician invested in that incumbent's career. In closing, our districting commission in our Charter is not an independent redistricting commission which is sorely needed in this city and for all states and municipalities, which brings me to two requests of the Commission.

25 First, amend the charter to restrict any

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1	former elected officials from serving on the
2	Districting Commission, And second, amend the
3	charter to eliminate the direct appointment of
4	Districting Commission members by current elected
5	officials.

Now this is a little aside from the example that I gave, but the Mayor and City Council should not be appointing the very individuals tasked with the determining something so directly impacting those who place them there in that position as a commissioner; the conflict of interest is tremendous.

So just in closing, I do want to offer up
California's reengineering of its redistricting
process before its 2010 cycle. One that has been
hailed by advocates as one of the most
independent and free of political pandering.

I hope you'll consider this model for New
York City. Our Charter should make
redistricting, which is a critical component of
democracy, shielded from self-interested
pressures and insure that all New York City's
communities are respected and their voting rights
upheld.

25 CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you very much. Let

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me just make a quick comment because this is
something that the Commission certainly has to be
concerned with. The decision by the Supreme
Court in Shelby took away the preclearance
requirement, not just in the southern states but
in New York City.

What you are suggesting, although you didn't say it, that there is a conflict between this idea that the Charter at one point calls for insuring the protecting of the civil rights of minority groups and the fact that no one any longer, no body any longer, will review the lines that are created by the districting commission, which as you noted, is appointed by current elected officials.

I'm not asking you a question. I'm asking my fellow commissioners what their reaction is to your comments.

COMMISSIONER HO: Well, thank you so much for testifying today. The idea of independent redistricting commissions is something that, you know, I've come across a lot in my work and no one likes partisan gerrymandering, and there's a view out there that an independent redistricting process, will address those concerns but what I

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remember from the 2010 debates in California were that actually minority communities were concerned that an independent redistricting commission might not be sufficiently attentive to making sure there's adequate representation for communities of color.

The map in California turned out to be, I think generally speaking, pretty good in that regard because there was a concern, I think, also not just in terms of the map itself and how it would turn out but also about the representation on an independent commission at a time when there are more elected officials of color than probably at any point in our nation's history, that that's the precise moment when we want to take the redistricting power away from elected officials and put it into an independent body.

I'm not saying that that's my view or my criticism but I'm just sort of wondering how you respond to those kinds of concerns.

MR. HONG: Well, in the sort of the guidelines for choosing the commissioners in the California process, there is actually in the New York City Charter, currently, a reference to sort of the diversity of the Commission. So it's in

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there and they have guidelines for that. So I'm
sure there were, you know, those concerns were
founded but like you said, the results, I think
it speaks to the process to some degree and I
think Commissioner Ho, I know that you are deeply
in this work so I would defer to you on the
knowledge of the California Commission but, you
know, I think our city's Charter right now has
good elements in it, such as that, you know, a
reference to voting rights, to language diversity
and ethic minority communities.

It's just it needs to be stronger and I think we can get some elements from the California Commission.

COMMISSIONER HO: I'm just wondering if also in addition to maybe changing the process of redistricting, if you think it might also be a good idea to change the actual substantive requirements of redistricting to do more to enhance representation of communities of color.

I mean, California also has, not in their constitution, but in the California Voting Rights Act, which goes beyond the Federal Voting Act in terms of what it demands for representation of communities of color and I know that's not what

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1	you came here to testify about specifically
2	but
3	MR. HONG: But I would totally support that.
4	I encourage all the commissioners to discuss
5	that. Yeah, I'm not familiar with the details of
6	that but it's, I know they have a very strong
7	voting rights law over there.
8	COMMISSIONER SEECHARRAN: Thank you for your
9	testimony, James and as you mentioned, my
10	organization worked on this issue previously. I
11	know that this is we've seen this play out
12	time and time again in Queens. I wonder if you
13	could speak a little bit more about the
14	alternative of how you would form a commission
15	that is more accountable and transparent.
16	MR. HONG: So again, I wish I was more
17	versed on how the processing in California is.
18	However, what I am aware of, is that there is a
19	panel there is sort of a commission that then
20	chooses a commission. So it's sort of like a
21	body that will elect or sort of sift through
22	applications to be on the commission in
23	California.
24	I believe the resulting commission was 14

members and for those 14 members, there was

25

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1	something like 30 there was 30,000
2	applications and then there was a pretty detailed
3	process of sort of diversifying the resulting
4	body.

