1   **Charter Review Committee Public Hearing**

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6   **Moderated by Carlo Scissura**

7   **Monday, June 17, 2024**

8   **5:16 p.m.**

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11   **NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln**

12   **234 East 149th Street**

13   **Auditorium**

14   **Bronx, NY 10451**

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19   Reported by: Thea Popko

20   JOB NO.:   6750852

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1   A P P E A R A N C E S

2   List of Attendees:

3   Carlo Scissura, Chair

4   Edward Kiernan, General Counsel

5   Kyle Bragg, Commissioner

6   Hazel Dukes, Vice Chair

7   Jackie Rowe-Adams, Commissioner

8   Stephanie McGraw, Commissioner

9   Christopher Lynch, Commissioner (by videoconference)

10   Rafael Salamanca, Speaker

11   Susan Lerner, Speaker

12   Ben Weinberg, Speaker

13   John Ketcham, Speaker

14   Mona Davids, Speaker

15   Melissa Mark-Viverito, Speaker

16   Frank Morano, Speaker

17   Claire Stottlemyer, Speaker

18   Lena Cohen, Speaker

19   Gloria Kim, Speaker

20   Pedro Suarez, Speaker

21   Roxanne Delgado, Speaker

22   Michael Torres, Speaker

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1   P R O C E E D I N G S

2   MR. SCISSURA: Good afternoon or good

3   evening. I have to say it is a pleasure to be here in

4   the Bronx. My second favorite borough that starts

5   with the letter "B." You'll have to guess what my

6   first is. But we love the Bronx.

7   And I just want to give a shoutout to

8   our borough president, Vanessa Gibson. Her team is

9   here tonight. So thank you. Please give Vanessa our

10   love.

11   MS. ROWE-ADAMS: Yes, yes.

12   MR. SCISSURA: All right. So we are

13   thrilled to have you here at our fourth public hearing

14   and our fifth meeting of the 2024 Charter Revision

15   Commission and the first of two public hearings that

16   will be held here in the Bronx. It is also the second

17   of three issue forums that the commission will host to

18   take a deep dive into important topics affecting our

19   city.

20   Last week our forum was about fiscal

21   issues, fiscal responsibility, fiscal integrity. And

22   we had a very robust evening. Excuse me. Today we

23   are focusing on good government and election reform

24   matters. And we will hear from a number of experts on

25   these subjects as well as New Yorkers at large. Later

1 this week on Thursday we will be in Brooklyn hosting a

2 forum on public safety. And we hope that you will be

3 there.

4   And for those of you that don't know

5 me, I'm Carlo Scissura. And I have the honor of

6 chairing this esteemed group of New Yorkers at this

7 charter commission. So we are joined today by, to my

8 right, our vice chair, the one and only Hazel Dukes;

9 Kyle Bragg, who served with me on the last commission;

10 Christopher Lynch is on Zoom; and Jackie Rowe-Adams is

11 to my left.

12   I want to thank our executive director,

13 our general counsel, and the entire staff who are

14 working really hard to make these meetings a great

15 success.

16   And I think -- anybody else on Zoom

17 from the commission? Just Mr. Lynch. Okay.

18   I would like to thank Christopher

19 Roker, the CEO of Lincoln Hospital, for hosting us

20 today and everybody here at Lincoln for doing such

21 great work in the Bronx. We thank you.

22   Thank you. Thank you, ma'am.

23   MS. SIMMONS-OLIVER: -- in charge of

24 public affairs and my team member --

25   MR. SCISSURA: Awesome. Thank you very

1   much for having us.

2   Okay. So I'm going to --

3   MS. SIMMONS-OLIVER: On behalf of

4   Mr. Roker and his entire leadership, we welcome you to

5   the greatest people in the whole City of New York.

6   Now we're going to pardon you, but

7   you're from the other side.

8   MR. SCISSURA: I'm from the other part

9   of town --

10   MS. SIMMONS-OLIVER: You're from the

11   other side of town. But we want you to feel very

12   welcome here and appreciated here. And we're looking

13   forward to this forum and to what you're going to hear

14   from our constituency.

15   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

16   MS. SIMMONS-OLIVER: So thank you all

17   so very much for joining us today at our fabulous

18   Lincoln Hospital.

19   MR. SCISSURA: We appreciate it. Thank

20   you.

21   I will say this about the Bronx. I'm

22   going off everything right now. But as an Italian

23   American, son of Italian immigrants from Brooklyn, the

24   Bronx has a much better Little Italy than we do. So I

25   will say that. All right.

1   Let me just ask our commissioners to

2   say a couple of words if they can.

3   Ms. Dukes, I'm going to start with you.

4   MS. DUKES: I'm pleased to see that

5   someone heard my cry. I've been sitting out my former

6   president of the Bronx branch NAACP is here.

7   Hello, Mr. Gray. Thank you for being

8   here. We are sitting -- Bronx. Don't miss anything

9   that happened here. And I hope others show up.

10   I think that, Chairman, this is such an

11   important task that we have taken on for New Yorkers.

12   This is a time when other voice can be heard. We hear

13   by closed door meetings and people not having a chance

14   to say anything. But this is your hearing. And so we

15   hope that you encourage your fellow other people in

16   boroughs to attend this and say what's on their mind.

17   MR. SCISSURA: Agreed.

18   Kyle.

19   MR. BRAGG: Thank you. Again,

20   Kyle Bragg. It's been an honor to serve on this

21   commission, as I had the opportunity and honor to

22   serve with Carlo and the last commission with

23   Mayor de Blasio. I think it -- also as Mama Dukes had

24   articulated very important to hear from the residents

25   of New York City about how we make government work for

1 all New Yorkers. And there's a great opportunity here

2 to come to this commission and give your thoughts and

3 ideas of how we can revise the charter to make sure

4 that government meets the needs of all of New York

5 City citizens. So thank you.

6   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, Kyle.

7   Jackie Rowe-Adams.

8   MS. ROWE-ADAMS: So good evening,

9 everyone. I am honored to be here this evening and

10 sit here in the famous, beautiful Lincoln Hospital. I

11 want to thank Mayor Adams for putting this commission

12 together because oftentimes we don't get a chance for

13 our voices to be heard. So this is an opportunity, as

14 you have heard, for all voices to be heard, what goes

15 on in your district, what goes on in your city. And

16 that's why I am so proud to be a part of the

17 commission, to be the voice for the voiceless. So we

18 have more to do. And we need you to do it. Get the

19 word out. It's very important. Thank you so very

20 much.

21   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, Ms. Adams.

22   And we've been joined by

23 Stephanie McGraw.

24   Ms. McGraw, would you like to say a

25 quick hello.

1   MS. MCGRAW: Yes. Good evening. Thank

2   you all so very much. My name is Stephanie McGraw.

3   I'm so honored to be a part of this charter revision

4   as one of the commissioners. I lived in the Boogie

5   Down Bronx. I'm the voice for the people. We are

6   here for the people. And we're just so honored to be

7   able -- I'd like to thank the mayor for putting this

8   together. And we want to hear from you. We want to

9   hear your voices, your ideas, and -- because we're

10 here for you. So thank you so very much. And I'm

11 going to thank my fellow commissioners as well.

12   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

13 Thank you.

14   Okay. So apparently we're having some

15 technical difficulties this evening. So I'm going to

16 try and speak very clearly. If there's something I

17 can do with my phone, if it makes sense to log in or

18 something I'll give you my phone. You guys let me

19 know.

20   Okay. So before we hear from our

21 speakers and the members of the public let me just say

22 a few words as to why we are here this evening. The

23 Charter Review Commission is tasked with reviewing the

24 entire city charter and recommending changes that will

25 help city government work more efficiently and better

1 serve all New Yorkers. In addition to reviewing the

2 charter, we will also be soliciting recommendations

3 and comments on how to improve city government from

4 members of the public and experts at forums like this

5 evening. Excuse me. At the end of the process the

6 commission will determine what proposals to take to

7 the voters in the form of a ballot question or

8 questions that will appear on the ballot at the

9 November 5th general election.

10   Today we welcome members of the public

11 to comment both in person; and hopefully, we get Zoom

12 set up. And the folks on Zoom will be able to jump on

13 Zoom. And we can take obviously comments via

14 testimony if you are unable to jump on.

15   So tonight is the third in a series of

16 meetings to hear from the public and from experts. We

17 will be hosting additional input sessions around the

18 city. And we will be back in the Bronx on July 11th

19 at Fordham University. So please spread the word

20 about our meetings. We will do the best to

21 accommodate everyone who wishes to speak. Future

22 meeting dates are on our website, www.nyc.gov/charter.

23 And comments and testimony may be submitted in writing

24 to charterinfo@citycharter.nyc.gov between now and

25 July 12th.

1   Okay. So to kick us off this evening,

2   it's an honor to welcome city council member

3   Rafael Salamanca, who is the chair of land use and

4   represents a great portion of the Bronx and the city

5   council.

6   So, Councilman, thank you. We've got a

7   podium right up there for you.

8   And I think we are back. Can you hear

9   us on Zoom? I believe we're good.

10   MR. SALAMANCA: Let me know when I can

11   begin.

12   MR. SCISSURA: You are ready,

13   Councilman. Good to see you.

14   MR. SALAMANCA: All right. Good to see

15   you all. Good evening. I want to first welcome you

16   to the South Bronx. And welcome to my council

17   district, the 17th Council District. And I've had the

18   honor of serving in the New York City Council for the

19   last eight years. And prior to that I served as a

20   district manager for Bronx Community Board 2 for about

21   five and a half years.

22   So today, you know, I will be extremely

23   brief. I just had a -- a commonsense idea that I

24   think would make sense and will help out quality of

25   life issues here in the City of New York. You know, I

1 believe that the -- the Charter Revision Commission

2 should be looking for ways that the charter can be

3 revised so that agencies with expertise in a

4 particular kind of service can make sure that service

5 is used at expansively -- expansively as possible for

6 New Yorkers.

7   Take sanitation for example. The

8 sanitation's illegal dumping camera program. These

9 last two years sanitations first started putting up

10 cameras on the city streets to catch illegal dumpers.

11 Today nearly 300 cameras are up. And sanitation's

12 increased its enforcement in every borough many times

13 over because of this. Sanitation police are ticketing

14 more illegal dumpers and impounding more vehicles each

15 week. And they -- and they now are the experts in

16 combating illegal dumping in our city. The charter's

17 current language allows sanitation to do this kind of

18 enforcement on our city streets. But there is a lot

19 more city property out there that fills outside of the

20 sanitation jurisdiction in the charter that can use

21 the sanitation enforcement. And let's face it, no

22 matter where dumping happens -- city's cleanliness,

23 which is typically what we think as a sanitation's

24 wheelhouse. Why should we consider revision that

25 let -- that lets the mayor put sanitation to work

1   against all illegal dumping on our city property?

2   Well, I urge the commission to explore whether and how

3   we can make revisions to our charter to achieve that

4   kind of efficient and effective delivery of city

5   services.

6   So basically, what I'm trying to get

7   at, currently we're having an issue in our communities

8   with individuals illegally dumping in our communities.

9   And I know we see it every part of the corner, whether

10 it's someone dumping a wheelbarrow or illegal trash or

11 construction trash from their buildings. And they're

12 not disposing of it properly. Well, when there is

13 illegal dumping happening, for example, in -- inside

14 of a New York City park, right, it is the

15 responsibility of the New York City Parks Department

16 to clean, to -- to pick up after those that illegally

17 dump. But currently, there are no surveillance

18 cameras to catch those individuals who are illegally

19 dumping. And so sanitation has the ability to do

20 enforcement because there is sanitation police. Well,

21 they need permission from the New York City Parks

22 Department to do that enforcement. Well, if we change

23 the charter and we allow sanitation to do enforcement

24 on all city land I think that we -- we will be able to

25 address what we call quality of life issues in New

1 York City.

2   MR. SCISSURA: So comments from any of

3 the commissioners?

4   MS. DUKES: As a former member of CB10

5 for some 20 some years, I would like to hear your

6 position as a city council member on land use.

7   MR. SALAMANCA: So I'm currently the

8 land use chair in city council for the last six years.

9 We've done some great work. Just recently we passed

10 the City of Yes, the economic development portion of

11 it. Now -- currently, I know that community boards

12 are hearing City of Yes on the housing component. My

13 focus in this New York City Council has been building

14 affordable housing.

15   In my time in the council my council

16 district alone has approved over 10,000 units of a

17 hundred percent affordable housing. In the last ten

18 years when you look at all the 51 council districts

19 the South Bronx has built more affordable housing than

20 21 council districts when you look at those numbers.

21 Now, the reality is, is that we are in a housing

22 crisis. But the South Bronx -- the borough, the

23 Bronx -- cannot build all of the housing for New

24 Yorkers. Every community must do their part. And

25 that is -- that has been the focus that we've had with

1   our leaders -- Adrienne Adams. And that has been the

2   focus of our administration as a land use chair.

3   MR. SCISSURA: Great. Thank you.

4   Kyle.

5   MR. BRAGG: Thank you,

6   Councilman Salamanca, for joining us this evening and

7   giving testimony. I think the issue that you raised

8   is very important, not only for the Bronx but

9   throughout the city. I experienced issues in Queens

10   about illegal dumping. And it destroys the quality of

11   life of our residents. And I think that is very

12   important that we consider what you brought to us

13   today in ways of making better the enforcement around

14   stopping this illegal dumping taken place throughout

15   our city, particularly our city parks. So thank you.

16   MR. SALAMANCA: Thank you.

17   MR. SCISSURA: Yeah. I think we've all

18   seen way too many mattresses thrown out there. So I'm

19   intrigued by the idea. I just want to make sure I

20   understand it, Councilman. So you would like to see

21   the Department of Sanitation to have the authority to

22   basically fine and find any illegal dumping on any

23   city-owned property?

24   MR. SALAMANCA: Yes. Currently, right

25   now should there be any illegal dumping inside of a

1   New York City Parks Department or underneath a bridge

2   or underneath a train they -- they can call sanitation

3   and ask them to clean it up.

4   But what we're missing is the

5   enforcement piece of this. Many individuals are, you

6   know -- we -- we got to figure out how do we stop

7   illegal dumping. Only way to do it is, you have to

8   catch them. One of the examples in the last three

9   years, my office has allocated over $540,000 to the

10   sanitation department to install what's called illegal

11   dumping cameras throughout my district. Sanitation

12   has done a great job catching these individuals. What

13   happens when they catch them. They go to their home;

14   they arrest them; they give them a $4,000 fine; and

15   they confiscate their vehicle. Now, imagine a week,

16   give Sanitation the authority to do this throughout

17   city property, especially in our green spaces, our

18   quality of life would improve.

19   MR. SCISSURA: Great. Thank you very

20   much.

21   Any other questions?

22   We appreciate you taking the time.

23   Thank you, Councilman.

24   MR. SALAMANCA: Thank you. Welcome to

25   the Bronx.

1   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

2   Okay. Our next speaker will be

3   Susan Lerner, followed by Ben Weinberg.

4   MS. LERNER: Thank you very much. I'm

5   Susan Lerner. I'm the executive director of Common

6   Cause New York. And I am the board chair of Rank the

7   Vote NYC. And I've been asked to talk about a couple

8   of different topics, which I'd like to touch on

9   briefly.

10   The first one I'd like to talk about is

11   New York City's very successful implementation of

12   ranked choice voting. I seem to be losing my voice.

13   And to basically attribute that success to the fact

14   that ranked choice voting was very broadly accepted by

15   community-based organizations and voters throughout

16   the city. The support for ranked choice voting, the

17   voter education, the enthusiasm for ranked choice

18   voting really ranged on the gamut of New York City

19   organizations, organizations that day in and day out

20   work in their communities to educate voters, to

21   mobilize voters to help New York citizens understand

22   how their -- thank you -- how their system works and

23   how to have their voices heard. And ranked choice

24   voting successfully allows voters to have more voice

25   and more choice. So the support and the active

1 engagement really, as I said, was broad and city wide.

2 It ranges from the Chinese American Planning Council

3 to the Queens Chapter of Zeta -- Zeta Phi Beta

4 Sorority Social Action Committee, DC 37, WE ACT, the

5 NAACP Jamaica branch, the Manny Cantor Center --

6 Dominicanos, League of Women Voters of New York City,

7 I could go on and on. But New York City's adoption of

8 ranked choice voting really has become a model for the

9 rest of the country. And I think we are all to be

10 congratulated for that success and for allowing this

11 sort of a reform to flourish.

