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Statement
New York State Senator Tony Avella

Quadrennial Advisory Commission
2015 Review of Compensation Levels
For
New York City Elected Officials

December 18, 2015

I submit these comments in response to the November 24, 2015 public hearing of the Quadrennial Advisory Commission, appointed by Mayor Bill de Blasio, to review the salaries of New York City elected officials.

The last commission was appointed in 2006 when I was serving on the City Council. At the time, I believed that the \$90,000 former Council Member salary was more than adequate. However, I was hopeful that the commission's review of compensation would create a forum for the city to have a meaningful discussion about what I still view as needed governmental reforms.

Accordingly, I submitted comments on May 20, 2006 to the then-Chair Tom A. Bernstein urging the commission to recommend that any increases in compensation be prospective. It is completely unethical for a body to vote itself a raise. Elected officials serve at the pleasure of the people—who need to have an opportunity to weigh in on whether they find a body so-elected as deserving of more tax-payer money.

I also urged the commission not to propose any salary increases without provisions that would have:

- Eliminated lucrative stipends—known as lulus—that Council Members can receive for holding extra positions, such as committee chairman; and
- Designated Council Members as “full time” employees.

Keep in mind that during my tenure, some of my colleagues in the City Council were making more than \$100,000 a year in addition to their Council salaries.

As you are likely aware, and as previously discussed in the public testimony submitted thus far, past commissions did not make, and have never made, such recommendations in the 30 years they been appointed. Their failure to directly tie proposed compensation increases to these types of necessary governmental reforms has allowed the City Council to sit idly by.

For example, on the day of the November 15, 2006 City Council vote on the last pay raise, I sponsored amendments that would have:

1. Delayed the pay increase for lawmakers until 2010;
2. Ended lulus; and
3. Prohibited Council members from holding outside jobs.

These amendments were rejected and the raises were approved. Only four members joined me in voting against the salary increase.

I subsequently pushed the Council to consider such reforms in 2009 when I introduced Int. 946-2009, which would have required that any changes to Council member salaries be voted on by the Council no later than 30 days prior to any primary, general, or special election, and that any such increase would not take effect until the first day in January following the next general election of the City Council. Unfortunately, this legislation never made it to the full Council for a vote.

While I am no longer serving in the City Council, as a resident of New York City and as an elected official in the New York State Legislature representing the 11th Senatorial District, I urge this commission to strongly recommend that the City Council tie these reforms to any proposed pay increases.

I appreciate the work of Citizens Union who took the time to put together a candidate questionnaire for Council members on these issues. It shows that support is growing for the various reforms I began pushing almost a decade ago. Today, 37 council members would support making salary increases prospective and 31 would support ending lulus for committee chairs.

In sum, I urge the commission to consider the suggestions from various groups who submitted testimony, including Citizens Union, NYPIRG, and Common Cause, and I am optimistic that with your recommendation we will see these reforms enacted.