Again, I think Commissioner Ho would know very well about this honestly and but I'm also, of course, happy to follow-up on any request for information but it was sort of twice removed, at least from any elected -- I'm not sure how that initial body was formed but it was already twice removed from any involvement by elected officials.

CHAIRMAN PERALES: Commissioner Ho, since you're going to be doing all this work --

COMMISSIONER HO: Just one other question.

We've been talking about redistricting a little

bit in the abstract but you started by talking

about the last redistricting process and I was

just wondering if you could say a little bit

about today, in your view, what is the current

state of representation for Asian American

communities in Queens on the New York City

Council? Is there a lack of representation that

you think needs addressing by improving the

redistricting process?

1	MR. HONG: Well, Asian Americans are right
2	now over 15 percent of the city, probably
3	16 percent. Out of city council members, I
4	believe there's two that are out of the 51,
5	there are two that are Asian American. Now I
6	don't think there needs to be a 1 to 1
7	correlation of like sort of race and
8	representation but, at the city level, I think
9	there could be better.
10	In places like Bensonhurst in Brooklyn, in
11	Bayside as I mentioned, in Richmond Hill, we saw
12	fragmentation that continued even after the
13	redistricting process of last time where
14	Asian-American communities that had already been
15	established, were not recognized in the
16	districting process unfortunately.
17	So, you know, the example that I gave was
18	just a very clear one where we could see that
19	there was an incumbent interest there but I think
20	it happened in many parts of the city.
21	COMMISSIONER SEECHARRAN: So to answer your
22	question Commissioner Ho, for example, I'll just
23	say that the South Asian population in Queens is
24	quite significant and there is no South Asian
25	representative and specifically Richmond Hill,

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1	there have been South Asian candidates running
2	since the 70s consistently and have gained very
3	little inroads into achieving elected office.
4	CHAIRMAN PERALES: If there are no further
5	questions, I can assure you we're going to be
б	looking very closely at this question of
7	redistricting and the impact it has on the
8	ability of people to get elected and to encourage
9	people to run.
10	MR. HONG: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you
11	everyone.
12	CHAIRMAN PERALES: John Cho.
13	MR. CHO: Chair Perales and members of the
14	commission, thank you for coming to Flushing, the
15	most diverse and dynamic community in America.
16	Since 1645, when Flushing was established by the
17	Dutch, our community has welcomed people from
18	around the world with open arms regardless of
19	race, ethnicity or religion.
20	Flushing now has hundreds of languages and
21	hosts the highest concentration of houses of
22	worship in the United States. Generations of
23	immigrants have found economic opportunities in
24	Flushing, which is now the forth largest
25	commercial district in New York and according to

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the Census, 52 percent of the population in
Community Board 7, which includes Flushing is of
Asian decent. 26 percent are white, 18 percent
are Hispanic, 2 percent are black.

However, the diversity is not reflected in the demographics of those appointed to serve on and officially represent Community Board 7.

54 percent are white, 38 percent are Asian, 6 percent are black and 2 percent are Hispanic.

When you look at the leadership of Community

Board 7, the Chair and the four Vice Chairs, the disparity between appointed officials and the community service is even (inaudible).

officers are white. While I cannot provide statistics of the age distribution of Community Board 7 members, I can tell you that there are very few who are 40 years or younger. Why is this important? A few months ago, as an example, CB7 voted against a variance that would've allowed a nonprofit organization to build a new health clinic and expand their services to more than 40,000 low income people in our community. This clinic would have addressed an important need in our community: Improved health care

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1	outcomes for low income immigrants of color.
2	Despite overwhelming evidence that this
3	population does not own cars, certain members of
4	Community Board 7 insisted that parking
5	requirements be followed regardless of the
6	circumstances and the project was rejected.

The vote was a shameful reminder of how removed many members of Community Board 7 are from this neighborhood that they are sworn to represent and serve. We cannot let another decade pass with hundreds of similar votes by similarly unrepresentative community boards.

There is too much at stake and I urge the Charter Revision Commission to act.

