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New York City Council Member Selvena N. Brooks-Powers' Testimony to the Quadrennial Advisory Commission

Submitted: May 22, 2026

Thank you to the Quadrennial Advisory Commission for the opportunity to testify.

As New York City continues to center affordability in our public discourse, we must be honest and inclusive about who that conversation applies to. That includes elected officials.

The last compensation review for city elected officials took place in 2015. Since then, the cost of living in New York City has risen dramatically, while the scope, pace, and demands of public service have evolved just as significantly.

Today, Council Members are expected to be accessible to constituents not only during traditional business hours, but in the evenings, on weekends, and in moments of crisis. The rise of social media, digital platforms, and an accelerated news cycle has fundamentally transformed this role. New Yorkers rightly expect real-time communication, rapid response, and consistent visibility from their elected representatives in ways that simply did not exist a decade ago.

At the same time, the responsibilities of Council Members have expanded in both scale and complexity. We manage multi-million-dollar discretionary budgets, navigate intricate land use decisions, oversee policy that impacts millions, and serve as one of the most immediate and responsive forms of government for our constituents.

We are often the first call in an emergency and the last line of accountability when systems fail. Yet while the expectations have increased, compensation has remained stagnant.

As a body, the Council has consistently advocated for fair wages, cost-of-living adjustments, and expanded benefits for the hardworking public servants who keep this city running. Just this week, we advanced Home Rule messages to support retirement security and benefit enhancements for our workforce.

We recognize that fair compensation is not a luxury; it is a necessity to recruit, retain, and sustain a talented and diverse workforce.

That same principle applies here.

Ensuring that elected office is fairly compensated is not about personal gain; it is about preserving access to public service. Without reasonable compensation, we risk limiting these roles to those who can independently afford to serve, undermining the very diversity, equity, and representation that our democracy depends on.

Public office should be accessible to working- and middle-class New Yorkers: to parents, to caregivers, to those who understand firsthand the challenges facing our communities.

A thoughtful, reasonable adjustment to compensation helps ensure that serving in government remains financially viable, ethically grounded, and reflective of the people we represent.

I urge the Commission to consider not only the economic realities of today, but the long-term health and inclusivity of our democratic institutions.

Thank you again for your time, your service, and your thoughtful consideration.