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Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this evening's hearing. This statement will be read on behalf of Minority Leader Steven Matteo and Borough President James Oddo, and represent their joint thoughts on a "good government" issue that should be a part of the deliberations of this Commission.

Eight years ago, as part of the infamous "Term Limits" Charter Revision Commission we led the "Local Control" movement. This battle cry was soon adopted by the *Staten Island Advance*, and we fought together valiantly to show why purely local decisions should be made by local officials, and not bureaucrats in Manhattan. Unfortunately, as the experience demonstrated and history has proven, that Commission was formed for the sole purpose of returning the Term Limits law back to what it was before the City Council and Mayor legislatively changed it. There was no interest in doing the hard work of truly reforming the City Charter to improve the delivery of services in the boroughs.

With that said, admittedly, some of our proposals may have been hard for an Executive to stomach. For example, we proposed giving local Borough Presidents the power to play some formal role in the choosing of agency Borough Commissioners. While that may be good government for residents of historically neglected communities like Staten Island, we understand that Executives will never willingly cede the power to pick their own team.

With that said, we were ready, willing, and able to have that discussion and to talk about different ways we can accomplish greater local control without taking power from the Mayor. Those in charge of the Commission did not want to have that discussion, and that was unfortunate.

Our proposal before the 2018 version of the Commission is more modest, but no less important and, if implemented, could help us achieve more Local Control without diminishing the power of the Executive. Simply stated, we believe the agencies themselves should be restructured to empower the Borough Commissioners more on issues purely affecting his/her borough. We have some good Borough Commissioners who know Staten Island much better than any Manhattan

bureaucrat ever would, could, or care to. They attend Community Board meetings weekly, get stopped by Staten Islanders in Stop and Shop who complain to them about various issues, and meet and speak with elected officials daily. They drive our streets to and from work, walk the pavement while shopping, and frequent our parks with their families. Their finger is on the proverbial pulse of the community. We should work to implement a mechanism to empower them on matters of purely local concern. To use an example from within the Department of Transportation realm, the Borough Commissioner and his local team knows better than anyone else in DOT leadership what roads are in most need of a “wear and tear.”

While the Mayor has the right as the Chief Executive to set policy for his Administration, local Borough Commissioners should have the ability to implement that policy in their boroughs based on their experiences within their communities. Agencies should be restructured in such a way that the chain of command within the agency is clear, and that one individual on the local level is not only responsible and accountable, but specifically empowered within the agency to act.

We thank you for the opportunity to offer our thoughts on this important topic, and look forward to further discussions.

**Testimony of New York City Council Member Joseph Borelli
Charter Revision Commission Public Hearing
College of Staten Island
Monday, September 24, 2018**

I would like to thank the Charter Revision Commission for this opportunity to offer my thoughts about City government and where I believe the Commission should be focusing its time, energy, and resources during this process.

I would first like to take the opportunity to recognize my friend, County Clerk Steve Fiala. Steve is a true student of government and I am confident that he is doing everything he can to represent our unique interests on Staten Island. I've always been proud of the fact that the beginning of my life in public service began as an intern for Councilman Steve Fiala. It's also a great treat to see my former colleague James Vacca, who when we served together, even if we were in different political parties we frequently found each other on the same side in battle after battle. I also have to acknowledge one of my constituents, Sal Albanese. Sal, even if you don't vote in favor of any of my recommendations, I hope you'll vote for me for re-election.

Additionally, as an adjunct Professor here at the College of Staten Island, I don't think you could've chosen a better venue. I'm hoping some of my students are here and I can count this as a field trip. I do think though that the 6:00 p.m. start time for a meeting of this importance is inappropriate and demonstrates a misunderstanding of the unique commuting patterns of Staten Island, particularly my constituents in the south shore. My constituents are sitting on Express Buses right now or getting on the train heading home. It's a battle that we must fight here on Staten Island to hold public meetings at times when Staten Islanders can actually participate. The start time though is, emblematic of some of the themes that I will touch upon in my testimony and I believe other Staten Islanders will also – that is more local control.