At a minimum the city needs to establish term limits for community board members. We have too many entrenched people who are disconnected from the neighborhoods they were suppose to represent. In Flushing, we have a community board that does not represent a full diversity. We need people of different backgrounds, perspectives and ages; people that understand that our neighborhoods are constantly changing and that government needs to adapt as well. I have much more to offer but that's all I have to

1	say at this moment.
2	CHAIRMAN PERALES: You've made a very good
3	point. We've heard this before about problems
4	and concerns by community boards. We've also
5	heard about the desire to have term limits for
6	members and so I'm glad to have heard your
7	comments. Anyone else? Anybody want to add? If
8	not, I thank you.
9	MR. CHO: Thank you very much for your time.
10	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Shirley Fipps (phonetic).
11	MS. FIPPS: Good evening to all. My name is
12	Shirley Fipps. I reside at 87-32 (inaudible)
13	Street, Hollis, New York. I am a native Queens
14	resident, born and raised here, schooled here,
15	worked here, retired here and I love Jamaica,
16	Queens. I'm familiar with the south side and the
17	north side of Queens.
18	My intro today pertains to Section 6 of the
19	Charter, (inaudible) appoint and remove. The
20	mayor shall appoint the heads of administrations,
21	departments, all commissioners and other officers
22	not elected by people except otherwise provided
23	by law.
24	My statement is the police commissioner, New
25	York City; Fire Department Commissioner, New York

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City and New York City School Chancellor. The people of New York City should be able to vote on the above commissioners due to daily responsibilities to the public.

The Police Commissioner has the force of police officers who have charged New York City residents for public safety and therefore the commissioner should be accountable to the people. The people should have a right to interview and ask questions to the Mayor's appointments prior to an election.

The residents in New York City pay taxes and as taxpayers, we should have a right to elect the commissioner and the process can be open to other qualified candidates prior to the elections; same process as an elected official running for office, the same for FDNY and New York City School Chancellor.

The mayor could appoint a nominating committee to have candidates submit their names. The Mayor's nominating committee will be responsible for the election process. The election candidates will be nonpartisan. The candidate will be responsible to finance their own campaigns and the reason why I say this, as

Τ	being a long-time resident, is we've had so many
2	issues in the city with our police commissioners
3	and I feel the Mayor's choice may not be enough
4	anymore.
5	As we look at Eric Garner, Fire Department,
6	they had a very big lawsuit where they had
7	discriminatory practices in hiring
8	African-Americans, mainly women, and there was a
9	big lawsuit and they had to reform in how they
10	were going to hire firefighters.
11	The Police Commissioner under, Kelly, Stop,
12	Question and Frisk, 700,000 people, Stop,
13	Question and Frisk, and nothing was really found,
14	maybe some marijuana. The purpose of Stop
15	Question and Frisk was to look for guns and most
16	of the time they didn't even find or not even
17	hardcore drugs.
18	If you study the court cases that came up on
19	the Stop, Question and Frisk, a lot of it was not
20	what it supposes to be and the policy that they
21	implemented for Stop, Question and Frisk,
22	blanketed people of color. If you have a policy,
23	you cannot blanket people of color. It has to be
24	for everyone.
25	I live in South Jamaica and I've see what

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1	they've done on Linden Boulevard, Merrick
2	Boulevard; stop, question and they frisk. You go
3	on Main Street, you go on Flushing, you go on
4	Bayside, you go to Forest Hills, I've never seen
5	a white male stopped, questioned and frisked on
6	the streets as I've seen in South Jamaica.
7	So I think we need people, commissioners that
8	come before the body of people. We pay taxes
9	here. We have a right to have commissioners that
10	are going to really serve the people and not the
11	politics or how they want to institute policies
12	to our people or to anyone where it's not fair.
13	So this is my statement.
14	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you. Commissioner
15	Clarke.
16	COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I hear you but if the
17	commissioner of police messes up after he's
18	elected, who would fire him? If the fire
19	commissioner messes up after he's elected, who
20	would fire him or her? I forget "her" because we
21	are just as competent as the men. And if the
22	Chancellor for the Board of Education was elected
23	and he messes up, who would be the point person
24	to fire the person?

