

New York City Council
Quadrennial Advisory Commission on Elected Official Compensation
Public Hearing — May 2026

Good morning, Chair and distinguished members of the Quadrennial Advisory Commission. My name is Rita Joseph, and I represent the 40th Council District in Brooklyn. I am grateful for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of a long-overdue cost-of-living adjustment to the compensation of New York City Council Members.

A Decade of Inaction Has Real Consequences

It has been nearly a decade since this Commission last conducted a formal review of Council Member compensation. Since 2016, New York City — and the nation — has experienced significant inflation, a global pandemic, and a dramatic increase in the cost of living. During that same period, Council Members have received no cost-of-living adjustments whatsoever. The result is that the real value of our compensation has steadily eroded, year after year, without correction.

To be clear: this is not a request for a raise. This is a request to restore the purchasing power that has quietly been stripped away by inflation over the past ten years. Every other professional class in public service has seen periodic adjustments to keep pace with economic realities. Council Members have not. That imbalance must be addressed.

Public Service Must Remain Accessible

One of the most serious — and least discussed — consequences of stagnant compensation is what it means for who can realistically serve on this body. The New York City Council is meant to reflect the full diversity of our city: working families, educators, community organizers, immigrants, and people who have never thought of government as a career but answered the call to serve their neighbors.

When compensation fails to keep pace with the cost of living in one of the most expensive cities in the world, we effectively price out the very people we need most in these seats. We risk creating a Council that can only be sustained by those with outside income, personal wealth, or financial support — and that is not the Council New York City deserves.

Fair compensation is not a privilege. It is a prerequisite for an equitable and representative democracy.

Transparency and Public Accountability Must Guide This Process

I want to be clear about what I am asking this Commission to do. I am asking for recommendations that are data-driven, grounded in economic evidence, and anchored in the long-term institutional health of city government. Any adjustments recommended should be tied

explicitly to objective measures — inflation indices, cost-of-living data, and comparisons with peer municipalities and other elected bodies.

This process must be transparent. New Yorkers deserve to understand how and why compensation decisions are made on behalf of their elected officials. A rigorous, well-documented process is not only the right approach — it is the only approach that will withstand public scrutiny and maintain the trust this institution depends on.

Conclusion

I respectfully urge this Commission to act on the evidence before you. A cost-of-living adjustment that reflects the economic realities of the past decade is fair, justified, and necessary. It will help ensure that public service in New York City remains accessible, that our Council remains diverse, and that our institution remains strong for the generations who will serve after us.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your commitment to getting this right.

Respectfully submitted,

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New York City Council