12   I've also been asked to talk about

13 primary reform. And I'd like to say, first off,

14 Common Cause New York does not have a position

15 currently on primary reform. But I think there's a

16 lot of confusion about the different types of primary

17 reform and what does or doesn't work in different

18 places. What we have done and what I will provide

19 when I provide written testimony in a few days is a

20 link to the polling, which we did with the support of

21 the New York Community Trust for unaffiliated voters

22 because I think a lot of the discussion around, Do we

23 need to change our primaries, arises from the fact

24 that the second largest registration in our city is

25 unaffiliated voters. And so we went -- and we talked

1   to unaffiliated voters. We polled them. We did focus

2   groups. And I think we have a better insight into

3   what motivates the unaffiliated voters. Interestingly

4   enough, unaffiliated voters see themselves as being

5   very engaged. But what they do not want is they do

6   not want to be affiliated with a party. They were

7   very, very clear about that. They see themselves as

8   engaged. They see themselves as thoughtful. And they

9   believe that they make determinations on how to cast

10   their votes based on candidates and not party label.

11   So when you look at the different types of primary

12   reform they run the gamut from what's called an open

13   primary. But there's a lot of confusion about what

14   that means. An open primary is actually a primary

15   where all candidates run in the same primary, whether

16   it's a non-partisan primary or primary where the

17   candidates are allowed to state their party

18   affiliation. But then there are what's called a

19   partially-closed primary and a partially-open primary.

20   And that is a primary system that allows voters to

21   show up and either register for a party on the spot at

22   their polling place and then vote in that primary.

23   And then they were made registered in that party going

24   forward. Or a system like the one that's being used

25   for a number of years in Massachusetts. And that is,

1   the voter shows up, is -- ascertains, shows that they

2   are unaffiliated. And they get to choose which

3   primary they will vote in that day without a party

4   affiliation. And I don't think it will surprise you

5   when I say that our polling in our focus group showed

6   that to the extent that unaffiliated voters wanted to

7   vote in primaries. And they wanted to see a change.

8   They did not want to be required to register in a

9   party even for a short period of time. We were

10 surprised that there was not more motivation on the

11 part of unaffiliated voters. Some of them were

12 frustrated that they could not vote in primaries.

13 Others were surprisingly protective of the parties

14 where they said, "Well, it's a party primary. And

15 party members should get to choose who is going to run

16 on behalf of their party." So we did not see a clear

17 winner. We didn't have anyone form a primary reform

18 where the unaffiliated voters told us in the 50 or 60

19 percentiles that that was what they favored. So I

20 think, you know, we have an interesting challenge when

21 we look at primaries, when the people we are trying to

22 bring back into a more active voting frame of mind at

23 the primary level tell us they don't have one

24 particular favorite. But they all see themselves as

25 engaged. And they reported to us, as they vote in

1   most elections, where they are able to vote.

2   So the third topic I'd like to address

3   is one that I think when we talk about open primaries

4   we're kind of getting to. And that is the question of

5   voter turnout. Voter turnout is a complicated,

6   multifaceted issue. There are relatively few things

7   we can point to that we know reliably will increase

8   voter turnout. We, as advocates for ranked choice

9   voting, have not pointed to ranked choice voting as a

10   solution to low turnout. But I will note that there

11   is a bump -- a slight bump up. We went -- we have the

12   highest turnout for primary election in several

13   decades in 2021 with ranked choice voting. We've seen

14   similar reasonable but not overwhelming increases in

15   other places that have adopted ranked choice voting.

16   We know that same-day voter registration, which you

17   can't control, is another factor that helps increase

18   the turnout rate. But most significantly, what we do

19   see, looking across the country -- and actually, there

20   was just a study which came out dealing with Las Vegas

21   having adopted -- having consolidated their elections

22   to even years. And they did that in 2019. And

23   subsequently, the turnout rate for Las Vegas municipal

24   elections has increased by nearly 50 percent. So this

25   is a very I think interesting factor, an issue that

1 could really make a difference. It can cut down on

2 costs. And it can definitely help turnout. I have no

3 doubt that it would have the same event here in New

4 York City, as it did in any of the municipalities

5 across the country that have adopted it. Now, the

6 question of whether the council on its own can make

7 that change, perhaps it does require a state

8 constitutional amendment. But a strong statement on

9 the behalf of New York City residents. They want that

10 reform. They -- we hear over and over from voters

11 that there are too many elections, they cannot keep

12 up. And there is a profound factor. So you know, I

13 think having a opportunity to be heard on the question

14 of consolidating our elections would give our voters

15 an opportunity to speak up for themselves.

16   And finally, I want to commend the

17 members of the commission. You are really facing a

18 very difficult task. You have a much shorter time

19 period than any other commission. It's really

20 unusually short time to consider a wide variety of

21 proposal. And I would suggest that making significant

22 changes to the way in which we vote in the elections

23 requires a thorough examination and shouldn't be

24 rushed. Two separate Charter Revision Commissions

25 considered ranked choice voting before it was placed

1   in front of the voters, where it was passed by an

2   overwhelming majority. And we would recommend to this

3   Charter Revision Commission that you might follow the

4   example of the 2018 Charter Revision Commission,

5   where -- when they ran out of time and they also had a

6   relatively short time period, although longer than the

7   one you've been presented with. And what they chose

8   to do was they identified issues that they thought

9   were important to -- for further study and recommended

10   that future Charter Revision Commissions dive further

11   than they were able to on at least two significant

12   issues that they identified. And I think that that

13   would be a very productive use of your time and

14   attention when you are faced with this very short

15   timeframe to be able to identify the issues you

16   believe are important. And -- but that could benefit

17   from further study because precipitous changes are

18   always difficult to accomplish and implement

19   successfully.

20   So thank you for the opportunity to be

21   heard.

22   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, Susan. It's

23   a pleasure to see you.

24   So I would just start with, you know, I

25   happen to be on with my colleague Kyle Bragg at the

1   2019.   We were excited that ranked choice voting made

2   it on that one.

3   But you said something very I think

4   critical.   Election reform is a big issue.   And it's

5   not just a charter commission that could say, This is

6   what we want to do.   We have a piece of it.   But then

7   there are state laws and federal laws and so many

8   things that go into it.   And you know, I have been

9   now -- this is my third commission that I've been on.

10   And at every one of them election reform comes up.   So

11   there should be a moment I believe -- speaking

12   personally -- where election reform is part and maybe

13   the only thing of a charter commission in the future.

14   MS. LERNER: And -- and that might very

15   well be a very productive discussion.   But I think it

16   would need more time to be able to really delve into

17   the ins and outs.   Because, as I said, elections are

18   multifaceted.   When we talk to voters, when we try and

19   figure out what motivates certain voters, what would

20   help people be more engaged or turn out more

21   frequently sometimes there are factors which we can

22   change through policy or administration.   And

23   sometimes there are factors which are outside of

24   anybody's control to really be able to affect.   So

25   having the opportunity to dive in deeply to really

1   look at the experience in other jurisdictions I think

2   is very productive in the election area. We've seen a

3   lot of changes at the state level within the last five

4   years that I think have really helped remove barriers

5   for voters.

6   And as I said, you know, I'm very

7   grateful for your and Kyle Bragg's service on the 2019

8   commission because I do think that putting ranked

9   choice voting in front of the voters allowed them to

10 adopt that reform and, as I said, to build the kind of

11 broad city-wide support that it has.

12   MR. SCISSURA: Great.

13   Any questions or -- Kyle, please.

14   MR. BRAGG: Thank you again for your

15 testimony. I found very interesting your idea, or at

16 least your thoughts, on how to build voter turnout. I

17 think it might fall beyond the charge of this

18 commission. But I appreciate the fact that you

19 brought this here today because we really need to

20 think about how we can build voter turnout in the

21 city. So to have 5 percent of the electorate elect

22 our leaders it's just terrible. And so the idea of

23 consolidating elections I think really has legs. So I

24 don't know where we take that next. But the idea of

25 having to build out a voter turnout is a really

1 important issue. And I appreciate that you brought

2 that to this table today.

3   MS. LERNER: Thank you.

4   MR. SCISSURA: Great. Thank you.

5   Anybody else?

6   Okay. Susan Lerner, thank you very

7 much.

8   Ben Weinberg.

9   Next after Ben we will have John

10 Ketcham.

11   MR. WEINBERG: Can you hear me? Good

12 evening, Commissioners. My name is Ben Weinberg. And

13 I'm the director of public policy for Citizens Union.

14 I first would like to thank you for the opportunity --

15 giving us the opportunity to speak before you today

16 and for your time and dedicating your time for this

17 very important task.

18   Citizens Union is a non-partisan

19 government group committed to reforming New York City

20 and State government by fostering accountability,

21 honesty, and the highest ethical standards. And

22 throughout our now very long history, we have

23 supported periodic comprehensive reviews of the

24 charter to ensure that city government is operating

25 effectively, efficiently, and in the public's best

1 interest. And we've also advised every Charter

2 Revision Commission over the years. And many of our

3 recommendations have been adopted. So this experience

4 informs the following recommendations we make before

5 you today. And I'll start with the ones related to

6 the process of this commission.

7   First, we believe that the two summer

8 months under which the commission is currently

9 operating is -- is too short. We think this is

10 unfortunately insufficient time to conduct the kind of

11 comprehensive review of the charter through a thorough

12 and extensive public process that engages the public

13 meaningfully. Now, we thank the commission for the

14 numerous public hearings that they have both held and

15 will hold and for the great level of transparency that

16 the commission has -- has shown so far. But we

17 believe that two months to conduct this sort of review

18 and recommend large change is -- is not something that

19 is recommended. Instead, we ask commissioners to

20 continue your work for several more months and not be

21 under the pressure of this 2024 ballots question

22 deadline and then submit your proposals to 2025

23 ballot -- November ballot. Now, I know that the --

24 the last Charter -- Commission did pretty much the

25 same. The -- what was called the Racial Justice

1 Commission, they ended their work in December and then

2 sent their questions on to the following year -- to

3 the ballot in the following year; however, I should

4 say if -- if this commission decides to continue with

5 its current deadline we do believe that the proposals

6 that -- proposal be narrow in scope because of this

7 rushed timeline. And Ms. Lerner here mentioned that

8 2018 -- twenty nine -- no, sorry -- 2018 and 2019

9 commission I -- I will also note that -- that the only

10 commission that was shorter than this in time was

11 Mayor Bloomberg's commission in '22. And that

12 commission also considered by a non-partisan

13 elections. But because of much criticism about that

14 short time and that was a month and once in -- in the

15 summer. That short -- the criticism comes with that

16 short time. And that commission decided to put too

17 much in their proposal on the November 22 ballot at

18 that time and then move the discussion of non-partisan

19 elections to a -- to a future commission. And this

20 could be any kind of -- any policy. I'm not only

21 referring to nonpartisan election, of course.

22   Our third recommendation here is

23 related to timelines. We, you know -- we are aware of

24 the kind of political context in which this commission

25 is -- is operating. And -- and I -- I do want to know

1   that, similarly to our comments here by timeline, we

2   have testified before the council on the rushed

3   process that they brought the latest -- their kind of

4   latest attempt to -- for charter revision -- revision,

5   which was the proposed expansion of advice and

6   consent. We think that the charter should have set

7   timelines for Charter Revision Commissions and other

8   processes for major charter revisions to prevent this

9   sort of gamesmanship, which is not the first time

10   we've seen. We've seen that during the 90s under

11   Giuliani and -- and that council. We've seen that

12   during the Bloomberg era. So our recommendation is

13   that -- that the city charter will -- includes

14   requirements for timeframes for a Charter Revision

15   Commission. We note in our written testimony that we

16   recommend requiring at least 180 days between the

17   charter revision's first meeting and the filing of

18   ballot proposals. And then at this 30 days between

19   the final report of a Charter Revision Commission and

20   the -- and the filing of ballot proposals. And

21   similarly, we recommend that a local law that amends

22   the charter is sent by the council to a referendum

23   will also be required, first of all, to vote on twice

24   by the city charter with 30 days apart and a public

25   hearing before a vote. And here we are kind of trying

1   to reflect the logic of the state constitution. Any

2   amendment for a state constitution requires two passes

3   in the state -- in the legislature. We think this

4   proposed timeframes could be further reviewed. The --

5   the exact numbers I mentioned are not critical. But a

6   critical point here is injecting the necessary time to

7   conduct a serious charter revision process, including

8   ample time for the public media and various

9   stakeholders to participate in the process. We think

10 adopting such timeframes would strengthen the charter,

11 improve collaboration between the two branches, and

12 strengthen public's trust in government. And our

13 written testimony has a nice little chart with a

14 different length of charter revisions. So we can take

15 examples of the -- the other timelines. Our other

16 recommendations are related to -- excuse me. Sorry.

17 Our other recommendation is also related to improving

18 turnout, as Ms. Lerner has mentioned here.

19   We also support moving New York City

20 municipal elections to even-numbered years. This

21 would not only increase voter turnout up and down the

22 ballot, this will also help reduce racial- and age-

23 based gaps across the city and produce significant

24 cost savings. This has been done in over a hundred

25 cities in the last decade around the country. It's a

1   well-tested reform. And it is one of the kind of few

2   things we can do to boost turnout in our city

3   elections. I should say that, as -- as Susan has

4   mentioned, this would require constitutional --

5   constitutional amendment. So our request is to

6   include that in your final report as an issue to be

7   discussed or an issue that this commission supports.

8   On ranked choice voting, we would -- we

9   want to reaffirm our support for the use of ranked

10   choice voting in municipal primaries. This was

11   adopted by the 2019 charter revision and has proven

12   useful in promoting a competitive, open, and fair

13   election. And we believe it has been properly

14   implemented in both the major city-wide election 2021,

15   a small-scale election in 2023, and several special

16   election. And we ask the commission to maintain that

17   system as is.

18   Lastly, the party -- sorry -- primary

19   reform was mentioned here. We have supported opening

20   the city's primary by adopting what's called the top

21   two election system for many years. So under that

22   system the first primary election's open to all

23   eligible voters, regardless of their party status so

24   that every registered voter can participate in the

25   primary. And then both -- sorry -- party registered

1 and unaffiliated voters and the top two candidates

2 advance to a general election in November. We have

3 proposed this reform before the 2010 commission and

4 the 2018 commission. But I do want to reiterate our

5 position on moving so fast with major changes. So

6 although we do support this sort of system, we think

7 this should not be taken on such a -- in such a quick

8 timeline. Thank you --

9   MR. SCISSURA: Great. Thank you very

10 much.

11   Good? Any questions or comments?

12   Okay. I just want to note on something

13 that you said earlier. And forgive me if I'm

14 paraphrasing. And I'm going to take the liberty of

15 speaking for all of us if I may. We are not part of

16 any political gamesmanship. We are not part of any

17 whatever is happening in the political world, we are a

18 group of independent New Yorkers, none of whom work

19 for the mayor or the city council, who have been

20 brought together to listen to folks and be out in

21 places across the city for a few months. And I can

22 tell you that, while it may seem like a short

23 timeframe, I have been since appointed as chair,

24 working on charter issues seven days a week. So it

25 may seem short to the public --

1   But I think, Susan, you'll appreciate

2   that every day there are emails and testimonies to

3   read.

4   So I'm not going to comment on the meat

5   on the bone of your testimony because I know you

6   submitted something. But I want to be clear that we

7   are all independent and here for New Yorkers.

8   MR. WEINBERG: And just to clarify,

9   this was not my intent to comment on commissioners or

10   the commission itself. But our idea was to create a

11   different system of how charter revisions operate

12   and -- and not only by charter revision but your

13   charter revision but also by council-initiated charter

14   revision so that we -- the public knows in advance

15   that there's set time on -- in which the public can

16   debate this, commissioners can debate this. And

17   things are clear in advance.

18   MR. SCISSURA: Great. Thank you very

19   much.

20   MR. WEINBERG: Thank you very much.

21   MR. SCISSURA: John Ketcham.

22   MR. KETCHAM: Chair Scissura and

23   members of the Charter Revision Commission, thank you

24   for the honor and opportunity to testify before you

25   today.

1   My name is John Ketcham. Though I

2   research and write on various issues affecting New

3   York City in my capacity as a fellow and director of

4   the Manhattan Institute, I speak before you in my

5   personal impacted as a lifelong and loyal New Yorker.

6   As a preliminary matter I would like to

7   reiterate the recommendations offered last Thursday by

8   my colleague E.J. McMahon at the Fiscal Responsibility

9   Forum. Five years and two elections after the 2019

10   charter amendment introduced ranked choice voting for

11   local primary and special elections New York City's

12   local electoral dynamics have not fundamentally

13   changed. Turnout remains abysmally low as Ms. Lerner

14   indicated. Closed primaries limit democratic

15   participation. And political competition occurs

16   almost entirely within the Democratic Party primary.

17   Manhattan Institute polling conducted this April

18   demonstrates that city voters from all political

19   persuasions are in favor of electoral reforms,

20   including a general satisfaction with ranked choice

21   voting. But to promote greater political competition

22   and turnout I respectfully recommend that the

23   commission consider three alternative electoral

24   systems without endorsing any one over the other.