I just want to make sure that you thought of

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1	the entire process of where we put
2	responsibility. When you elect a mayor, you
3	should elect a mayor who you know is
4	understanding of all of the needs of the people
5	so that whomever he appoints, and they disappoint
6	us, that we can go to him and say it's time to
7	fire but if we elect them, we have to wait to
8	another election before we can fire him.
9	MS. FIPPS: Like our elected officials
10	most of the elected officials, if they're
11	convicted for corruption, or if they're running
12	and they have a corruption case against them,
13	people don't usually vote for them but I mean,
14	like I said, that's the process that could be
15	looked at by a nominating committee if he
16	appoints a nominating committee and it can still
17	come back to the mayor. I'm just putting this
18	out there. You know there's a lot of things that
19	would have to be reviewed and understood.
20	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Anyone else?
21	COMMISSIONER BRAGG: Kyle Bragg.
22	I agree with your concerns because as a
23	young black man who was born in Brooklyn and
24	raised in Southeast Queens, I've not only
25	experienced seen bias but experienced it

1	myself. I'm not quite sure that your
2	recommendation to have citywide elections for
3	those commissioners is the answer. What the
4	answer is I'm not sure of either but we need to
5	have an answer, I agree with that. I want to
6	thank you for coming here and providing your
7	testimony.
8	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you very much.
9	Jesse Conrad. Is there a Jesse Conrad in the
10	room? No longer in the room apparently.
11	Jobi Jacob.
12	MR. JACOB: Good evening, Commissioners. My
13	name is Jobi and I reside in Hollis Hills and I'd
14	like to speak about two topics.
15	One is the Vision Zero. I'm a big believer
16	in Vision Zero. The proposition that no one,
17	whether they're a pedestrian, a cyclist, or a
18	driver, should die in traffic crashes.
19	We've made a lot of progress towards Vision
20	Zero goals but as we have seen in the last year
21	in Washington, the new administration can undo
22	all our hard work. I would like to see the
23	Charter amended to protect progress on Vision
24	Zero. The DOT Commissioner's duties and powers
25	should include Vision Zero and the Charter should

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1	include	verbiage	to	insure	that	the	Vision	Zero
2	task for	cce meets	reg	gularly				

And the second topic I'd like to talk to you about is, community board reform. Community boards are full of dedicated public servants who volunteer their time to represent their neighborhoods. I count many of them as my friends and they need to be applauded for their service but there is need for reform.

If I join my CB today and stay on for 30 years, it's unreasonable to expect that my views would reflect the values of society in 2048 as over 30 years, society changes.

Many CB members have served 30 plus years and while I applaud their dedication and service, isn't it fair to say that most New York City neighborhoods demographically look nothing like they did 30 plus years ago? Is a board thus composed truly reflective of the community? I don't know what the answer to this. Is it term limits? Is it elections?

At the very least, all boards should be required to publish demographic data that shows what the board looks like, including information about race, ethnicity, how they get around, so

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that people can look at their own communities and compare and see if their community board is representative of them.

I would also like to suggest that while it is appropriate for a CB to bring an item to DOT's attention, it is not appropriate for public safety to be subject to a vote. In Turturro versus City of New York, the City was found liable after a Brooklyn CB torpedoed a plan to enact safety improvements on Gerritsen Avenue. Protecting lives is the first and most fundamental job for government, thus DOT should not feel that CBs should have a veto on street safety improvements and the Charter's language should reflect this. Right now DOT is required to seek approval from every CB for any change on the street.

Unfortunately not everyone can attend community board meetings. I would encourage that all community board meetings should be live streamed just like this meeting, so that people can access this information.

And one last thing I'd like to say, if I may, CB practices and procedures seem haphazard and seem to vary from board to board. The

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1	Charter should empower the council to define and
2	standardize rules and procedures for all boards.
3	So if I move from one neighborhood to the next, I
4	should know how the board should function. Thank
5	you.
6	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you.
7	COMMISSIONER CLARKE: I just want to say
8	that's great testimony and I commend you for your
9	thoughtfulness and for the words you put in
10	writing.
11	MR. JACOB: Thank you.
12	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Benedict Joson.
13	MR. JOSON: Good evening, Commissioners.
14	Thank you Commissioners, the Mayor's Community
15	Affairs Unit, and others for organizing this. My
16	name is Benedict Joson and resident of Flushing,
17	Queens and co-founder of 260 by 26, a global
18	organization focused on children's education and
19	youth skills.
20	Given that I have minimal knowledge on the
21	Charter, my inputs are more on the process than
22	on the content. For any civic and communal
23	effort to achieve its potential, it must be
24	intergenerational and inclusive of young people.
25	On this note, I highly encourage that the

