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May 28, 2026

2026 Quadrennial Advisory Commission Public Hearing for the Review of Compensation Levels of Elected Officials

Good afternoon.

Before I begin, I would like to thank the members of this Commission: Chair Weisbrod, Commissioner Angelo, and Commissioner Barrios-Paoli for convening this public hearing and considering testimony regarding the compensation levels of elected officials across the City of New York. Through this timely proceeding, New York possesses a unique opportunity to evaluate cost-of-living wages in a manner that will serve New Yorkers well. I look forward to the insights this Commission will bring to these critical wage calculations, and to your work ahead as you review this important data for our community.

I am Council Member Amanda Farías. For the past 4.5 years, I have had the honor of representing New York City Council District 18 in the Bronx; a working-class constituency comprising working families, municipal workers, small business owners, immigrants, and facing escalating financial pressures. To maintain a truly representative government, public service must remain financially sustainable for working-class citizens. When compensation fails to keep pace with escalating costs, New Yorkers are systemically precluded from leadership, leaving public office exclusive to the wealthy.

The last comprehensive review of compensation for New York City elected officials occurred in 2016. In the decade since, New York City, our nation, and the global economy have endured extraordinary economic volatility that has fundamentally altered the baseline cost of living and working in this city. **We have navigated a global pandemic that devastated local economies and reshaped the demands placed upon public servants. We continue to experience historic inflation, soaring housing costs, rising healthcare expenses, childcare burdens, supply chain instability, and workforce shortages.** The economic realities facing New Yorkers today are fundamentally different than they were ten years ago.

At the same time, the role of elected officials has expanded dramatically in both scope and intensity.

Serving as a member of the New York City Council is not a standard 40-hour workweek. It is a continuous, around-the-clock responsibility that requires managing

crises, responding to emergencies, overseeing agencies, negotiating budgets, conducting legislative work, supporting constituents through bureaucratic systems, and maintaining a constant presence within the communities we represent. During certain periods of the year — including budget season, emergencies, and times of crisis — **many of us work 60, 70, or even 80-hour weeks.** The demands of the role do not stop after business hours, on weekends, or during holidays.

Yet despite the scale of these responsibilities, elected officials have not received the same routine cost-of-living considerations that many other city workers have received over time. We are public servants, too. We dedicate our professional lives to serving New Yorkers, and our compensation should reflect the modern realities of public service in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

Importantly, today's City Council is increasingly reflective of the communities we represent. Many members are first-generation professionals, working-class New Yorkers, caregivers, parents, immigrants, or individuals without generational wealth or financial safety nets. We carry student debt, support extended family members, manage childcare and eldercare responsibilities, and face the same economic pressures confronting millions of New Yorkers every day.

Public office should not become accessible only to independently wealthy individuals or those with outside financial privilege. If compensation does not keep pace with the realities of living and working in New York City, we risk creating a government that is less representative, less accessible, and less connected to the lived experiences of everyday New Yorkers.

Additionally, there are substantial professional and personal costs associated with public service that are often overlooked. Elected officials routinely absorb expenses tied to community engagement, transportation, events, meals, constituent support, district visibility, and the day-to-day operational realities of maintaining a meaningful presence in our communities. Many of these costs are not reimbursed, despite being directly tied to the responsibilities of the role.

Providing fair and livable compensation is not about personal enrichment; it is about protecting the integrity, accessibility, and sustainability of public service. It is about ensuring that people from all socioeconomic backgrounds can realistically serve their city without financial instability becoming a barrier to participation, as we are seeing with mass exodus from other levels of government.

As we look toward the future of New York City governance, we must also recognize the importance of rebuilding and strengthening public trust in our institutions. That requires transparency, accountability, and a government that attracts and retains talented, ethical, community-rooted leaders. A realistic compensation framework is one component of ensuring public service remains stable, professional, and accessible to working-class New Yorkers - not just those with independent wealth or financial flexibility.

New York City's elected officials are tasked with navigating some of the most complex urban challenges in the country while serving millions of residents through moments of

crisis, uncertainty, and need. The compensation structure should reflect both the magnitude of this responsibility and the economic realities of the city we serve.

Our government requires the perspectives of transit workers, healthcare professionals, municipal employees, educators, small business owners, immigrant families, and single parents managing multiple jobs to maintain housing and food security. These New Yorkers deserve representation from individuals who understand economic hardship as a lived reality rather than a theoretical talking point. If compensation structures fail to evolve alongside inflation, we risk creating an exclusionary system where only the independently wealthy can afford to serve. That outcome is inherently incompatible with a representative democracy.

My hope is that we can look at this situation through the same human lens we apply to the rest of our city's workforce. Every year, our municipal employees secure regular wage updates because we all understand that soaring costs hurt working families. While these adjustments are a vital lifeline, they are often barely enough to help workers offset the immense weight of modern inflation.

But when the global pandemic struck, the official process to implement cost-of-living adjustments was halted. This crisis froze our statutory review timeline during a time when local offices had to transform overnight into operational hubs for food distribution, healthcare access, and localized economic relief. **As a result, we are now effectively one-and-a-half review cycles overdue while governing in an entirely different economic backdrop.**

As this Commission formulates its recommendations, I trust that these comprehensive socioeconomic realities will be fully reflected in your final analysis, and a consideration for retroactive compensation in this session as initially considered in the City Council's legislation. Accounting for these broader systemic shifts is essential to protecting the integrity of our roles. By keeping public service economically viable for individuals from every socioeconomic background, we ensure that New York City's government remains deeply reflective of the working people who sustain it. Thank you for your time, your rigorous consideration, and the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record. I welcome any questions the commission may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Hon. Amanda Farías
Council Member, District 18
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