25   First Final Five voting, which uses a

1 non-partisan primary open to all candidates and all

2 registered voters, regardless of party. The top five,

3 or four in certain systems, vote-getters again

4 regardless of party, advance to a general election.

5 Voters in that general election then use ranked choice

6 voting to select a single winner with a majority of

7 the final round votes.

8   Second, for city council elections, the

9 single transferable vote, or STV, is the variety of

10 ranked choice voting that produces multiple winners

11 from each district. New York City in fact used this

12 system between 1936 and 1947. It can achieve

13 proportional representation in which the composition

14 of the elected body matches the makeup of subgroups in

15 the electorate, such as along party lines.

16   Finally, list-based proportional

17 representation systems do not use ranked choice

18 voting. They instead count votes at the party level.

19 And parties receive seats in proportion to their

20 shares of the vote. Many varieties of these list type

21 systems exist. And in my written comments that will

22 be forthcoming shortly I discuss the open list type,

23 which I consider the best suited to the city's

24 electoral needs.

25   No matter the electoral system the

1   commission considers, however, I strongly recommend

2   keeping party labels on the ballot to help guide voter

3   decision making. I have no doubt that many

4   unaffiliated and independent New Yorkers don't want

5   much to do with party registration for themselves.

6   But parties do play a fundamental role in aligning

7   voters' values and preferences with -- with those who

8   are running. They also help form a coherent

9   legislature once the election is over and various

10   lawmakers have to assemble into various coalitions to

11   pass legislation on an issue-by-issue basis. It's

12   really important to consider that if local issues do

13   not bifurcate left to right, like many national issues

14   do, nor do they assemble neatly into any single

15   ideological package. So your stance on zoning reform

16   or land use is not really going to have that much of

17   an influence on whether you support, let's say,

18   charter schools. They're independent of one another.

19   And therefore, that richness and diversity ought to be

20   reflected in the political composition of the city

21   council. As an experimental and innovative reform I

22   even recommend broadening the information available to

23   voters by allowing endorsements, such as from the

24   mayor, comptroller, and local community

25   organizations -- civic groups and newspapers to appear

1   alongside candidates' names on the ballot alongside

2   the party's signal. That would allow for a rich

3   informational signal that could immediately align

4   voters' preferences and values with those who are

5   running. And it doesn't have to just be about party

6   label. It could be about the local paper that you

7   read or your local civic group.

8   I also agree with Ms. Lerner's

9   recommendation or comments about the positive effects

10   of moving local elections to an even-numbered year

11   cycle. I also believe that that would require a state

12   constitutional amendment but believe that the

13   positives far outweigh the negatives. The one wrinkle

14   in such a reform however would be the length and

15   complexity of balance because you would have in

16   certain cases --

17   MR. SCISSURA: I'm going to ask you to

18   wrap up if you can --

19   MR. KETCHAM: Very good. Thank you,

20   Chair.

21   As for reforms to the city's

22   procurement systems, I recommend repealing Charter

23   Section 326's requirement that agencies hold a public

24   hearing for proposed contracts of over a hundred

25   thousand dollars awarded by a method other than

1   competitive sealed bidding. This month the state

2   legislature did pass legislation that would replace

3   both public hearings with the seven-day online notice

4   and comment period. But if the governor does not sign

5   that legislation into law I respectfully suggest that

6   the commission consider putting it to the voters.

7   And finally, for emergency

8   procurements, I suggest amending Charter Section 315

9   to require that procuring agencies submit a copy of

10   awarded emergency contracts and related documentation

11   to the comptroller's office within 30 days. The

12   Procurement Policy Board Rule 212E4 already requires

13   this. But agencies are routinely non-compliant. The

14   comptroller should then be required to post all

15   received emergency contracts on its website for public

16   review and transparency within some reasonable

17   timeframe, say, seven days.

18   My written testimony will expand on

19   these proposals, which I hope you have found helpful.

20   Thank you very much.

21   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

22   Any comments or questions?

23   Yes, ma'am.

24   MS. ROWE-ADAMS: Thank you so much for

25   your testimony. It was a lot. But I want to go back

1 to -- because I didn't clearly -- I'm sorry. I didn't

2 clearly understand the part where you said the mayor,

3 the comptroller, everyone need to be closer to when

4 the election is of voting. Their name should be next

5 to the -- I didn't understand. Could you be more

6 clear about that, especially for the charter revision?

7   MR. KETCHAM: Of course. Thank you,

8 Commissioner, for the question. So the mayor can

9 provide an endorsement that is then printed on the

10 ballot to signal who the mayor's preferred candidate

11 would be to voters immediately upon looking at the

12 ballot. This would signal to voters a sense of

13 affinity with the mayor's agenda, a sense of

14 continuity perhaps between one mayoral administration

15 to the next. And it need not be just the mayor. It

16 could also be the comptroller or other executives. It

17 could also be expanded to local organizations and

18 newspapers as I said. This allows for competition on

19 an informational level, not -- right now we get a

20 ballot. And we only see party label. For many, many

21 voters that's the only informational signal that they

22 have to guide their decision making. We all would

23 hope that they have done their homework to make an

24 informed and deliberative decision before they reach

25 the ballot box. But research and decades of evidence

1   have shown that that is more of an aspiration than

2   reality; therefore, I think it is helpful to have

3   immediate informational cues to voters printed

4   alongside candidate names on ballots, like party

5   labels. But for things like Mayor Adams's -- the

6   preferred candidate in a particular race.

7   MS. ROWE-ADAMS: Thank you.

8   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you. Okay. We

9   have one more speaker in person. And then I will move

10 to the Zooms.

11   Mona Davids in person. And then

12 Melissa Mark-Viverito, followed by Frank Morano on

13 Zoom.

14   MS. DAVIDS: Good evening, everyone.

15   MR. SCISSURA: Good evening.

16   MS. DAVIDS: My name is Mona Davids. I

17 am a parent. I'm an activist. I am a newspaper

18 publisher. Publisher of "LittleAfrica News" as well

19 as "New York Voice," "Bronx Voice," "Staten Island

20 Voice," "Bed Stuy Voice," "Harlem Voice," "Queens

21 Voice." I'm missing some -- I'm missing one, the

22 seventh one.

23   I -- I want to talk in two different

24 roles. One role as an education and safety activist

25 on behalf of New York City School Safety Coalition, as

1 well as the New York City Parents Union. And then in

2 my role also as a parent, as a long-time Bronxite, as

3 well as a, you know, registered voter here.

4 I am also -- let me also just say this.

5 I'm also involved in the Bronx NAACP here in the

6 Bronx. And the first thing I want to talk about is

7 what today's hearing is about, which is electoral

8 reform. For the last three weeks I think I've been in

9 "Politico" almost every week about something with this

10 commission. And today it came up again in "Politico"

11 that ranked choice voting is successful because it

12 increased voter turnout in 2021. When I testified at

13 the Staten Island hearing I spoke specifically about

14 ranked choice voting not increasing or improving voter

15 turnout in 2023 when it came to our city council

16 elections. A city-wide election is a -- is a whole

17 different ball game. We're talking apples to oranges.

18 When he did a candidate debate with all the mayoral

19 candidates we had to divide it up because there was so

20 many of them. So it's -- it's apples to oranges.

21 What our communities care about, what -- here in the

22 Bronx -- South Bronx; Co-op City; you know, Harlem;

23 Brooklyn; Bed Stuy; East Flatbush -- what we care

24 about matters on the local level. And that is who

25 represents us and who speaks for us as the community.

1   And when it comes to voter turnout in 2023 -- I don't

2   have my computer here. I had it in Staten Island.

3   But when it comes to voter turnout in 2023 those

4   numbers went down. We had city council members

5   elected mostly with less than 10 percent -- and I'm

6   just going to talk Democratic primary, not even

7   general election -- less than 10 percent of the

8   Democratic voters in their district, mostly less than

9   5 percent. Here in the Bronx, the Bronx NAACP every

10 election sends out a breakout -- a breakdown of the

11 voter turnout. And it is low. Voter apathy is real.

12 So I just want us to put it in context where we say,

13 Oh, ranked choice voting -- which I voted no on -- but

14 ranked choice voting is successful because it

15 increased voter turnout in the 2021 voting election

16 with so many candidates. That -- you can't compare

17 that. We're talking about what's happening in our

18 communities with our local city council members.

19 That, to us, is what matters. And those numbers went

20 down. And why would it go down. Because you know

21 what, who are our triple prime voters. They are

22 seniors. Seniors didn't understand ranked choice

23 voting. I put it on the record the last time.

24   I have to organize and conduct ranked

25 choice voting workshops. I did for NAACP and Co-op

1   City. I did it for different political clubs,

2   Democratic and Republican clubs, community-based

3   organizations. You can still go on the website --

4   sorry -- the Facebook page our ranked choice voting

5   NYC. And you can see all the virtual workshops that

6   we did because our communities were not informed. And

7   they were not educated. And that's what resulted in

8   the city council holding a hearing on the preparedness

9   of ranked choice voting and allocating money to make

10   sure that our communities are informed. So again,

11   when we look at the numbers for 2023, when we look at

12   the voter turnout, and when we look at our triple

13   prime voters -- our seniors and others -- they don't

14   understand it. So that is my position on ranked

15   choice voting. And that is how we dealt with it in

16   our communities. So -- and while I understand people

17   like to say, Oh, this organization, that organization,

18   that organization, we don't -- in my community -- in

19   our communities -- whether it's the South Bronx, Bed

20   Stuy, East Flatbush -- it doesn't matter -- Co-op --

21   we don't care about alphabet organizations. We care

22   about our organizations in our communities. So that

23   is with ranked choice voting.

24   Now I want to speak about advice and

25   consent as well as the How Many Stops Act. When we

1   look at those numbers of how many people voted for

2   these city council members, when you look at those low

3   percentage turnout numbers for even Democratic voters

4   in the Democratic primary clearly 90 percent -- or

5   almost 90 percent -- of the voters in their district

6   don't even come out and vote for them. So how do they

7   speak for them? We're here in the Bronx.

8   If you speak to anybody on the street

9   they're going to tell you we want more police officers

10 in our communities. We want community policing. We

11 want to go back to the days when I was growing up in

12 Bed Stuy in the 80s where the police officers knew our

13 names and would tell our parents when we're cutting.

14 That's what we want. We don't want less police; we

15 want more police. We want to continue with the

16 community engagement and working together with our

17 police officers that keep us safe. We do not want our

18 police officers taking records and fighting and --

19 and, you know, keeping track of everybody that may ask

20 them for directions, no.

21   And that is the disconnect that we're

22 talking about, Commissioners. The disconnect between

23 the role, what the city council members are doing and

24 what the people of their communities, whether it's

25 here in the Bronx, in Brooklyn, Southeast Queens, in

1   Staten Island, what we need and what we want.

2   And last but not least, when it comes

3   to advice and consent in 2021 we elected Eric Adams as

4   mayor. The city as a whole elected him as our public

5   safety mayor. That was the number one thing that he

6   ran on. So to come out and reverse that with the How

7   Many Stops Act simply does not make sense when it

8   comes to public safety. They're not speaking for us.

9   And they're not speaking for the person that we

10   elected to be our mayor. And they're certainly not

11   speaking for their communities.

12   Next thing I want to talk about, school

13   safety. School safety, public safety. I know this

14   hasn't been brought up here. But the "New York Post"

15   did an editorial recently -- I think yesterday -- when

16   it comes to the public advocate's office. And they

17   called on the commission to consider doing away with

18   the public advocate's office. And they went on to

19   speak about the history of the public -- of the public

20   advocate's office, where the city council president

21   position was eliminated. I'm sorry. The -- our

22   current public advocate is -- is the reason why we

23   have the How Many Stops Act bill. He was the one that

24   sponsored it. Our public advocate is against keeping

25   our children safe in schools. He is against school

1 safety agents. He is against community policing.

2 This is our public advocate. He doesn't speak for me.

3 He doesn't speak for our communities. He doesn't

4 speak for the others that I know whose children have

5 been shot, assaulted, attacked. He does not speak for

6 us. He speaks for his agenda or his ideology, which

7 does not put the interest of our communities first.

8 So I would like the commission to consider rescinding,

9 eliminating, terminating the position of a public

10 advocate because there really is no reason for us to

11 have a public advocate. We cannot afford it. And I

12 honestly don't know what that office does except for

13 endanger us.

14   MR. SCISSURA: I'm going to ask you to

15 wrap up if you can --

16   MS. DAVIDS: Yes, yes. I will wrap up

17 right now.

18   And my -- my final point to this

19 commission is, when it comes to coming back to advice

20 and consent I would ask you to, please, yourself go

21 and look at the numbers of the people who voted for

22 city council members and see if they truly indeed

23 reflect their communities, who voted for them, and

24 what their communities are asking for.

25   Thank you.

1   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

2   Okay. Any comments or questions?

3   Hearing none, I am going to go to Zoom.

4   And our first speaker on Zoom is former speaker of the

5   city council, Melissa Mark-Viverito.

6   Melissa, it's great to see you here.

7   MS. MARK-VIVERITO: How are you? Can

8   you hear me okay?

9   MR. SCISSURA: Yes, we can. Thank you.

10   MS. MARK-VIVERITO: Certainly. Well --

11   well, good evening to all of you Commissioners.

12   Melissa Mark-Viverito designated former speaker of New

13   York City Council, co-founder of 21 in '21, now known

14   as the Majority, and the first Latina to hold the

15   position of speaker.

16   I'm here today in my capacity as a

17   board member for Rank the Vote New York City, a

18   nonprofit organization, that was founded in 2019 to

19   bring ranked choice voting to New York City and has

20   been educating voters for the last two election cycles

21   since our landmark win. My testimony also reflects

22   the convergence of my long-standing professional and

23   personal interest, electing more women to public

24   office and how ranked choice voting help get us there.

25   Oh, sorry very much. I'm trying to

1   scroll and read this, while I'm talking to you.

2   Charter Revision Commissions are given

3   immense authority to reshape the city's charter. And

4   I look forward to its recommendations; however, I want

5   to be unequivocal. This -- this commission should not

6   do the work of its most immediate predecessor and,

7   more importantly, undo the will of an overwhelming

8   majority of voters by attempting to repeal ranked

9   choice voting as it contemplates changes to the

10   charter. A lot could be said about New York's

11   elections and what works and doesn't work for everyday

12   New Yorkers.

13   In 2019 voters had the opportunity to

14   reimagine how New York City votes with ranked choice

15   voting. With two election cycles under our belt, it's

16   clear this reform has had a positive impact on voters,

17   elected official, candidates, and ultimately

18   contributed to a more representative democracy. As a

19   former city council member and city council speaker, I

20   know what it is like to work in a male-dominated

21   legislative body that does not truly reflect New York

22   City's vibrant communities. When I was first elected

23   to the city council in 2006 there were 16 women in

24   council. By the time I left office there were just

25   10. That's why in 2017 I co-founded 21 in '21 with

1 the mission of electing 21 women to the city council

2 in 2021. Spoiler alert and hence the name change we

3 smashed our goal and are now in the majority with 31

4 women, the majority of whom are women of color with a

5 seat at the table, fighting for their neighbors and

6 communities under the leadership of yet another woman

7 speaker, Speaker Adams, the first black speaker of the

8 New York City Council.

9   Ranked choice voting was instrumental

10 to our success. Under the old system to -- wait for

11 our turn. I definitely was told that. Or worse, two

12 women couldn't possibly run in the same election,

13 certainly not two women of color for fear of spoiling

14 the race by dividing the vote. Ranked choice voting

15 helped us turn the page on these antiquated, unfair

16 political operating norms. With ranked choice voting

17 the more women, the better. During the 2021 cycle the

18 majority endorsed 74 women in 35 races. That's

19 because gone are the days in which voters could only

20 choose one candidate. Now voters can rank up to five

21 candidates, meaning voters now have more voice and

22 more choice and never have to worry about wasting

23 their vote. With ranked choice voting you can still

24 vote for your favorite but also have a few backups.

25 And if you don't want to rank you don't have to. I --

1   I remember a couple of races where I opted to just

2   vote for one person. So you have that option as well

3   on this system. And it also lists candidates who

4   benefited from ranked choice voting. We have the

5   highest turnout primary election in 30 years. 85

6   percent of voters ranked at least two candidates in

7   the Democratic mayoral primary. And nearly 50 percent

8   of voters used all five rankings on their mayoral

9   ballot. And they kept on ranking. 70 percent of

10   voters ranked at least two candidates in their city

11   council race. Voters like and understand that RCV

12   allows them to vote their values while supporting

13   multiple candidates that best reflect them. The

14   nature of RCV also forges better candidates who cannot

15   rely on simply turning out their base but have to

16   campaign to a broader constituency and therefore

17   develop the consensus-building skills that are

18   essential to the work of actually governing.