1	commission and revision process be more
2	accessible and inclusive of youth and this
3	applies across government.
4	This could mean including high school and
5	college-aged New Yorkers on the commission as
6	decision makers. This could mean hosting these
7	hearings at New York City high schools and
8	colleges so that students could readily attend
9	and participate and this could mean providing
10	educational content to students on the Charter
11	that aligns with their proficiencies.
12	At the core of these recommendations is that
13	there's active participation and leadership from
14	youth in the Commission and with the Charter.
15	Thank you.
16	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you. That's an
17	important point. I think we're all sensitive to
18	that.
19	COMMISSIONER CLARKE: That's another good
20	point. You are very thoughtful, very smart, and
21	we hear you.
22	CHAIRMAN PERALES: John Park, the executive
23	director of the MinKwon Center.
24	MR. PARK: Thank you very much for coming
25	out to our area to have this and listen, I

1 appreciate it very much.

My name is John Park and I am executive director of the MinKwon Center for Community Action. Before I sort of talk a little bit more, I also wanted to note that a few of us were kind of plugged into these kinds of things. We heard pretty late about this. I don't know what kind of communications were happening around letting people know the days and times and the areas but like for myself, I didn't hear about this until pretty late in the process. I just want to note that.

James Hong, one of my colleagues, still a friend, a former colleague, spoke here very recently, right before I did. He was -- he had much more details and he spoke much more eloquently about the redistricting process. Back in 2010, I was also on the ACCORD. I was a student community member of the Asian-American Community Coalition on Redistricting Democracy and there were a couple of takeaways that I have from that as well.

I just wanted to double down on that. One thing that we learned is, in terms of having levers of influences, in terms of having leverage

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over the districting process, choosing who would sit at the table was just as powerful as sitting at the table and it was very clear to me, at that point, that we needed another level of independence between how the current redistricting commission was appointed because the influences were clear during that process and we knew then that something had to be fixed about it.

The other thing that was also clear was that when there was like a redistricting or an independent commission, it almost, it was almost like there was a veil of protection that existed now that wasn't there before. So even though there was a lot of like various types of influences, incumbent protections, now people could point to this is actually independent when it was clear to us that it wasn't truly independent and it even caused more problems and frustrations at our end.

So I just wanted to way in, again, at what my friend, James Hong, had said. That there should be another layer, another independent type of panel or commission to appoint the people who are going to sit at the table and also agree with

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1	the suggestion earlier that we could strengthen
2	locally our own voting rights protocols and
3	processes to shore up what's happening on the
4	federal level. Thank you.
5	COMMISSIONER CLARKE: Your testimony was
6	quite clear.
7	CHAIRMAN PERALES: We are going to look at
8	the whole question of how the Redistricting
9	Commission is selected and whether or not there
10	are other models that we might employ. Thank you
11	very much.
12	MR. PARK: Because currently, I'll just add,
13	that the voting process is the most sacred thing
14	that we can have and the gerrymandering, the
15	types of things that are happening, is basically
16	a loophole in our democracy.
17	So it is one of those areas where we
18	fundamentally absolutely categorically have to
19	get right because it immediately effects our
20	communities directly. So thank you for
21	listening.
22	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you. Is there
23	anyone else would you like to testify?

Kivelson from the League of Women Voters.