One of the crosses that Staten Island has constantly been forced to bear has been the fact that so much of what happens in our day to day life isn't determined by Staten Islanders, but by unelected bureaucrats in Manhattan. If there's one single theme that I could encourage the Commission to consider, it's allowing borough officials more autonomy in making decisions that affect individual boroughs, because the public servants that serve our community are selected by our neighbors. We understand firsthand what it's like to commute to Manhattan or not to have our streets cleared in a snow storm.

My fear, and the fear of 500,000 people on Staten Island, is that, as is usually the case, our voices on Staten Island will be drowned out due to our small numbers relative to the City and that we will end up with new institutions and ways of doing things that end up doing us more harm than good.

Our Borough President James Oddo has been consistent in calling for greater decentralization, as has the Staten Island Advance. This is an issue on which almost everyone on Staten Island can agree. We understand that whenever decisions about local matters are made by unelected bureaucrats who don't live here and never visit. We don't want to be laboratories for the latest experiments in social engineering as too often seems the case on issues ranging from buses to composting.

What is clear is that this decentralization vs. Manhattan domination of our civic life argument is one that started back at the time Staten Islanders voted to join our fine city and it's one that will continue forever. We recognize that in so many ways, New York will always be dominated by Manhattan, but that's no reason why Staten Islanders shouldn't be considered fit to govern ourselves.

Of course, I recognize that we are one city and that you cannot have 5 different broad policy goals one for each borough. That would be impracticable and I don't think anyone on Staten Island is advocating that. It must be noted that "policy" is one thing and administrative functions are another. Administrative functions and decision making can be decentralized without affecting policy. Giving local officials more control will help further policies set in Manhattan by ensuring the more efficient allocation of resources.

I simply believe that on local issues – for example, when to close schools because of inclement weather, where to put speed bumps, whether to have bike lanes in certain neighborhoods, what streets should be repaved, etc., that we on Staten Island know better than bureaucrats based in Manhattan and should have the ability to make the administrative decisions. We are not asking for broad powers over policy – I am a firm believer that when a Mayor is elected he has the right to set policy, even if it's policy I may not agree with. With that said, however, administrative decisions made to carry out those policies are best made at the most local level.

So how do we do this? I think if you were to hold a hearing featuring expert testimony and analysis from policymakers and those who have studied municipal governance you'd get dozens, maybe even hundreds of suggestions. In fact, since this is a two year Commission and you have the luxury of time, I'd urge you to do just that. In essence though, there are a few key items, which I think are a no-brainer. Our Borough Presidents should be empowered to serve as the central figure behind greater local control. Since 1989, when the Board of Estimate was eliminated, the role of Borough President has too often been ceremonial and we're forced to rely on Borough Presidents to be effective masters of their own "Borough Bully Pulpit". There's no reason for that. We should take a step back toward local control of administrative functions of those agencies that deal with essential functions of government for New Yorkers.

I believe there should be a greater administrative decentralization of certain agency functions. This means greater local decision making of certain purely local concerns such as local transportation needs, local economic development concerns, local education decisions, and local land use concerns. The key to everything in my view is "administrative decentralization."

Here are a few ideas for how to bring about a greater level of administrative decentralization:

- Give Borough Presidents a role in picking Borough Commissioners for city agencies. Perhaps the Borough President in each borough could provide the Mayor a list of five potential Borough Commissioners to choose from. There are numerous other ways to do this as well. We could also give the local Borough President, or a majority of a Borough's Council delegation, the ability to remove a Borough Commissioner. This would allow the Mayor to determine whose in control of the agency, but make sure that someone who had an agenda, which was at odds with a community's wouldn't be given free rein to ride roughshod over community standards.
- As an alternative, we can give the Borough Presidents the sole power to appoint Borough Commissioners in consultation with the borough Council Members, to the most important agencies that affect day to day life of borough residents like DOT, DOB, etc. This would ensure that the Borough President has his own team in place to help with day to day issues within a borough, but it would also make sure that the Council delegation has a role.
- On issues that only affect a single borough – i.e., where to place traffic signals, etc., Borough Commissioners should be required to formally consult with the Council Member of the appropriate district and the input provided should be incorporated into any decisions made.
- It may also be worth considering, the Borough Commissioners of each of the important agencies to form a "Borough Cabinet." There should be a "Borough Cabinet" meeting at least once per month, hosted by the Borough Presidents. This is a chance for the Borough Commissioners to report on the status they have made and to discuss upcoming issues. This meeting should be regularly scheduled and open to the public to make comments and ask questions of the officials. The local Council Members should also participate in this body.
- The 311 system should be decentralized to a greater extent. Currently, there are complaints that when people call 311 that the operators are often not familiar with local issues. There should be 311 operators assigned to specific borough issues (preferably with those operators living in the boroughs to which they are assigned). When a 311 call comes in from Staten Island, that phone call should automatically be routed to one of the Staten Island operators for assistance. There should also be a mechanism that the details of the call are automatically forwarded to the appropriate local Council Member. So often I'll meet a constituent at Shop Rite for her to tell me how she called and complained about a local issue, which still hasn't been resolved. It's not unusual for me to then find that he or she hasn't called my office, they've complained to 311. Some constituent issues are best handled by the local Council Member, etc.
- There should be a mandate that each agency that performs adjudicative functions maintain an office in each borough to adjudicate matters for residents or business owners of that borough. This would prevent the need for residents