19   And as we prepare for the next local

20   election cycle, Rank the Vote NYC along with the city-

21   wide network of community -- will be on the ground

22   educating voters and making sure every New Yorker is

23   confident and prepared as they head to the polls next

24   June.

25   I also do want to highlight that ranked

1   choice voting has been studied by different -- having

2   different efforts to study the results, not only in

3   New York City but in other locations. And again, it

4   validates that not only do more women get elected; but

5   more diversity is brought to the table. And we've

6   seen that in the short time that has been in place

7   here in New York City.

8   So I thank you for the opportunity to

9   speak. I've always been a very strong -- support of

10 RCV. I still am obviously. And I hope that it

11 remains our system here in New York City. So thank

12 you so much for your time tonight.

13   MS. DUKES: Thank you so much,

14 Former Speaker.

15   Is there any questions? Hearing none.

16   Our next speaker? Frank Morano, are

17 you on?

18   MR. MORANO: I am, Commissioners. Can

19 you hear me okay --

20   MS. DUKES: Yes, yes. Thank you.

21   MR. MORANO: Okay. Thank you. This

22 was actually going to be the one meeting where I was

23 not going to focus on elections or a proportional

24 representation because I've said a lot to you guys

25 already. You guys have been very patient with me.

1   The one thing that I'll add just

2   because several of the speakers -- several of whom I

3   agree with, some of whom I disagree with -- have

4   brought up -- and some of the commissioners have

5   brought up -- is the issue of voter turnout and what

6   effect different electoral changes would have on voter

7   turnout.

8   I obviously can't tell you that

9   switching to non-partisan elections or proportional

10   representation, as John Ketcham articulately espoused,

11   would lead to an increase in voter turnout. One thing

12   throughout American history that we've seen is that

13   competitive elections produces higher voter turnout.

14   And in elections where there's ranked choice voting or

15   proportional representation, I think it's a much

16   greater likelihood that we'll see competitive

17   elections. My two cents on that. And while I do

18   disagree with Mr. Ketcham on the importance of keeping

19   a party label, I do think his recommendations in terms

20   of single transferable vote were right on the money.

21   But I think the one that you mentioned in terms of

22   Final Five is definitely at best unproven and at worst

23   very discriminatory towards people that are members of

24   minor parties. To follow up on Speaker Viverito and

25   Ms. Lerner's comments on ranked choice voting, I want

1   to echo them with what the prior commission did. And

2   part of the problem with switching to a system like

3   Final Five is there's one aspect under our current

4   system that's very confusing to the voter, which is we

5   rank one -- we vote one way in the primary and in

6   special elections and then a totally different way for

7   the general. I would urge the commission, rather than

8   consider doing away with ranked choice voting -- I

9   would urge the members of the commission to consider

10   if you don't go along with nonpartisan elections -- I

11   would urge members of the commission to consider

12   expanding ranked choice voting to the general election

13   because that's really where it's most effective. For

14   starters, what do we hear whenever anybody talks about

15   voting for a third-party candidate -- whether it's

16   Ralph Nader, Ross Perot, Robert Kennedy, Jill Stein --

17   we always hear that there's going to be a spoiler

18   effect. And if you're voting for Nader you're really

19   voting for Bush. If you're voting for Perot you're

20   really voting for Clinton. The place where ranked

21   choice voting can be most effective is in the general

22   election because it does away with that horrible

23   spoiler effect.

24   And the last thing that I'll mention is

25   to build upon the work of the commission in 2010,

1   which Chairman Scissura served on. One of the things

2   that that commission did, which was great, is lowered

3   the number of signatures required to get on the

4   ballot. At the time if you wanted to run for

5   office -- or for city council as a Republican or

6   Democrat it would take 900 signatures. If you wanted

7   to run as an independent it would take 2700

8   signatures. One of the things that the commission

9   wisely did in that year was they lowered the number to

10 450 signatures. And even the members of the

11 commission staff were unsure of whether they have the

12 legal right to do that. They were saying, "Do we have

13 the ability to do this? Is this a state law thing?"

14 And sure enough that change made by that commission

15 reducing the number from 2700 signatures to 450

16 signatures has withstood judicial scrutiny. And I

17 think the case is clear that you do have the right to

18 alter the number of signatures. So what I would

19 suggest to open up the process even more to everybody

20 that wants to run for office, allow candidates running

21 for city council, mayor, comptroller the option of

22 getting on the ballot of not submitting any signatures

23 and instead put up a filing fee equivalent to

24 1 percent of the salary for the office that you're

25 seeking. Not only would you -- this do away with the

1 costly, you know, mechanism of challenging signatures,

2 which is so mired in bureaucracy and everything else,

3 it would actually generate a little bit of revenue for

4 the city. And in states and municipalities that have

5 this filing fee option in lieu of signatures we have

6 not seen 900 candidates run for office. And voters,

7 even in an election with a lot of candidates, have

8 shown that they have no problem figuring out who the

9 serious candidates are versus people that are running

10 just to see their name on the ballot.

11   So I would ask the commission, in

12 addition to making ranked choice voting implemented

13 for the general election, please consider an

14 alternative avenue to petitions to allow people to get

15 on the ballot. My suggestion would be a filing fee.

16 Thank you very much.

17   MS. DUKES: Thank you very much.

18   Any questions? Hearing none.

19   Our next speaker is Claire Stottlemyer.

20 Am I pronouncing your name correctly?

21   MS. STOTTLEMYER: Good evening. I

22 think you did. But it -- it was a little hard to

23 hear. Claire Stottlemyer. Can you hear me okay?

24   MS. DUKES: Yes.

25   MS. STOTTLEMYER: Okay. Thank you so

1 much for the opportunity to testify today. My name is

2 Claire Stottlemyer. I'm an attorney with the Legal

3 Aid Society and a member of the Vote in New York's --

4 Coalition, which is comprised of directly impacted New

5 Yorkers, advocates, legal service providers, civic

6 engagement groups, and elected officials created in

7 2020 to address the unmet needs of eligible voters who

8 are detained in New York jails. In New York anyone

9 who was incarcerated while serving a misdemeanor

10 conviction or because they cannot afford their bail is

11 eligible to vote. On Rikers Island as of today that's

12 6,305 individuals who retain their right to vote.

13 There are no voting sites in New York jails and

14 therefore incarcerated New Yorkers struggle to

15 participate and have their voices heard each Election

16 Day. The Board of Elections finds the absentee ballot

17 voting process as facilitated in part by the

18 Department of Correction under the New York City

19 Charter 1057 and quite despite data that shows

20 widespread disenfranchisement and disparate impact

21 upon communities of color.

22   Our coalition assisted approximately

23 800 people, with registered to vote between 2020 and

24 2022 at Rikers Island. But only 67 New Yorkers

25 ultimately had their vote counted. In June 20, 2023,

1   the Department of Correction returned 74 completed

2   ballots to the Board of Elections. But only 32 were

3   counted. Additionally, in the same year more than a

4   hundred valid request forms submitted by the

5   Department of Correction were rejected by the Board of

6   Elections. No feedback was given as to why such a

7   large percentage of ballots and ballot requests were

8   rejected.

9   I went to Rikers with our coalition

10   last Wednesday. And we registered 68 New Yorkers to

11   vote. But zero of them will be able to vote in the

12   New York primary happening on June 25th because of the

13   Department of Correction did not turn in the forms by

14   the deadline, which was of course this past Saturday.

15   One of the Department of Corrections staff member is

16   tasked with burying completed registration forms and

17   absentee ballots between the jails and local DOB

18   offices. As a result, requests for absentee ballots

19   often go unfulfilled. The absentee ballot return rate

20   at Rikers is significantly lower than state-wide rate.

21   And when absentee ballots are actually delivered to

22   the Board of Elections they're frequently rejected.

23   And voters are not provided any explanation or

24   opportunity to cure. The Board of Election has denied

25   responsibility for this voting process and summarily

1   rejects ballots rather than providing incarcerated New

2   Yorkers an opportunity to cure as they do for voters

3   who are at liberty.

4   These practices are in violation of New

5   York State law as well as the John R. Lewis Voting

6   Rights Act. While these agencies are busy passing

7   responsibility off to the other, the impact upon

8   communities of color is of course devastating.

9   Ninety-two percent of individuals detained in New York

10 City jails are nonwhite. And our organizations have

11 fought for equity on this issue grounded in the

12 reality that these policies are part of practice that

13 dates back to the founding of this country that seeks

14 to exclude black people from full participation in

15 American life.

16   This issue deserves our full attention

17 and the attention of those who are paid by us to run

18 the responsible agencies. If we care about fair and

19 free elections and full participation in the

20 democratic process we must ensure real ballot access

21 for all incarcerated citizens. So for the Charter

22 Revision Commission, our demand is that the Section

23 1057A should be amended to address the needs of

24 incarcerated New Yorkers, ensuring that both agencies

25 must collaborate to ensure voting access to the

1 ballot. New York City should join many other counties

2 throughout the country by providing polling sites in

3 all of our jails. New York City can also strengthen

4 the absentee ballot process in our jails by requiring

5 the Board of Elections to facilitate the program

6 directly, ensuring that voters have access to the

7 agency, including registration forms, ballot requests,

8 and education materials. Voters must be given the

9 same opportunity to cure their ballots as those who

10 are not incarcerated. And the Board of Elections must

11 make sure that each voter's voice is heard.

12   Thanks so much.

13   MS. DUKES: Thank you very much.

14   Any questions? No questions. Thank

15 you so much.

16   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

17   Lena Cohen.

18   MS. COHEN: Good evening.

19   MR. SCISSURA: Good evening --

20   MS. COHEN: Thank you for the

21 opportunity to testify this evening. My name is

22 Lena Cohen. And I am the senior manager of Civic

23 Engagement at United Neighborhood Houses.

24   Here at United Neighborhood Houses, or

25 UNH, is a policy and social change organization. We

 1 represent New York settlement houses together that

 2 reach 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life each

 3 year. So I do -- re-work to advance democracy by

 4 equipping settlement houses with non-partisan tools

 5 that foster civic participation, aiming to close

 6 participation gaps among underrepresented populations.

 7 And a prime example of our success is actually the

 8 implementation of ranked choice voting in New York

 9 City. So back in 2019 New York City -- the charter

10 amendment to establish RCV. And at UNH, what we did

11 was supported that by hosting educational workshops

12 for hundreds of New Yorkers. And in our experience

13 talking with settlement house staff and the

14 communities they serve, we heard loud and clear that

15 ranked choice voting has been and continues to be a

16 significant success for them. For example, compared

17 to the most recent similar competitive mayoral

18 primary, which actually took place back in 2013,

19 turnout in the 2021 primary increased for all age

20 groups after the implementation of ranked choice

21 voting; moreover, in 2021, we saw the results lead to

22 the most diverse city council in the city's recent

23 history. And plus surveys showed that over 70 percent

24 of voters felt comfortable using RCV. And they felt

25 like it gave them more choices and better

1   representation.

2   Next, I would like to address fiscal

3   responsibility. To promote fiscal responsibility and

4   support working class New Yorkers, UNH recommends

5   improving the city's human services contracting

6   process. This would enable nonprofit providers, like

7   settlement houses, to be more efficient and responsive

8   to the communities they serve; however, the reality is

9   nonprofit providers often experience significant

10   delays with the city's contracting process. So I just

11   wanted to uplift that because at UNH we support

12   revising the New York City charter to set timeframes

13   for each stage of that procurement process, which

14   would improve the process overall for both the

15   providers but the New Yorkers that are receiving these

16   services.

17   So in closing, at UNH we firmly believe

18   that democracy functions best when all constituents

19   are active and have opportunities to engage, which is

20   why we appreciate this series of hearings held by the

21   commission. And we look forward to working with you

22   all to promote civic engagement and finding new ways

23   to ensure fiscal responsibility in the years ahead.

24   Thank you so much.

25   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

1   So we're hearing a lot about ranked

2   choice voting tonight and I think over the last week

3   or two. I just want to be clear, we are not here to

4   repeal proposals and things that have already been put

5   forward. But we are here to listen to New Yorkers to

6   hear how we can make systems even better.

7   So it's been considered. It's been

8   voted on by the people. I and Kyle were on that

9   commission. And I just want to be clear that we're

10   here to move forward and not to move backwards on

11   ranked choice voting.

12   Okay. Gloria Kim.

13   MS. KIM: Thank you for the opportunity

14   to testify tonight. My name is Gloria Kim. And I'm

15   the director of policy, research, and impact at the

16   Human Services Council. We are a membership

17   organization representing over 170 human services

18   providers in New York City.

19   Just to echo what Lena testified about.

20   So over the past several decades government has

21   transferred most legally mandated human services for

22   New Yorkers to nonprofit human services providers for

23   a contract -- to -- to deliver programs helping New

24   Yorkers thrive in weather-like storms. So the current

25   process is the prime mechanism for creating, funding,

1   and awarding contracts to human services providers.

2   And according to these organizations an average of 77

3   percent of revenues came from government contracts.

4   So the contracting system is complex. And a lack

5   of -- a lack of collaboration and transparency in the

6   development of a request for proposals coupled with

7   this complex process it creates an adequately funded

8   set of programs and extensive delays in contract

9   registration and payment.

10   So the comptroller's fiscal year '23

11   annual summary contracts report, it showed that even

12   though the city procures over $12 million in human

13   services, more than 95 percent of total contract value

14   for human service and nonprofit contractors were

15   registered late in the first half of fiscal year '24.

16   This means providers take enormous fiscal and legal

17   risks by signing leases, hiring staff, and starting

18   programs without a contract or continuing to operate

19   services on the verbal agreement that things will get

20   sorted out. The delays create cash flow issues for

21   providers who have to put off paying vendors, take out

22   lines of credit that they have to pay interest on and

23   because -- paid until the contract is registered. So

24   the city and its residents ultimately -- these

25   problems, especially when those providers have to

1   close programs or go out of business altogether

2   because of the financial strain imposed by these late

3   payments. And the result is that communities lose

4   access to cherished neighborhood institutions and

5   potential services and -- to carry out human services

6   programs. For instance, last year you might have

7   heard about Sheltering Arms, which was a 200-year-old

8   nonprofit. They had to close its doors last year

9   because of challenges from pandemic but also chronic

10   underfunding and the late government contract

11   payments. So city charter creates a 30-day timeframe

12   for the comptroller to register contract. And we

13   think that Chapter 13 of the city charter should be

14   amended to require the current policy board to set

15   contracted timelines for each current process and

16   regularly report on the compliance of the contracting

17   agencies. So there are many steps from the

18   announcement of rewards, registration. And with the

19   data acquired through past city's procured system

20   there should be maybe the timeframes to hold the

21   contracted agencies accountable for the delayed

22   procurement processes resulting in resources providers

23   waiting months and sometimes years to be paid for the

24   services provided. And building off of this

25   recommendation, we also believe that there needs to be

1   a mechanism to hold the city to a timely registration.

2   So we also suggest amending the charter so that

3   nonprofits can actually collect interest when the city

4   pays late. So while the goal is that the contracts

5   should ever start before payments are made, nonprofits

6   shouldn't have to carry the cost of any late payments.

7   So we recommend that the payment procedure requirement

8   that the city is responsible for interest-only

9   payments including late payments due to late contract

10   and registration. And also to echo the Independent

11   Budget Office's recommendation at the last hearing,

12   you know, to implement these important procurement

13   improvements the charter should establish a mandate

14   describing this as the big responsibilities for the

15   Mayor's Office of Contract Services. It's really

16   crucial for MOCS to have -- authority, insurance, and

17   any agencies make contracting deadlines and be able to

18   improve procurement processes across programmatic

19   agencies.

20   We also have a number of other

21   recommendations. But these are the main ones that

22   we're focusing on. Thank you so much for giving me

23   the time to testify today.

24   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

25   Pedro Suarez.

1   MR. SUAREZ: Thanks, everyone. Again,

2   Pedro Suarez with the Third Avenue Business

3   Improvement District. I'm the executive director.

4   The Third Avenue Business Improvement District

5   represents the corridor off 3rd Avenue from 148th

6   Street to 153rd Street in the Melrose -- neighborhood

7   in the South Bronx. I wanted to elevate a few things.

8   One, I want to double tap on what was

9   shared most recently by our colleague Gloria Kim. A

10   hundred percent agree on the recommendations regarding

11   city's contracting process was having a significant

12   impact, particularly on business improvement districts

13   across the city. Oftentimes, we receive funding that

14   is on reimbursement basis. So just wanted to double

15   tap. No need to repeat there. I think she captured

16   everything great right through there.