MS. KIVELSON: (Inaudible) Adrianne

24

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1	CHAIRMAN PERALES: I apologize, Ms.
2	Kivelson. I'm glad I asked if there was somebody
3	else that wanted to testify. It says that you
4	are from the League of Women Voters.
5	MS. KIVELSON: Yes, I am.
6	CHAIRMAN PERALES: So we certainly want to
7	hear from you.
8	MS. KIVELSON: I'm very pleased that you're
9	here because this time, I only had to come four
10	blocks. I live in on Kissena Boulevard and
11	usually I'm running around the city, so thank you
12	for coming to Flushing.
13	I'm a volunteer with the League of Women
14	Voters and I'm also the author of What Makes New
15	York City Run, which is a citizen guide to the
16	New York City Charter and we've been publishing
17	this book since 1978 and we are coming out with
18	an updated version on it's an e-book in about
19	a month and it's going to have links to city
20	agencies.
21	CHAIRMAN PERALES: We'd like to see it.
22	MR. KIVELSON: We will see that you get a
23	copy and hope you all will get other copies. I'm
24	going to talk about I'll summarize my
25	presentation. I have written testimony. I'd

1	like	talk	about	two	issues	and	the	first	one	is
2	insta	ant-rı	unoff v	votir	ng.					

We've been talking about instant-runoff voting in the city. We started in 2009 when they were ordering voting machines. We thought it was a wonderful opportunity to put in a computer program on instant-run off voting because we had spent \$13 million in 2009 on a runoff but that didn't happen and in 2013, we had another runoff for the public advocate.

Again, we spent \$13 million on the runoff.

The voting turn out was 6.9 percent of the eligible voters. I don't pride myself on my math but I think that comes out to \$650 per vote.

200,000 people voted, \$13 million, I came out to \$650 per vote.

With instant-runoff voting we could do this in one location. With ranked choice voting, it's used in municipalities all over the country and could successfully be implemented in New York because we have a voting system which can be adapted to do instant-runoff voting. We have a very secure voting system in New York. We're very pleased with it and could incorporate instant-runoff voting.

We hope you will consider this because if you do, and it becomes a proposal that the voters vote on in November, we have two and a half years to implement instant-runoff voting, not only the computer program but to do a successful voter education program.

We're recommending it, to do away with the runoff. That's our first priority but we think it also can also be used in other ways. One way is to use it for military and absentee voters because there's a very short timeframe, particularly for military voters, to get ballots back on the second election.

And we'd also like you to think about using it in special elections for city council because the special elections have multiple candidates, nonpartisan multiple candidates, very low turnout, and people can be elected to the City Council with 20, 25 percent of the vote if there are enough candidates.

Instant-runoff voting would mean that some candidate arrived in a threshold. Which would be representative of the population. So I know other people have spoken for this I'll take, if you let me do that, one more consideration. We

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1	think	it's	time	to	codify	the	Department	of
2	Educat	ion i	in the	e Ci	ty Char	ter		

We have had a New York City Department of
Education authorized by the state legislature for
16 years. You cannot find that department in the
City Charter. There is nothing about the
Department of Education in the City Charter. We
think it's time it did; that the parents of our
1.1 million school children and teachers and the
taxpayers, should be able to look at the Charter
to see what the governance of the Department of
Education is.

Right now, you really have to depend on State Law and the labyrinth of figuring that out is beyond all of us but if it was codified in the City Council, parents and teachers and citizens would understand what the Department of Education does and we believe that this is time, 16 years since the legislature authorized mayoral control of the Department of Education. It's time to put in the Charter.

There are other city agencies that function under State Law like the Department of Transportation and the Civil Service Commission, that's in the administrative services; they

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operate under State Law. Police Department operates under State Law but they can be in our Charter.

The state literally has the ability to change things in our Charter any time they want to but to just not put the Department of Education in the Charter because they're something that's temporary when no one has suggested any other form of governance, we believe it's time for the New York City Department of Education to be in the Charter.

And I have one personal request for the commission. In order to access the New York City Charter at the present time, New Yorkers have to know that they have to go to Administrative Laws on the city's website and then they can view the Charter chapter by chapter. The last Charter Commission put the entire Charter on its website, or the city website as one document, which would be a much easier way.

We understand it changes all the time but while the life of the commission is dealing with the Charter, it's a finite document and we hope you'll put it on the website. Thank you.