from Staten Island to travel to Manhattan to adjudicate matters. This could be done on a rotating basis, so each adjudicative agency would not have to maintain a full time adjudication office in each borough, but must have these services available at least once per week.

- Currently, the city charter has all of the members of the Community Board appointed by the Borough President, with half recommended by the individual Council Member. Why? Isn't a council member at least equally suited to determine the members of the community to give voice to community concerns? I would encourage you to allow Council members to appoint half of the members of the community Board, without approval from the Borough President.

I think, Borough Presidents should be given a role more similar to the County Executive model, as has been articulated so well in previous Charter Revision Commissions by my predecessor as Councilman Vincent Ignizio. Borough Presidents should be a more equal partner in city government, which would bring about a more efficient and cost-effective government administration.

Aside from the issue of local control, an issue that I truly believe requires your attention is the city's matching funds program. Since I've been in politics, I've seen this go from a 4-1 program to a 6-1 program at substantial cost to the taxpayers and almost no difference in who runs for office or which special interests dominate the political agenda. This year, the Mayor's Charter Revision Commission has put a question on the ballot, which would raise this to an 8-1 match. This is absolutely ludicrous and will serve only to make it even easier for incumbents to raise money and make campaign consultants, election lawyers and political operatives wealthier. If New Yorkers make what I would argue is an ill-conceived decision to increase the matching funds program to 8-1, I would urge the Commission to either raise the threshold of money necessary to qualify for matching funds or to reduce it back to 4-1. I'm also open to whatever options the Commission might consider. I can tell you as someone that's seen colleagues in both the Assembly and the Council get arrested and go to prison. The matching funds system has done nothing to reduce corruption. Dishonest people are going to find a way to game the system, whether there are matching funds or not.

Here are some additional ideas, not directly related to administrative decentralization or the public matching funds system, which we should be discussing:

- Require the Independent Budget Office (IBO) to conduct a cost estimate on every City Council bill. If that bill calls for additional spending, the Councilmember should spell out how it's paid for either through additional taxes or spending cuts in other programs. Too often my colleagues in the City Council propose legislation without regard to how it will be paid for. That's a model that's simply unsustainable, particularly if there's an economic downturn.
- Undergo a comprehensive review of every city agency within city government to determine which duplicate efforts made by other agencies, offices, or subdivisions with the goal of eliminating any unnecessary organizations.

- Make it more difficult to raise taxes in the city through a supermajority requirement. In a city where the members of the legislative body are overwhelmingly of one party it is important to have such a requirement.
- Require that public hearings be held in each borough before raising taxes.
- Rationalize the process of special elections to fill vacancies. Is there a better system out there, rather than requiring someone to run for the office in the special election and then once again in November of the same year? It wastes city resources to have two elections for the same seat in a single year.
- Consider making the referendum process easier. The rise of the Trump movement and the Sanders movement proves that people are more engaged than ever and want to be a part of the process. Let's encourage that.
- Rein in the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA). Give the City Council greater oversight over BSA, including a call up provision so that the City Council can assert jurisdiction over certain matters.
- Give each Borough President an appointee on BSA.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard this evening. I hope this is the first of many hearings you'll have in our borough. You're welcome in my district any time.