17   A few other issues that I want to

18   elevate -- and again, I don't have specifics on where

19   exactly within the -- the city charter -- but a few

20   issues that I think we should pay attention to that I

21   do think that the -- the city charter could be

22   potentially clearer on. One is making sure that we

23   are mandating development of city agencies, as it

24   pertains to studying the impact of methadone clinics,

25   particularly in communities in the Bronx --

1 particularly in the South Bronx where there's a high

2 concentration of them. And I think that again people

3 who need these services should -- should receive them;

4 right? But I think we need to look at the

5 concentration of clinics within specific ZIP codes and

6 the impacts that they're having on the community from

7 an equity perspective and making sure that communities

8 are sharing the responsibility across the city, not

9 just in the Bronx. This is having a tremendous impact

10 on the quality of life in -- in the neighborhoods that

11 the district serves, as well as other parts of -- of

12 the Bronx. So I encourage us to look at -- at least

13 mandating that we're studying those impacts and share

14 that with the state before -- there was also involved

15 when it comes to the methadone clinics across the

16 city. So I know it's a complex issue. But we really

17 need to look at the impact that it's having on

18 particular neighborhoods in the South Bronx.

19   And the other issue that I wanted to

20 elevate here is related to land use and really empower

21 communities to have greater autonomy when it comes --

22 particularly in underserved marginalized communities.

23 And what -- what businesses or -- or what

24 organizations in those communities can do from an

25 economic development standpoint. And this comes from,

1 you know, the work that's currently being done with

2 the City of Yes initiative and making sure that we are

3 not working in silos and taking what we learned from

4 the City of Yes initiative and incorporating it into

5 the city's charter in terms of recommendations for

6 addressing on land use and how we can make sure that

7 communities are responsive to the ever evolving

8 landscape, as it pertains to economic development and

9 creating jobs for New Yorkers.

10   And then lastly, I'll say that when it

11 comes to unlicensed street vending across the city I

12 think the city charter needs be clear in terms of

13 who's responsible for addressing some of those

14 challenges and how we support unlicensed vendors and

15 the -- path at getting to the business properly and

16 appropriately regulations because right now there are

17 communities across the city where there's a high

18 volume of preventing that. That just is not

19 sustainable. So really looking at where the city

20 charter can be clearer around how we address this

21 issue and who's accountable and who's responsible for

22 really managing that situation because there are

23 communities, particularly like 3rd Avenue, where there

24 are high volume street vendors. It's not really clear

25 on how we're going forward with addressing some of the

1   challenges that -- that come with that.

2   So those are some of the points that I

3   want to elevate my goal as executive director of Third

4   Avenue Business Improvement District. And thank you

5   for your time.

6   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

7   We have I believe Roxanne.

8   MS. DELGADO: Yes. Can you hear me?

9   MR. SCISSURA: Yes, we can.

10   MS. DELGADO: Oh, hi. How are you? My

11   name is Roxanne Delgado. I'm a Bronx resident --

12   MR. SCISSURA: Did you say -- I'm

13   sorry -- Delgado?

14   MS. DELGADO: I'm sorry. What?

15   MR. SCISSURA: Delgado?

16   MS. DELGADO: Yeah. Delgado.

17   I just wanted to make some -- express

18   my opinions regarding, first, the -- How Many Stop

19   bill. I have to agree with Ms. Mona Davids. And I

20   lived in Bronx most of my life. And most people here

21   don't complain that there's too many officers. They

22   only complain that there isn't enough. Insufficient

23   number of officers, the lack of enforcement, the lack

24   of quality of life now. Neighborhoods are turning

25   upside down because basically everyone knows that law

1   enforcement, they can do whatever they want whenever

2   they want. And has really been an undue burden on

3   marginalized and low-income communities that don't

4   have the resources to -- to have tools to protect

5   themselves or to leave the area. They're stuck in a

6   neighborhood that has really deteriorated so rapidly

7   within the last two years. And it's -- and it's just

8   unbelievable how the neighborhoods are changing. And

9   my friend told me that it's happening throughout the

10   city. It's just not -- it's just not in the Bronx.

11   But Bronx, it's such a much more -- because, as I

12   said, we don't have the resource to alleviate the

13   issue that are happening in our community. So I have

14   to agree that we have to address public safety.

15   Another one issue in the city, public safety. And we

16   have to try to get away from this rhetoric of

17   defunding NYPD. And mind you, I'm not for police; I'm

18   for criminal justice reform. But I want to live like

19   my neighbors do. We want to live in a community where

20   we can walk safely without being concerned that we're

21   going to be randomly attacked. And attacks have been

22   happening randomly. 'Cause I'm so -- happen to

23   disagree with someone. It's happening randomly --

24   randomly at any time of the day, not just late in the

25   evening. So public safety is of number one concern

1   for the city.

2   Number 2, public advocate, yes.

3   Interesting. I know I was at the city's Charter

4   Revision Commission over ten years ago and still --

5   still wait -- why is it that the commission will pose

6   this question to the city do we want a public advocate

7   office? Yes or no? Because of the people, by the

8   people, for the people. We should decide how we like

9   to be governed. The public advocate has no executive,

10 legislative, or judicial powers, no enforcement power.

11 And I feel like this is something that has been

12 addressed. I've been questioning many, many decades

13 ago, Why do we have this office still operating at

14 taxpayers' expenses? So I'd like you to also consider

15 putting this on the ballot. Should the public

16 advocate office exist as a governing agency?

17   Secondly, elections. I think we

18 either -- non-partisan elections or expand the ranked

19 choice voting into the general election. And I -- I

20 disagree with the fact that the ranked choice

21 elections -- reason why we have more diversity in our

22 elected offices is not that the demographic has

23 changed a lot. So if you look at the district city

24 council we have -- we have women of color. Look at

25 the demographics of that district that they serve. So

1   it's not just -- you can't just say ranked choice

2   voting for more diversity, more women. That's an

3   opinion. That's not fact based. And then we have

4   increased the voting. Voting turnout still as low as

5   ever.

6   Community boards, this is the reason

7   why I joined this meeting. I'm sure many of you have

8   read many headlines regarding my board, Community

9   Board 11. But it's not just Community Board 11 that's

10   dysfunctional. It just how community board operates

11   throughout this -- in the Bronx. It's actually not

12   a -- a tool for empowering. It's actually a tool for

13   disempowerment where they don't do minutes. They

14   don't follow up on -- they don't abide by FOIA. They

15   don't -- there's no avenue to mandate by -- to be

16   chartered. That's when it comes to your process.

17   There's lots of conflicts of interest financially,

18   personal. It's -- it's unbelievable that corruption

19   and the lack of -- dysfunction we have in community

20   boards. And I personally think we should eliminate

21   community boards. But I -- I know that's not going to

22   happen. But I think one of the main things you do

23   that this management position should be electable

24   because right now this management is at the whim and

25   will of 49-51 members of the board. And what happens

1   outside the board is not his or her concern. And it's

2   an ongoing issue on board where he just abides what

3   the boards says it's okay. So even the police officer

4   "Well, we can't do anything. The board is the one

5   that hires and disciplines. And it terminates their

6   staff." So this board -- just imagine their staff

7   abide by the whims, the will of the -- it -- idiocy of

8   their board members. Instead of addressing the needs

9   of the whole community that we basically fund their

10   salaries. So I would like the district manager --

11   because I know you will not eliminate community board

12   too. But I think that's the best thing for the

13   community -- because community boards are like a wall

14   between the agency's proposals and the community. And

15   usually community boards do not reflect the opinion or

16   the will of the community. They -- what they do is

17   they always backdoor deals, talking to agency or --

18   MR. SCISSURA: Ms. Delgado, can I ask

19   you if you could be --

20   MS. DELGADO: -- go along yours.

21   MR. SCISSURA: If you could wrap up

22   please.

23   MS. DELGADO: Definitely. Let me wrap

24   it up.

25   So again, public advocate, should that

1   office be -- that should be put on the ballot, whether

2   that office should exist. DM, district manager for

3   community board. It's not -- district serve cabinet

4   meeting for two years. It's mandated by city charter.

5   There's no methods to enforce what the city charter

6   puts on the community board. It's supposed to be a

7   police officer for any city -- officer that falls on

8   the board members to enforce or to follow up. So

9   Community Board, fix this function.

10   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much --

11   MS. DELGADO: -- our election make it

12 non-partisan. Expand the ranked choice voting into

13 general election.

14   And lastly, no more with this defund

15 NYPD because you're not helping black / brown people.

16 You're actually making more of us victims of crime.

17   Thank you so much.

18   MR. SCISSURA: Great. Thank you.

19   Michael Daryl Torres.

20   MR. TORRES: Can you hear me? Perfect.

21 Thank you to the Charter Revision Commission and

22 Lincoln Hospital for hosting us this evening. My name

23 is Michael Torres. And it is an honor to sit before

24 this commission and discuss the powerful undercurrents

25 happening in our great city. I also wish to

1 acknowledge the now presently here

2 Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., an exemplary

3 public servant who I served as a young political

4 staffer and someone I deeply respect.

5 　　　　　　MR. SCISSURA: We are by the way

6 thrilled that Ruben Diaz, Jr. is part of our

7 commission.

8 　　　　　　MR. TORRES: But let us not forget why

9 we are having this hearing on revision of the city

10 charter. The city council who voted in overwhelming

11 support to curb the power of the executive in a 46-to-

12 4 vote passed the legislation to expand the city

13 council's authority to approve or block appointing

14 commissioners by the mayor. The city council would

15 like us to believe that this legislation is pure

16 hearted and concerns itself solely with good

17 governments. The council says to us, "How do we not

18 support accountability of mayoral appointees?" This

19 is a simple good governance practice apply and

20 legislative chambers across the country and

21 specifically in the chambers of -- of Congress. Yet

22 the reality is clear. The council wishes to weaken

23 executive power. And the City of New York will be

24 worse off because of it. By stripping the executive

25 of unilateral appointment power the legislature will

1   increase in both power and arrogance. Term limits

2   have created a top-heavy city council, a legislature

3   powered by the speaker, and heads of powerful

4   committees. Instead of showing this reality, they

5   wish to convince us that their oversight of future

6   agency heads is appropriate, when the -- when the

7   reality is they are deeply motivated to take advantage

8   of a politically weakened mayor. They are prisoners

9   of their political moment unable to foresee the

10 characters of future legislatures and mayors. Would

11 these same provision be proposed with the mayor as

12 popular as Franklin Roosevelt or Mario Cuomo in their

13 respective primes? Or would these same provisions we

14 proposed with a fractured command of council? No.

15 This is a brazen attack to make the current council

16 stronger and to further plough the voters' ability to

17 discern where to lay the responsibility for both the

18 accomplishments and failures of the executive.

19   And I want to make it very clear that

20 this testimony is not an endorsement of the current

21 administration's successes or failures. This

22 testimony is based on the conviction that has strong

23 executives necessary to go in the City of New York.

24 As one famous New York lawyer put it, a feeble

25 executive implies a feeble execution of the

1   government. A feeble execution is but another phrase

2   for that execution. And a government ill-executed,

3   whatever it may be in theory, must be in practice a

4   bad government. That is what Alexander Hamilton wrote

5   in "Federalist Papers 70" in support of a strong

6   executive branch. And any attempt to weaken his power

7   is an invitation to four challenges. Unnecessary

8   bureaucracy, unproductive gridlock, lack of

9   appropriate accountability, and distrust between the

10 branches of government that do not have the best

11 interest of the city at heart.

12   Because of this the people of New York

13 should not adopt the city council's recommended

14 revisions to the city charter. Thank you for your

15 time.

16   MR. SCISSURA: I have to tell you,

17 anybody who quotes "Federalist Papers," like, jumps up

18 in my list. So thank you. Thank you for those

19 comments.

20   Okay. Do we have any other speakers on

21 Zoom? Do we have any other speakers here who would

22 wish to testify in person?

23   Okay. I'm going to turn it over to my

24 colleagues now for any final thoughts, should you

25 like. Why don't we start to my left, Ms. McGraw.

1   MS. MCGRAW: Yes. Thank you so much.

2   Thank you all for coming out and making

3   this a real priority in your life, not only for

4   yourself but for the city at whole. We appreciate

5   everything that was said here today. And we're

6   honored to be here to listen to your concern and hear

7   what you have to say because we are here for the

8   people and be the voice for the people. So thank you

9   so much.

10   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

11   MS. ROWE-ADAMS: Thank you. And you're

12   going to be hearing this for months. And I'm thanking

13   you because I'm very proud to sit here on this

14   commission and watch everyone of your faces. You're

15   listening, you're listening. And you care. That is

16   very important. That is what we want to see and hear,

17   to give you an opportunity to voice your opinions

18   because this is your community. This is your city.

19   And that's why I'm very proud of you. And please

20   spread the word to get people out. It is important

21   that they have an opportunity to voice their opinion

22   and exercise their right as taxpayers. Thank you.

23   Get home safe, everyone.

24   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, Ms. Adams.

25   Madame Dukes.

1   MS. DUKES: I call my fellow Carlo --

2   that it is so important you come from work. You have

3   other things you could be doing tonight. But this is

4   so important. I have tracked and read, as our chair

5   said.

6   Susan, it's good to see you again with

7   the kind of work we've done over the years.

8   And I have had the privilege over the

9   last three weeks to read the kind of work that you all

10   did, you and Kyle and Ruben Diaz and many men and

11   women before me. So we stand on the shoulders of

12   great New Yorkers --

13   Especially you, Mr. Chairman, after

14   three rounds of the government chair. I really

15   applaud you.

16   But we're not here because we don't

17   have anything else to do. My days and evenings are

18   full. But I made a commitment because I love New York

19   City. I am a New Yorker. So thank all of you for

20   coming out and listening and giving your time. And

21   for those who presented to us tonight, thank you very

22   much.

23   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you. And thank

24   you for the kind words.

25   Kyle, you're going to close it up for

1   us tonight.

2   MR. BRAGG: Well, great. Thank you,

3   everyone who came here in person, in attendance; those

4   of you online who attended this hearing, I want to

5   thank all those folks who gave testimony today so that

6   we had the opportunity to hear from the people of this

7   city, which made the testimony that I heard this

8   evening made this a very potent hearing. And I just

9   want to say how much I appreciate people taking the

10   time -- their own time to come forth and bring those

11   thoughts, those ideas and how we make our city a

12   better governance. So thank you again.

13   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you. And we have

14   Commissioner Christopher Lynch on Zoom.

15   Mr. Lynch.

16   MR. LYNCH: Yes. Good evening. I just

17   wanted to say thank you to all the participants that

18   came and wanted to testify this evening. It was very

19   eye opening and grateful for those ones. And like I

20   said from the beginning of having voices of those ones

21   who cannot have their voices heard and appreciative of

22   the young lady that -- Claire, who came up to speak up

23   where they were just as involved individuals to speak

24   up about how their advice towards voting and the whole

25   process is being violated there. So I just want to

1   thank everyone for participating this evening. Thank

2   you for your time.

3   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you. And I also

4   want to -- message -- Commissioner Nye [ph] is on

5   Zoom.

6   I'm not sure if, Commissioner, you'd

7   like to say anything before we wrap up? No. Okay.

8   So just a quick comment, as we close.

9   Again, it's great to be in the Bronx. I think we

10   heard a lot of intriguing testimony. Some new items,

11   some recurring items. And I think we are excited

12   about Thursday. We will be in my home borough of

13   Brooklyn. So I ask Bronxites, come visit us in

14   Brooklyn, where we will focus on public safety. So a

15   lot of great things happening. And I think we

16   appreciate your continued testimony.

17   I reiterate, if you can come to a

18   meeting join us on Zoom, like the dozens and dozens of

19   folks that are on tonight. And please submit your

20   testimony because I think you've heard it from me, you

21   heard it from Commissioner Dukes. We do read it. So

22   get it to us so that we can be really engaged with

23   what New Yorkers are thinking.

24   So I thank you all for being here.

25   Thank you to our hosts again. And we will see you on

1   Thursday.   Thank you very much.

2   Motion to adjourn.

3   I think we all say yes.

4   MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Yes.

5   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

6   (Whereupon, the meeting concluded at

7   7:02 p.m.)