1	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Let me just make a
2	comment before I ask the other commissions if
3	they have a question.
4	One of the reasons, I think, that there's
5	been hesitancy to put the Department of Education
6	as part of the City Charter, is that there are
7	still a lot of people who hope that they will go
8	back to the day where there is a Board of
9	Education, not just mayoral control. So it's a
10	political thicket, if that makes some sense.
11	Have you thought about that.
12	MS. KIVELSON: Well, we have and as
13	contentious as the reauthorization of state funds
14	and of the city, of the mayoral control in
15	Albany, and its been ugly almost since the time
16	it started, no one has suggested going back to
17	the Board of Education. I haven't heard that, I
18	haven't read that in any document. That was not
19	seen as a viable model because no one was in
20	control.
21	I spoke about this at earlier Charter
22	Revision Commissions and the answer was well, if
23	it were city controlled rather than mayor
24	controlled, the Council would be more
25	enthusiastic; that the Council isn't enthusiastic

Τ	because it's mayoral control.
2	I don't know how you do this but I think the
3	timeframe to say that it's 20 percent of our
4	budget and it's not there and no one has really
5	had a bill or a legislation or proposal for
6	another form of control that. We haven't seen
7	that. We haven't seen anybody proposing another
8	form of control. So there's some people who
9	would say it was better in the old days.
LO	I was around when we had the Board of
11	Education and some of our chancellors were
L2	wonderful people but it was an impossible
L3	situation with the spreading of control with the
L4	borough president. So there may be people who
L5	said it but they haven't proposed it and I think
L6	certainly everybody would be interested in a
L7	proposal but nobody has proposed anything so
L8	that's
L9	CHAIRMAN PERALES: I understand. Anyone
20	else want to comment? We will consider it.
21	MS. KIVELSON: Thank you very much.
22	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Thank you very much. I
23	will again ask if anyone else wants to testify?
24	The hour draws late, so I hope this will be a

brief comment.

25

1	MR. KIERNAN: My name is Edward Kiernan.
2	I'm a member of Community Board 3 here in Queens.
3	We cover Jackson Heights, Corona and East
4	Elmhurst and my main concern is that the
5	community boards have diminished they've lost
6	power since the time of the Board of Estimates.
7	Now we get stuff thrown at us from DOT or
8	from DOB and we're kind of just told, you know,
9	just take it and deal with it and we don't really
LO	have the input that boards used to have.
L1	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Is it I'm trying to
L2	figure out what you're saying. Is it that you
L3	don't think you have the capacity in terms of
L 4	support or is it that you don't have the time?
L5	MR. KIERNAN: We don't have the authority.
L6	CHAIRMAN PERALES: Then why does somebody
L7	give it to you? Ask you for the
L8	MR. KIERNAN: They essentially ask us for a
L9	rubber stamp.
20	CHAIRMAN PERALES: But you cannot say no?
21	MR. KIERNAN: No.
22	CHAIRMAN PERALES: And what you're asking
23	for is greater authority?
24	MR. KIERNAN: What I would like is to if
25	you recall back when the Board of Estimates was

1 -- the way boards were then, we could actually 2 say no to something and now we really can't. 3 It's by --CHAIRMAN PERALES: Your comment has to do 4 with the community boards and their lack of 5 6 authority in some areas. 7 MR. KIERNAN: Exactly. CHAIRMAN PERALES: Well, we'll take that 8 9 into consideration. I see lots of issues 10 regarding community boards have been raised with 11 us, so I thank you. 12 MR. KIERNAN: Thank you. 13 CHAIRMAN PERALES: Anyone else? Seeing no 14 hands, I will ask for a motion. COMMISSIONER BRAGG: Motion to adjourn. 15 CHAIRMAN PERALES: Is there a second? 16 17 COMMISSIONER ARCHER: Second. 18 COMMISSIONER BRAGG: All in favor? 19 COMMISSIONER BRAGG: Aye. 20 (A chorus of ayes.) 21 CHAIRMAN PERALES: Opposed? Hearing no 22 opposition, the motion is passed and we are 23 adjourned. Thank you. 24 (Whereupon, at 8:05 P.M., the above matter 25 concluded.)

1	CERTIFICATE
2	
3	STATE OF NEW YORK)
4	: SS.: COUNTY OF NEW YORK)
5	
6	I, ENRIQUE ALVARADO, a Notary Public for and
7	within the State of New York, do hereby certify:
8	That the above is a correct transcription of my
9	stenographic notes.
LO	I further certify that I am not related to any
L1	of the parties to this action by blood or by marriage and
L2	that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this
L3	matter.
L 4	IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand
L5	this 3rd day of May 2018.
L6	
L7	Enique Clertico
L8	ENRIQUE ALVARADO
L9	
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