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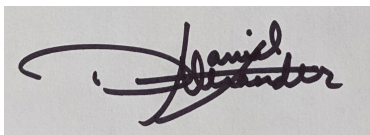12   otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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25

1		8

1 53:24
10 41:5,7 47:25
10,000 13:16
10451 1:14
1057 55:19
1057a 57:23
11 71:9,9
11th 9:18
12 62:12
12th 9:25
13 63:13
148th 65:5
149th 1:12
153rd 65:6
16 47:23
17 1:7
170 61:17
17th 10:17
180 28:16
1936 34:12
1947 34:12

2

2 10:20 70:2
20 13:5 55:25
200 63:7
2006 47:23
2010 31:3
52:25
2013 59:18
2017 47:25
2018 22:4 27:8
27:8 31:4
2019 20:22
23:1 24:7 27:8

30:11 33:9
46:18 47:13
59:9
2020 55:7,23
2021 20:13
30:14 40:12
41:15 44:3
48:2,17 59:19
59:21
2022 55:24
2023 30:15
40:15 41:1,3
42:11 55:25
2024 1:7 3:14
26:21
2025 26:22
21 13:20 46:13
46:13 47:25,25
48:1
212e4 37:12
22 27:11,17
23 62:10
234 1:12
24 62:15
25th 56:12
2700 53:7,15
29418 83:14

3

30 28:18,24
37:11 49:5
63:11
300 11:11
30630 82:16
31 48:3

315 37:8
32 56:2
326's 36:23
35 48:18
37 17:4
3rd 65:5 67:23

4

4 74:12
4,000 15:14
450 53:10,15
46 74:11
49-51 71:25

5

5 24:21 41:9
50 19:18 20:24
49:7
51 13:18
540,000 15:9
5:16 1:8
5th 9:9

6

6,305 55:12
60 19:18
67 55:24
6750852 1:20
68 56:10

7

70 49:9 59:23
76:5
74 48:18 56:1
77 62:2
7:02 81:7

8

800 55:23
800,000 59:2
80s 43:12
85 49:5

9

90 43:4,5
900 53:6 54:6
90s 28:10
95 62:13

a

abide 71:14
72:7
abides 72:2
ability 12:19
53:13 75:16
82:10 83:7
able 8:7 9:12
12:24 20:1
22:11,15 23:16
23:24 56:11
64:17
absentee 55:16
56:17,18,19,21
58:4
abysmally
33:13
accepted 16:14
access 57:20,25
58:6 63:4
accommodate
9:21
accomplish
22:18

accomplishm... 75:18
accountability 25:20 74:18 76:9
accountable 63:21 67:21
accurate 82:9 83:5
achieve 12:3 34:12
acknowledge 74:1
acquired 63:19
act 17:4 42:25 44:7,23 57:6
action 17:4 82:12,16 83:8 83:12
active 16:25 19:22 60:19
activist 39:17 39:24
actually 18:14 20:19 49:18 50:22 54:3 56:21 59:7,18 64:3 71:11,12 73:16
adams 2:7 3:11 4:10 7:7,8,11 7:21 14:1 37:24 39:7 44:3 48:7 77:11,24

adams's 39:5
add 51:1
addition 9:1 54:12
additional 9:17
additionally 56:3
address 12:25 20:2 55:7 57:23 60:2 67:20 69:14
addressed 70:12
addressing 67:6,13,25 72:8
adequately 62:7
adjourn 81:2
administration 14:2 23:22 38:14
administratio... 75:21
adopt 24:10 76:13
adopted 20:15 20:21 21:5 26:3 30:11
adopting 29:10 30:20
adoption 17:7
adrienne 14:1
advance 31:2 32:14,17 34:4

59:3
advantage 75:7
advice 28:5 42:24 44:3 45:19 79:24
advised 26:1
advocate 44:22 44:24 45:2,10 45:11 70:2,6,9 70:16 72:25
advocate's 44:16,18,20
advocates 20:8 55:5
affairs 4:24
affect 23:24
affecting 3:18 33:2
affiliated 18:6
affiliation 18:18 19:4
affinity 38:13
afford 45:11 55:10
affordable 13:14,17,19
afternoon 3:2
age 29:22 59:19
agencies 11:3 36:23 37:9,13 57:6,18,24 63:17,21 64:17 64:19 65:23
agency 58:7 70:16 72:17

75:6
agency's 72:14
agenda 38:13 45:6
agents 45:1
ago 70:4,13
agree 36:8 51:3 65:10 68:19 69:14
agreed 6:17
agreement 62:19
ahead 60:23
aid 55:3
aiming 59:5
alert 48:2
alexander 76:4 83:2,15
align 36:3
aligning 35:6
alleviate 69:12
allocated 15:9
allocating 42:9
allow 12:23 36:2 53:20 54:14
allowed 18:17 24:9
allowing 17:10 35:23
allows 11:17 16:24 18:20 38:18 49:12
alongside 36:1 36:1 39:4

alphabet 42:21	**applaud** 78:15	**arrogance** 75:1	**auditorium**
alter 53:18	**apples** 40:17,20	**articulated**	1:13
alternative	**apply** 74:19	6:24	**authority** 14:21
33:23 54:14	**appointed**	**articulately**	15:16 47:3
altogether 63:1	31:23	51:10	64:16 74:13
amended 57:23	**appointees**	**ascertains** 19:1	**autonomy**
63:14	74:18	**asked** 16:7	66:21
amending 37:8	**appointing**	17:12	**available** 35:22
64:2	74:13	**asking** 45:24	**avenue** 54:14
amendment	**appointment**	**aspect** 52:3	65:2,4,5 67:23
21:8 29:2 30:5	74:25	**aspiration** 39:1	68:4 71:15
33:10 36:12	**appreciate** 5:19	**assaulted** 45:5	**average** 62:2
59:10	15:22 24:18	**assemble** 35:10	**awarded** 36:25
amends 28:21	25:1 32:1	35:14	37:10
american 5:23	60:20 77:4	**assisted** 55:22	**awarding** 62:1
17:2 51:12	79:9 80:16	**attack** 75:15	**aware** 27:23
57:15	**appreciated**	**attacked** 45:5	**awesome** 4:25
ample 29:8	5:12	69:21	
announcement	**appreciative**	**attacks** 69:21	**b**
63:18	79:21	**attempt** 28:4	
annual 62:11	**appropriate**	76:6	**b** 3:5
antiquated	75:6 76:9	**attempting**	**back** 9:18 10:8
48:15	**appropriately**	47:8	19:22 37:25
anybody 4:16	67:16	**attend** 6:16	43:11 45:19
25:5 43:8	**approve** 74:13	**attendance**	57:13 59:9,18
52:14 76:17	**approved**	79:3	**backdoor**
anybody's	13:16	**attended** 79:4	72:17
23:24	**approximately**	**attendees** 2:2	**backups** 48:24
apart 28:24	55:22	**attention** 22:14	**backwards**
apathy 41:11	**april** 33:17	57:16,17 65:20	61:10
apparently	**area** 24:2 69:5	**attorney** 55:2	**bad** 76:4
8:14	**arises** 17:23	82:14 83:10	**bail** 55:10
appear 9:8	**arms** 63:7	**attribute** 16:13	**balance** 36:15
35:25	**arrest** 15:14	**audio** 82:8 83:3	**ball** 40:17
			ballot 9:7,8
			26:23,23 27:3
			27:17 28:18,20

29:22 35:2
36:1 38:10,12
38:20,25 49:9
53:4,22 54:10
54:15 55:16
56:7,19 57:20
58:1,4,7 70:15
73:1
ballots 26:21
39:4 56:2,7,17
56:18,21 57:1
58:9
barriers 24:4
base 49:15
based 16:15
18:10 29:23
34:16 42:2
71:3 75:22
basically 12:6
14:22 16:13
68:25 72:9
basis 35:11
65:14
beautiful 7:10
bed 39:20
40:23 42:19
43:12
beginning
79:20
behalf 5:3
19:16 21:9
39:25
believe 10:9
11:1 18:9
22:16 23:11

26:7,17 27:5
30:13 36:11,12
60:17 63:25
68:7 74:15
belt 47:15
ben 2:12 16:3
25:8,9,12
benefit 22:16
benefited 49:4
best 9:20 25:25
34:23 49:13
51:22 60:18
72:12 76:10
82:9 83:6
beta 17:3
better 5:24
8:25 14:13
18:2 48:17
49:14 59:25
61:6 79:12
beyond 24:17
bidding 37:1
bifurcate 35:13
big 23:4 64:14
bill 44:23 68:19
bit 54:3
black 48:7
57:14 73:15
blasio 6:23
block 74:13
bloomberg
28:12
bloomberg's
27:11

board 10:20
16:6 37:12
46:17 55:16
56:2,5,22,24
58:5,10 63:14
71:8,9,9,10,25
72:1,2,4,6,8,11
73:3,6,8,9
boards 13:11
71:6,20,21
72:3,13,15
body 34:14
47:21
bone 32:5
boogie 8:4
boost 30:2
borough 3:4,8
11:12 13:22
74:2 80:12
boroughs 6:16
box 38:25
bragg 2:5 4:9
6:19,20 14:5
22:25 24:14
79:2
bragg's 24:7
branch 6:6
17:5 76:6
branches 29:11
76:10
brazen 75:15
breakdown
41:10
breakout 41:10

bridge 15:1
brief 10:23
briefly 16:9
bring 19:22
46:19 79:10
broad 17:1
24:11
broadening
35:22
broader 49:16
broadly 16:14
bronx 1:14 3:4
3:6,16 4:21
5:21,24 6:6,8
8:5 9:18 10:4
10:16,20 13:19
13:22,23 14:8
15:25 39:19
40:5,6,22,22
41:9,9 42:19
43:7,25 65:7
65:25 66:1,9
66:12,18 68:11
68:20 69:10,11
71:11 74:2
80:9
bronxite 40:2
bronxites 80:13
brooklyn 4:1
5:23 40:23
43:25 80:13,14
brought 14:12
24:19 25:1
28:3 31:20
44:14 50:5

51:4,5
brown 73:15
budget 64:11
build 13:23
24:10,16,20,25
52:25
building 13:13
49:17 63:24
buildings 12:11
built 13:19
bump 20:11,11
burden 69:2
bureaucracy
54:2 76:8
burying 56:16
bush 52:19
business 63:1
65:2,4,12
67:15 68:4
businesses
66:23
busy 57:6

c

c 2:1 3:1
cabinet 73:3
call 12:25 15:2
78:1
called 15:10
18:12,18 26:25
30:20 44:17
camera 11:8
cameras 11:10
11:11 12:18
15:11

campaign
49:16
candidate
38:10 39:4,6
40:18 48:20
52:15
candidates
18:10,15,17
31:1 34:1 36:1
40:19 41:16
47:17 48:21
49:3,6,10,13,14
53:20 54:6,7,9
cantor 17:5
capacity 33:3
46:16
captured 65:15
care 40:21,23
42:21,21 57:18
77:15
carlo 1:6 2:3
4:5 6:22 78:1
carry 63:5 64:6
case 53:17
cases 36:16
cash 62:20
cast 18:9
catch 11:10
12:18 15:8,13
catching 15:12
cause 16:6
17:14 69:22
cb10 13:4
center 17:5

cents 51:17
ceo 4:19
certain 23:19
34:3 36:16
certainly 44:10
46:10 48:13
certificate 82:1
83:1
certify 82:3
83:2
chair 2:3,6 4:8
10:3 13:8 14:2
16:6 31:23
32:22 36:20
78:4,14
chairing 4:6
chairman 6:10
53:1 78:13
challenge 19:20
challenges 63:9
67:14 68:1
76:7
challenging
54:1
chambers
74:20,21
chance 6:13
7:12
change 12:22
17:23 19:7
21:7 23:22
26:18 48:2
53:14 58:25
changed 33:13
70:23

changes 8:24
21:22 22:17
24:3 31:5 47:9
51:6
changing 69:8
chapter 17:3
63:13
characters
75:10
charge 4:23
24:17
chart 29:13
charter 1:1
3:14 4:7 7:3
8:3,23,24 9:2
9:22 11:1,2,20
12:3,23 21:24
22:3,4,10 23:5
23:13 25:24
26:1,11,24
28:4,6,7,8,13
28:14,17,19,22
28:24 29:7,10
29:14 30:11
31:24 32:11,12
32:13,13,23
33:10 35:18
36:22 37:8
38:6 47:2,3,10
55:19 57:21
59:9 60:12
63:11,13 64:2
64:13 65:19,21
67:5,12,20
70:3 73:4,5,21

74:10 76:14

charter's 11:16

chartered 71:16

charterinfo 9:24

cherished 63:4

children 44:25 45:4

chinese 17:2

choice 16:12,14 16:16,17,23,25 17:8 20:8,9,13 20:15 21:25 23:1 24:9 30:8 30:10 33:10,20 34:5,10,17 40:11,14 41:13 41:14,22,25 42:4,9,15,23 46:19,24 47:9 47:14 48:9,14 48:16,22,23 49:4 50:1 51:14,25 52:8 52:12,21 54:12 59:8,15,20 61:2,11 70:19 70:20 71:1 73:12

choices 59:25

choose 19:2,15 48:20

chose 22:7

christopher 2:9 4:10,18 79:14

chronic 63:9

cities 29:25

citizens 7:5 16:21 25:13,18 57:21

city 3:19 5:5 6:25 7:5,15 8:24,25 9:3,18 10:2,4,18,25 11:10,16,18,19 12:1,4,14,15,21 12:24 13:1,6,8 13:10,12,13 14:9,15,15,23 15:1,17 16:16 16:18 17:1,6 17:24 21:4,9 24:11,21 25:19 25:24 28:13,24 29:19,23 30:2 30:14 31:19,21 33:3,18 34:8 34:11 35:20 39:25 40:1,15 40:16,22 41:4 41:18 42:1,8 43:2,23 44:4 44:20 45:22 46:5,13,17,19 47:14,19,19,23 48:1,8 49:10 49:20 50:3,7 50:11 53:5,21

54:4 55:18 57:10 58:1,3 59:9,9,22 60:12 61:18 62:12,24 63:11 63:13 64:1,3,8 65:13,19,21,23 66:8,16 67:2,4 67:11,12,17,19 69:10,15 70:1 70:6,23 73:4,5 73:7,25 74:9 74:10,12,14,23 75:2,23 76:11 76:13,14 77:4 77:18 78:19 79:7,11

city's 11:22 16:11 17:7 30:20 33:11 34:23 36:21 47:3,22 59:22 60:5,10 63:19 65:11 67:5 70:3

citycharter.n... 9:24

civic 35:25 36:7 55:5 58:22 59:5 60:22

claire 2:17 54:19,23 55:2 79:22

clarify 32:8

class 60:4

clean 12:16 15:3

cleanliness 11:22

clear 18:7 19:16 32:6,17 38:6 47:16 53:17 59:14 61:3,9 67:12 67:24 74:22 75:19

clearer 65:22 67:20

clearly 8:16 38:1,2 43:4

clinics 65:24 66:5,15

clinton 52:20

close 59:5 63:1 63:8 78:25 80:8

closed 6:13 18:19 33:14

closer 38:3

closing 60:17

clubs 42:1,2

coalition 39:25 55:4,22 56:9

coalitions 35:10

codes 66:5

cohen 2:18 58:17,18,20,22

coherent 35:8

collaborate
57:25

collaboration
29:11 62:5

colleague 22:25
33:8 65:9

colleagues
76:24

collect 64:3

color 48:4,13
55:21 57:8
70:24

combating
11:16

come 7:2 43:6
44:6 68:1 78:2
79:10 80:13,17

comes 23:10
27:15 41:1,3
44:2,8,16
45:19 66:15,21
66:25 67:11
71:16

comfortable
59:24

coming 45:19
77:2 78:20

command
75:14

commend
21:16

comment 9:11
32:4,9 37:4
80:8

comments 9:3
9:13,23 13:2
28:1 31:11
34:21 36:9
37:22 46:2
51:25 76:19

commission
3:15,17 4:7,9
4:17 6:21,22
7:2,11,17 8:23
9:6 11:1 12:2
21:17,19 22:3
22:4 23:5,9,13
24:8,18 26:2,6
26:8,13,16,24
27:1,4,9,10,11
27:12,16,19,24
28:15,19 30:7
30:16 31:3,4
32:10,23 33:23
35:1 37:6
40:10 44:17
45:8,19 47:5
52:1,7,9,11,25
53:2,8,11,14
54:11 57:22
60:21 61:9
70:4,5 73:21
73:24 74:7
77:14

commissioner
2:5,7,8,9 38:8
79:14 80:4,6
80:21

commissioners
6:1 8:4,11 13:3
25:12 26:19
32:9,16 43:22
46:11 50:18
51:4 74:14

commissions
21:24 22:10
28:7 47:2

commitment
78:18

committed
25:19

committee 1:1
17:4

committees
75:4

common 16:5
17:14

commonsense
10:23

communities
12:7,8 16:20
40:21 41:18
42:6,10,16,19
42:22 43:10,24
44:11 45:3,7
45:23,24 47:22
48:6 55:21
57:8 59:14
60:8 63:3
65:25 66:7,21
66:22,24 67:7
67:17,23 69:3

community
10:20 13:11,24
16:15 17:21
35:24 40:25
42:2,18 43:10
43:16 45:1
49:21 66:6
69:13,19 71:6
71:8,9,10,19,21
72:9,11,13,13
72:14,15,16
73:3,6,9 77:18

compare 41:16

compared
59:16

competition
33:15,21 38:18

competitive
30:12 37:1
51:13,16 59:17

complain 68:21
68:22

completed 56:1
56:16

complex 62:4,7
66:16

complexity
36:15

compliance
63:16

compliant
37:13

complicated
20:5

component 13:12	**congratulated** 17:10	**contemplates** 47:9	**conviction** 55:10 75:22
composition 34:13 35:20	**congress** 74:21	**context** 27:24 41:12	**convince** 75:5
comprehensive 25:23 26:11	**consensus** 49:17	**continue** 26:20 27:4 43:15	**copy** 37:9
comprised 55:4	**consent** 28:6 42:25 44:3 45:20	**continued** 80:16	**corner** 12:9
comptroller 35:24 37:14 38:3,16 53:21 63:12	**consider** 11:24 14:12 21:20 33:23 34:23 35:12 37:6 44:17 45:8 52:8,9,11 54:13 70:14	**continues** 59:15	**correction** 55:18 56:1,5 56:13
comptroller's 37:11 62:10		**continuing** 62:18	**corrections** 56:15
computer 41:2		**continuity** 38:14	**correctly** 54:20
concentration 66:2,5		**contract** 61:23 62:8,13,18,23 63:10,12 64:9 64:15	**corridor** 65:5
concern 69:25 72:1 77:6	**considered** 21:25 27:12 61:7		**corruption** 71:18
concerned 69:20	**considers** 35:1	**contracted** 63:15,21	**cost** 29:24 64:6
concerns 74:16	**consolidated** 20:21	**contracting** 60:5,10 62:4 63:16 64:17 65:11	**costly** 54:1
concluded 81:6	**consolidating** 21:14 24:23		**costs** 21:2
conduct 26:10 26:17 29:7 41:24	**constituency** 5:14 49:16	**contractors** 62:14	**council** 10:2,5 10:16,17,18 13:6,8,13,15,15 13:18,20 17:2 21:6 28:2,11 28:22 31:19 32:13 34:8 35:21 40:15 41:4,18 42:8 43:2,23 44:20 45:22 46:5,13 47:19,19,23,24 48:1,8 49:11 53:5,21 59:22 61:16 70:24 74:10,14,17,22 75:2,14,15
conducted 33:17	**constituents** 60:18	**contracts** 36:24 37:10,15 62:1 62:3,11 64:4	
confident 49:23	**constitution** 29:1,2	**contributed** 47:18	
confiscate 15:15	**constitutional** 21:8 30:4,5 36:12	**control** 20:17 23:24	
conflicts 71:17			
confusing 52:4	**construction** 12:11	**convergence** 46:22	
confusion 17:16 18:13			

council's 74:13
76:13
councilman
10:6,13 14:6
14:20 15:23
counsel 2:4
4:13 82:10,13
83:7,10
count 34:18
counted 55:25
56:3
counties 58:1
country 17:9
20:19 21:5
29:25 57:13
58:2 74:20
couple 6:2 16:7
49:1
coupled 62:6
course 27:21
38:7 56:14
57:8
create 32:10
62:20
created 55:6
75:2
creates 62:7
63:11
creating 61:25
67:9
credit 62:22
crime 73:16
criminal 69:18
crisis 13:22

critical 23:4
29:5,6
criticism 27:13
27:15
crucial 64:16
cry 6:5
cues 39:3
cuomo 75:12
curb 74:11
cure 56:24 57:2
58:9
current 11:17
27:5 44:22
52:3 61:24
63:14,15 75:15
75:20
currently 12:7
12:17 13:7,11
14:24 17:15
26:8 67:1
cut 21:1
cutting 43:13
cycle 36:11
48:17 49:20
cycles 46:20
47:15

d

d 3:1
daniel 83:2,15
daryl 73:19
data 55:19
63:19
dates 9:22
57:13

davids 2:14
39:11,14,16,16
45:16 68:19
day 16:19,19
19:3 20:16
32:2 37:3
55:16 63:11
69:24
days 17:19
28:16,18,24
31:24 37:11,17
43:11 48:19
78:17
dc 17:4
de 6:23
deadline 26:22
27:5 56:14
deadlines 64:17
dealing 20:20
deals 72:17
dealt 42:15
debate 32:16
32:16 40:18
decade 29:25
decades 20:13
38:25 61:20
70:12
december 27:1
decide 70:8
decided 27:16
decides 27:4
decision 35:3
38:22,24
dedicating
25:16

deep 3:18
deeply 23:25
74:4 75:7
definitely 21:2
48:11 51:22
72:23
defund 73:14
defunding
69:17
delayed 63:21
delays 60:10
62:8,20
delgado 2:21
68:8,10,11,13
68:14,15,16,16
72:18,20,23
73:11
deliberative
38:24
deliver 61:23
delivered 56:21
delivery 12:4
delve 23:16
demand 57:22
democracy
47:18 59:3
60:18
democrat 53:6
democratic
33:14,16 41:6
41:8 42:2 43:3
43:4 49:7
57:20
demographic
70:22

demographics
  70:25
demonstrates
  33:18
denied 56:24
department
  12:15,22 14:21
  15:1,10 55:18
  56:1,5,13,15
describing
  64:14
deserves 57:16
designated
  46:12
despite 55:19
destroys 14:10
detained 55:8
  57:9
deteriorated
  69:6
determinations
  18:9
determine 9:6
devastating
  57:8
develop 49:17
development
  13:10 62:6
  65:23 66:25
  67:8
diaz 74:2,6
  78:10
difference 21:1
different 16:8
  17:16,17 18:11

29:14 32:11
  39:23 40:17
  42:1 50:1,2
  51:6 52:6
difficult 21:18
  22:18
difficulties 8:15
digital 82:8
  83:3
directions
  43:20
directly 55:4
  58:6
director 4:12
  16:5 25:13
  33:3 61:15
  65:3 68:3
disagree 51:3
  51:18 69:23
  70:20
discern 75:17
disciplines 72:5
disconnect
  43:21,22
discriminatory
  51:23
discuss 34:22
  73:24
discussed 30:7
discussion
  17:22 23:15
  27:18
disempower...
  71:13

disenfranchis...
  55:20
disparate 55:20
disposing 12:12
district 7:15
  10:17,17,20
  13:16 15:11
  34:11 41:8
  43:5 65:3,4
  66:11 68:4
  70:23,25 72:10
  73:2,3
districts 13:18
  13:20 65:12
distrust 76:9
dive 3:18 22:10
  23:25
diverse 59:22
diversity 35:19
  50:5 70:21
  71:2
divide 40:19
dividing 48:14
dm 73:2
dob 56:17
documentation
  37:10
doing 4:20
  43:23 44:17
  52:8 78:3
dollars 36:25
dominated
  47:20
dominicanos
  17:6

door 6:13
doors 63:8
double 65:8,14
doubt 21:3
  35:3
dozens 80:18
  80:18
due 64:9
dukes 2:6 4:8
  6:3,4,23 13:4
  50:13,20 54:17
  54:24 58:13
  77:25 78:1
  80:21
duly 82:5
dump 12:17
dumpers 11:10
  11:14
dumping 11:8
  11:16,22 12:1
  12:8,10,13,19
  14:10,14,22,25
  15:7,11
dynamics
  33:12
dysfunction
  71:19
dysfunctional
  71:10

---

e

---

e 2:1,1 3:1,1
e.j. 33:8
earlier 31:13
east 1:12 40:23
  42:20

echo 52:1 61:19
   64:10
economic 13:10
   66:25 67:8
editorial 44:15
educate 16:20
educated 42:7
educating
   46:20 49:22
education
   16:17 39:24
   58:8
educational
   59:11
edward 2:4
effect 51:6
   52:18,23
effective 12:4
   52:13,21
effectively
   25:25
effects 36:9
efficient 12:4
   60:7
efficiently 8:25
   25:25
efforts 50:2
eight 10:19
either 18:21
   70:18
elect 24:21
electable 71:23
elected 34:14
   41:5 44:3,4,10
   47:17,22 50:4

55:6 70:22
electing 46:23
   48:1
election 3:23
   9:9 20:12 23:4
   23:10,12 24:2
   27:21 30:13,14
   30:15,16,21
   31:2 34:4,5
   35:9 38:4
   40:16 41:7,10
   41:15 46:20
   47:15 48:12
   49:5,20 52:12
   52:22 54:7,13
   55:15 56:24
   70:19 73:11,13
election's 30:22
elections 20:1
   20:21,24 21:11
   21:14,22 23:17
   24:23 27:13,19
   29:20 30:3
   33:9,11 34:8
   36:10 40:16
   47:11 50:23
   51:9,13,14,17
   52:6,10 55:16
   56:2,6,22
   57:19 58:5,10
   70:17,18,21
electoral 33:12
   33:19,23 34:24
   34:25 40:7
   51:6

electorate
   24:21 34:15
elevate 65:7,18
   66:20 68:3
eligible 30:23
   55:7,11
eliminate 71:20
   72:11
eliminated
   44:21
eliminating
   45:9
emails 32:2
emergency
   37:7,10,15
employed
   82:11,14 83:8
   83:11
employee 82:13
   83:10
empower 66:20
empowering
   71:12
enable 60:6
encourage 6:15
   66:12
endanger 45:13
ended 27:1
endorsed 48:18
endorsement
   38:9 75:20
endorsements
   35:23
endorsing
   33:24

enforce 73:5,8
enforcement
   11:12,18,21
   12:20,22,23
   14:13 15:5
   68:23 69:1
   70:10
engage 60:19
engaged 18:5,8
   19:25 23:20
   80:22
engagement
   17:1 43:16
   55:6 58:23
   60:22
engages 26:12
enormous
   62:16
ensure 25:24
   57:20,25 60:23
ensuring 57:24
   58:6
enthusiasm
   16:17
entire 4:13 5:4
   8:24
entirely 33:16
equipping 59:4
equity 57:11
   66:7
equivalent
   53:23
era 28:12
eric 44:3

fills 11:19	**fix** 73:9	**forth** 79:10	**full** 57:14,16,19
final 28:19 30:6	**flatbush** 40:23	**forthcoming**	78:18
33:25 34:7	42:20	34:22	**function** 73:9
45:18 51:22	**flourish** 17:11	**forum** 3:20 4:2	**functions** 60:18
52:3 76:24	**flow** 62:20	5:13 33:9	**fund** 72:9
finally 21:16	**focus** 13:13,25	**forums** 3:17	**fundamental**
34:16 37:7	14:2 18:1 19:5	9:4	35:6
financial 63:2	50:23 80:14	**forward** 5:13	**fundamentally**
financially	**focusing** 3:23	18:24 47:4	33:12
71:17 82:15	64:22	60:21 61:5,10	**funded** 62:7
83:11	**foia** 71:14	67:25	**funding** 61:25
find 14:22	**folks** 9:12	**foster** 59:5	65:13
finding 60:22	31:20 79:5	**fostering** 25:20	**further** 22:9,10
finds 55:16	80:19	**fought** 57:11	22:17 29:4
fine 14:22	**follow** 22:3	**found** 24:15	75:16 82:12
15:14	51:24 71:14	37:19	83:9
firmly 60:17	73:8	**founded** 46:18	**future** 9:21
first 3:6,15	**followed** 16:3	47:25	22:10 23:13
10:15 11:9	39:12	**founder** 46:13	27:19 75:5,10
16:10 17:13	**following** 26:4	**founding** 57:13	
25:14 26:7	27:2,3	**four** 34:3 76:7	**g**
28:9,17,23	**fordham** 9:19	**fourth** 3:13	**g** 3:1
30:22 33:25	**foregoing** 82:3	**fractured**	**game** 40:17
40:6 45:7 46:4	82:4 83:4	75:14	**gamesmanship**
46:14 47:22	**foresee** 75:9	**frame** 19:22	28:9 31:16
48:7 62:15	**forges** 49:14	**frank** 2:16	**gamut** 16:18
68:18	**forget** 74:8	39:12 50:16	18:12
fiscal 3:20,21	**forgive** 31:13	**franklin** 75:12	**gaps** 29:23 59:6
3:21 33:8 60:2	**form** 9:7 19:17	**free** 57:19	**general** 2:4
60:3,23 62:10	35:8	**frequently**	4:13 9:9 31:2
62:15,16	**former** 6:5 13:4	23:21 56:22	33:20 34:4,5
five 10:21 24:3	46:4,12 47:19	**friend** 69:9	41:7 52:7,12
33:9,25 34:2	50:14	**front** 22:1 24:9	52:21 54:13
48:20 49:8	**forms** 56:4,13	**frustrated**	70:19 73:13
51:22 52:3	56:16 58:7	19:12	**generate** 54:3

getters 34:3
getting 20:4
  53:22 67:15
gibson 3:8
giuliani 28:11
give 3:7,9 7:2
  8:18 15:14,16
  21:14 77:17
given 47:2 56:6
  58:8
giving 14:7
  25:15 64:22
  78:20
gloria 2:19
  61:12,14 65:9
go 15:13 17:7
  23:8 37:25
  41:20 42:3
  43:11 45:20
  46:3 52:10
  56:19 63:1
  72:20 75:23
goal 48:3 64:4
  68:3
goes 7:14,15
going 5:2,6,13
  5:22 6:3 8:11
  8:15 18:23
  19:15 31:14
  32:4 35:16
  36:17 41:6
  43:9 45:14
  46:3 50:22,23
  52:17 67:25
  69:21 71:21

  76:23 77:12
  78:25
good 3:2,2,23
  7:8 8:1 10:9,13
  10:14,15 25:11
  31:11 36:19
  39:14,15 46:11
  54:21 58:18,19
  74:16,19 78:6
  79:16
governance
  74:19 79:12
governed 70:9
governing
  49:18 70:16
government
  3:23 6:25 7:4
  8:25 9:3 25:19
  25:20,24 29:12
  61:20 62:3
  63:10 76:1,2,4
  76:10 78:14
governments
  74:17
governor 37:4
grateful 24:7
  79:19
gray 6:7
great 4:14,21
  7:1 10:4 13:9
  14:3 15:12,19
  24:12 25:4
  26:15 31:9
  32:18 46:6
  53:2 65:16

  73:18,25 78:12
  79:2 80:9,15
greater 33:21
  51:16 66:21
greatest 5:5
green 15:17
gridlock 76:8
ground 49:21
grounded
  57:11
group 4:6 19:5
  25:19 31:18
  36:7
groups 18:2
  35:25 55:6
  59:20
growing 43:11
guess 3:5
guide 35:2
  38:22
guys 8:18 50:24
  50:25

h

half 10:21
  62:15
hamilton 76:4
happen 22:25
  69:22 71:22
happened 6:9
happening
  12:13 31:17
  41:17 56:12
  69:9,13,22,23
  73:25 80:15

happens 11:22
  15:13 71:25
hard 4:14
  54:22
harlem 39:20
  40:22
hazel 2:6 4:8
head 49:23
headlines 71:8
heads 75:3,6
health 1:11
hear 3:24 5:13
  6:12,24 8:8,9
  8:20 9:16 10:8
  13:5 21:10
  25:11 46:8
  50:19 52:14,17
  54:23,23 61:6
  68:8 73:20
  77:6,16 79:6
heard 6:5,12
  7:13,14,14
  16:23 21:13
  22:21 55:15
  58:11 59:14
  63:7 79:7,21
  80:10,20,21
hearing 1:1
  3:13 6:14
  13:12 28:25
  36:24 40:7,13
  42:8 46:3
  50:15 54:18
  61:1 64:11
  74:9 77:12

79:4,8
hearings 3:15
26:14 37:3
60:20
heart 76:11
hearted 74:16
heavy 75:2
held 3:16 26:14
60:20
hello 6:7 7:25
help 8:25 10:24
16:21 21:2
23:20 29:22
35:2,8 46:24
helped 24:4
48:15
helpful 37:19
39:2
helping 61:23
73:15
helps 20:17
hereto 82:14
83:11
hi 68:10
high 66:1 67:17
67:24
higher 51:13
highest 20:12
25:21 49:5
highlight 49:25
hires 72:5
hiring 62:17
history 25:22
44:19 51:12
59:23

hold 26:15
36:23 46:14
63:20 64:1
holding 42:8
home 15:13
77:23 80:12
homework
38:23
honestly 45:12
honesty 25:21
honor 4:5 6:20
6:21 10:2,18
32:24 73:23
honored 7:9
8:3,6 77:6
hope 4:2 6:9,15
37:19 38:23
50:10
hopefully 9:11
horrible 52:22
hospital 4:19
5:18 7:10
73:22
hospitals 1:11
host 3:17
hosting 4:1,19
9:17 59:11
73:22
hosts 80:25
house 59:13
houses 58:23
58:24 59:1,4
60:7
housing 13:12
13:14,17,19,21

13:23
human 60:5
61:16,17,21,22
62:1,12,14
63:5
hundred 13:17
29:24 36:24
56:4 65:10
hundreds
59:12

i

idea 10:23
14:19 24:15,22
24:24 32:10
ideas 7:3 8:9
79:11
identified 22:8
22:12
identify 22:15
ideological
35:15
ideology 45:6
idiocy 72:7
illegal 11:8,10
11:14,16 12:1
12:10,13 14:10
14:14,22,25
15:7,10
illegally 12:8
12:16,18
imagine 15:15
72:6
immediate 39:3
47:6

immediately
36:3 38:11
immense 47:3
immigrants
5:23
impact 47:16
55:20 57:7
61:15 65:12,24
66:9,17
impacted 33:5
55:4
impacts 66:6
66:13
implement
22:18 64:12
implementati...
16:11 59:8,20
implemented
30:14 54:12
implies 75:25
importance
51:18
important 3:18
6:11,24 7:19
14:8,12 22:9
22:16 25:1,17
35:12 64:12
77:16,20 78:2
78:4
importantly
47:7
imposed 63:2
impounding
11:14

improve 9:3 15:18 29:11 60:14 64:18
improvement 65:3,4,12 68:4
improvements 64:13
improving 29:17 40:14 60:5
incarcerated 55:9,14 57:1 57:21,24 58:10
include 30:6
includes 28:13
including 29:7 33:20 58:7 64:9
income 69:3
incorporating 67:4
increase 20:7 20:17 29:21 51:11 75:1
increased 11:12 20:24 40:12 41:15 59:19 71:4
increases 20:14
increasing 40:14
independent 31:18 32:7 35:4,18 53:7 64:10

indicated 33:14
individuals 12:8,18 15:5 15:12 55:12 57:9 79:23
influence 35:17
information 35:22
informational 36:3 38:19,21 39:3
informed 38:24 42:6,10
informs 26:4
initiated 32:13
initiative 67:2 67:4
injecting 29:6
innovative 35:21
input 9:17
ins 23:17
inside 12:13 14:25
insight 18:2
install 15:10
instance 63:6
institute 33:4 33:17
institutions 63:4
instrumental 48:9
insufficient 26:10 68:22

insurance 64:16
integrity 3:21
intent 32:9
interest 26:1 45:7 46:23 62:22 64:3,8 71:17 76:11
interested 82:15 83:12
interesting 19:20 20:25 24:15 70:3
interestingly 18:3
intrigued 14:19
intriguing 80:10
introduced 33:10
invitation 76:7
involved 40:5 66:14 79:23
island 39:19 40:13 41:2 44:1 55:11,24
issue 3:17 12:7 14:7 20:6,25 23:4 25:1 30:6 30:7 35:11,11 51:5 57:11,16 66:16,19 67:21 69:13,15 72:2
issues 3:21 10:25 12:25

14:9 22:8,12 22:15 31:24 33:2 35:12,13 62:20 65:17,20
italian 5:22,23
italy 5:24
items 80:10,11

j

jackie 2:7 4:10 7:7
jails 55:8,13 56:17 57:10 58:3,4
jamaica 17:5
jill 52:16
job 1:20 15:12
jobs 67:9
john 2:13 25:9 32:21 33:1 51:10 57:5
join 58:1 80:18
joined 4:7 7:22 71:7
joining 5:17 14:6
jr 74:2,6
judicial 53:16 70:10
july 9:18,25
jump 9:12,14
jumps 76:17
june 1:7 49:24 55:25 56:12
jurisdiction 11:20

jurisdictions 24:1

justice 26:25 69:18

k

keep 21:11 43:17

keeping 35:2 43:19 44:24 51:18

kennedy 52:16

kept 49:9

ketcham 2:13 25:10 32:21,22 33:1 36:19 38:7 51:10,18

kick 10:1

kiernan 2:4

kim 2:19 61:12 61:13,14 65:9

kind 11:4,17 12:4 20:4 24:10 26:10 27:20,24 28:3 28:25 30:1 78:7,9,24

knew 43:12

know 4:4 8:19 10:10,22,25 12:9 13:11 15:6 19:20 20:7,16 21:12 22:24 23:8 24:6,24 26:23 27:23,25 32:5

40:3,22 41:20 43:19 44:13 45:4,12 47:20 54:1 64:12 66:16 67:1 70:3 71:21 72:11

knowledge 82:9 83:6

known 46:13

knows 32:14 68:25

kyle 2:5 4:9 6:18,20 7:6 14:4 22:25 24:7,13 61:8 78:10,25

l

label 18:10 36:6 38:20 51:19

labels 35:2 39:5

lack 62:4,5 68:23,23 71:19 76:8

lady 79:22

land 10:3 12:24 13:6,8 14:2 35:16 66:20 67:6

landmark 46:21

landscape 67:8

language 11:17

large 3:25 26:18 56:7

largest 17:24

las 20:20,23

lastly 30:18 67:10 73:14

late 62:15 63:2 63:10 64:4,6,9 64:9 69:24

latest 28:3,4

latina 46:14

law 28:21 37:5 53:13 57:5 68:25

lawmakers 35:10

laws 23:7,7

lawyer 75:24

lay 75:17

lead 51:11 59:21

leaders 14:1 24:22

leadership 5:4 48:6

league 17:6

learned 67:3

leases 62:17

leave 69:5

left 4:11 35:13 47:24 76:25

legal 53:12 55:2,5 62:16

legally 61:21

legislation 35:11 37:2,5 74:12,15

legislative 47:21 70:10 74:20

legislature 29:3 35:9 37:2 74:25 75:2

legislatures 75:10

legs 24:23

lena 2:18 58:17 58:22 61:19

length 29:14 36:14

lerner 2:11 16:3,4,5 23:14 25:3,6 27:7 29:18 33:13

lerner's 36:8 51:25

letter 3:5

level 19:23 24:3 26:15 34:18 38:19 40:24

lewis 57:5

liberty 31:14 57:3

lieu 54:5

life 10:25 12:25 14:11 15:18 57:15 59:2 66:10 68:20,24 77:3

lifelong 33:5	**longer** 22:6	**m**	**male** 47:20
likelihood 51:16	**look** 13:18,20 18:11 19:21 24:1 42:11,11 42:12 43:1,2 45:21 47:4 60:21 66:4,12 66:17 70:23,24	**ma'am** 4:22 37:23	**mama** 6:23
limit 33:14		**madame** 77:25	**management** 71:23,24
limits 75:1		**made** 18:23 23:1 53:14 64:5 78:18 79:7,8	**manager** 10:20 58:22 72:10 73:2
lincoln 1:11 4:19,20 5:18 7:10 73:22	**looking** 5:12 11:2 20:19 38:11 67:19	**main** 64:21 71:22	**managing** 67:22
lines 34:15 62:22	**lose** 63:3	**maintain** 30:16	**mandate** 64:13 71:15
link 17:20	**losing** 16:12	**major** 28:8 30:14 31:5	**mandated** 61:21 73:4
list 2:2 34:16 34:20,22 76:18	**lot** 11:18 17:16 17:22 18:13 24:3 37:25 47:10 50:24 54:7 61:1 70:23 80:10,15	**majority** 22:2 34:6 46:14 47:8 48:3,4,18	**mandating** 65:23 66:13
listen 31:20 61:5 77:6		**make** 4:14 6:25 7:3 10:24 11:4 12:3 14:19 18:9 21:1,6 26:4 38:23 42:9 44:7 58:11 61:6 64:17 67:6 68:17 73:11 75:15,19 79:11	**manhattan** 33:4,17
listening 77:15 77:15 78:20			**manny** 17:5
lists 49:3	**lots** 71:17		**marginalized** 66:22 69:3
little 5:24 29:13 54:3,22	**loud** 59:14		**mario** 75:12
littleafrica 39:18	**love** 3:6,10 78:18		**mark** 2:15 39:12 46:5,7 46:10,12
live 69:18,19	**low** 20:10 33:13 41:11 43:2 69:3 71:4	**makes** 8:17	**massachusetts** 18:25
lived 8:4 68:20		**makeup** 34:14	**matches** 34:14
local 28:21 33:11,12 35:12 35:24 36:6,7 36:10 38:17 40:24 41:18 49:19 56:17	**lower** 56:20	**making** 14:13 21:21 35:3 38:22 49:22 54:12 65:22 66:7 67:2 73:16 77:2	**materials** 58:8
	lowered 53:2,9		**matter** 11:22 33:6 34:25 42:20
	loyal 33:5		**matters** 3:24 40:24 41:19
locations 50:3	**lynch** 2:9 4:10 4:17 79:14,15 79:16		**mattresses** 14:18
log 8:17			
logic 29:1			
long 25:22 40:2 46:22			

mayor 6:23
7:11 8:7 11:25
27:11 31:19
35:24 38:2,8
38:15 39:5
44:4,5,10
53:21 74:14
75:8,11
mayor's 38:10
38:13 64:15
mayoral 38:14
40:18 49:7,8
59:17 74:18
mayors 75:10
mcgraw 2:8
7:23,24 8:1,2
76:25 77:1
mcmahon 33:8
meaning 48:21
meaningfully
26:13
means 18:14
62:16
meat 32:4
mechanism
54:1 61:25
64:1
media 29:8
meeting 3:14
9:22 28:17
50:22 71:7
73:4 80:18
81:6
meetings 4:14
6:13 9:16,20

meets 7:4
melissa 2:15
39:12 46:5,6
46:12
melrose 65:6
member 4:24
10:2 13:4,6
46:17 47:19
55:3 56:15
members 8:21
9:4,10 19:15
21:17 32:23
41:4,18 43:2
43:23 45:22
51:23 52:9,11
53:10 71:25
72:8 73:8
membership
61:16
men 78:10
mention 52:24
mentioned 27:7
29:5,18 30:4
30:19 51:21
message 80:4
methadone
65:24 66:15
method 36:25
methods 73:5
michael 2:22
73:19,23
million 62:12
mind 6:16
19:22 69:17

minor 51:24
minutes 71:13
mired 54:2
misdemeanor
55:9
missing 15:4
39:21,21
mission 48:1
mobilize 16:21
mocs 64:16
model 17:8
moderated 1:6
moment 23:11
75:9
mona 2:14
39:11,16 68:19
monday 1:7
money 42:9
51:20
month 27:14
37:1
months 26:8,17
26:20 31:21
63:23 77:12
morano 2:16
39:12 50:16,18
50:21
motion 81:2
motivated 75:7
motivates 18:3
23:19
motivation
19:10
move 27:18
39:9 61:10,10

moving 29:19
31:5 36:10
multifaceted
20:6 23:18
multiple 34:10
49:13 81:4
municipal
20:23 29:20
30:10
municipalities
21:4 54:4

n

n 2:1 3:1
naacp 6:6 17:5
40:5 41:9,25
nader 52:16,18
name 8:2 25:12
33:1 38:4
39:16 48:2
54:10,20 55:1
58:21 61:14
68:11 73:22
names 36:1
39:4 43:13
narrow 27:6
national 35:13
nature 49:14
nearly 11:11
20:24 49:7
neatly 35:14
necessary 29:6
75:23
need 7:18 12:21
17:23 23:16
24:19 38:3,15

44:1 65:15
66:3,4,17
needs 7:4 34:24
55:7 57:23
63:25 67:12
72:8
negatives 36:13
neighborhood
58:23,24 63:4
65:6 69:6
neighborhoods
66:10,18 68:24
69:8
neighbors 48:5
69:19
neither 82:10
83:7
network 49:21
never 48:22
new 3:25 4:6
5:5 6:11,25 7:1
7:4 9:1 10:18
10:25 11:6
12:14,15,21,25
13:13,23 15:1
16:6,11,18,21
17:6,7,14,21
21:3,9 25:19
29:19 31:18
32:7 33:2,5,11
34:11 35:4
39:19,25 40:1
44:14 46:12,17
46:19 47:10,12
47:14,21 48:8

49:22 50:3,7
50:11 55:3,4,8
55:8,13,14,18
55:24 56:10,12
57:1,4,9,24
58:1,3 59:1,2,8
59:9,12 60:4
60:12,15,22
61:5,18,22,23
67:9 74:23
75:23,24 76:12
78:12,18,19
80:10,23 82:19
news 39:18
newspaper
39:17
newspapers
35:25 38:18
nice 29:13
nine 27:8
ninety 57:9
non 18:16
25:18 27:12,18
34:1 37:13
51:9 59:4
70:18 73:12
nonpartisan
27:21 52:10
nonprofit
46:18 60:6,9
61:22 62:14
63:8
nonprofits 64:3
64:5

nonwhite 57:10
norms 48:16
notary 82:18
note 20:10 27:9
28:15 31:12
notice 37:3
november 9:9
26:23 27:17
31:2
number 3:24
18:25 44:5
53:3,9,15,18
64:20 68:23
69:25 70:2
numbered
29:20 36:10
numbers 13:20
29:5 41:4,19
42:11 43:1,3
45:21
numerous
26:14
ny 1:14
nyc 1:11 16:7
42:5 49:20
nye 80:4
nypd 69:17
73:15

---

o

o 3:1
obviously 9:13
50:10 51:8
occurs 33:15
offered 33:7

office 15:9
37:11 44:16,18
44:20 45:12
46:24 47:24
53:5,20,24
54:6 64:15
70:7,13,16
73:1,2
office's 64:11
officer 72:3
73:7,7 82:2
officers 43:9,12
43:17,18 68:21
68:23
offices 56:18
70:22
official 47:17
officials 55:6
oftentimes 7:12
65:13
oh 41:13 42:17
46:25 68:10
okay 4:17 5:2
8:14,20 10:1
16:2 25:6
31:12 39:8
46:2,8 50:19
50:21 54:23,25
61:12 72:3
76:20,23 80:7
old 48:10 63:7
oliver 4:23 5:3
5:10,16
once 27:14 35:9

ones 26:5 64:21
79:19,20
ongoing 72:2
online 37:3
79:4
op 40:22 41:25
42:20
open 18:12,14
18:19 20:3
30:12,22 34:1
34:22 53:19
opening 30:19
79:19
operate 32:11
62:18
operates 71:10
operating
25:24 26:9
27:25 48:16
70:13
opinion 71:3
72:15 77:21
opinions 68:18
77:17
opportunities
60:19
opportunity
6:21 7:1,13
21:13,15 22:20
23:25 25:14,15
32:24 47:13
50:8 55:1
56:24 57:2
58:9,21 61:13
77:17,21 79:6

opted 49:1
option 49:2
53:21 54:5
oranges 40:17
40:20
organization
42:17,17,18
46:18 58:25
61:17
organizations
16:15,19,19
35:25 38:17
42:3,21,22
57:10 62:2
66:24
organize 41:24
ought 35:19
outcome 82:15
83:12
outs 23:17
outside 11:19
23:23 72:1
outweigh 36:13
overall 60:14
oversight 75:5
overwhelming
20:14 22:2
47:7 74:10
own 21:6 79:10
owned 14:23

p

p 2:1,1 3:1
p.m. 1:8 81:7
package 35:15

page 42:4
48:15
paid 57:17
62:23 63:23
pandemic 63:9
paper 36:6
papers 76:5,17
paraphrasing
31:14
pardon 5:6
parent 39:17
40:2
parents 40:1
43:13
park 12:14
parks 12:15,21
14:15 15:1
part 5:8 7:16
8:3 12:9 13:24
19:11 23:12
31:15,16 38:2
52:2 55:17
57:12 74:6
partially 18:19
18:19
participants
79:17
participate
29:9 30:24
55:15
participating
80:1
participation
33:15 57:14,19
59:5,6

particular 11:4
19:24 39:6
66:18
particularly
14:15 65:12,25
66:1,22 67:23
parties 19:13
34:19 35:6
51:24 82:11,14
83:8,11
partisan 18:16
25:18 27:12,18
34:1 51:9 59:4
70:18 73:12
parts 66:11
party 18:6,10
18:17,21,23
19:3,9,14,15,16
30:18,23,25
33:16 34:2,4
34:15,18 35:2
35:5 36:5
38:20 39:4
51:19 52:15
party's 36:2
pass 35:11 37:2
passed 13:9
22:1 74:12
passes 29:2
passing 57:6
past 56:14
61:20 63:19
path 67:15
patient 50:25

pay 62:22
65:20
paying 62:21
payment 62:9
64:7
payments 63:3
63:11 64:5,6,9
64:9
pays 64:4
pedro 2:20
64:25 65:2
people 5:5 6:13
6:15 8:5,6
19:21 23:20
42:16 43:1,24
45:21 51:23
54:9,14 55:23
57:14 61:8
66:2 68:20
70:7,8,8 73:15
76:12 77:8,8
77:20 79:6,9
percent 13:17
20:24 24:21
41:5,7,9 43:4,5
49:6,7,9 53:24
57:9 59:23
62:3,13 65:10
percentage
43:3 56:7
percentiles
19:19
perfect 73:20
period 19:9
21:19 22:6

37:4
periodic 25:23
permission
12:21
perot 52:16,19
person 9:11
39:9,11 44:9
49:2 76:22
79:3
personal 33:5
46:23 71:18
personally
23:12 71:20
perspective
66:7
persuasions
33:19
pertains 65:24
67:8
petitions 54:14
ph 80:4
phi 17:3
phone 8:17,18
phrase 76:1
pick 12:16
piece 15:5 23:6
place 14:14
18:22 50:6
52:20 59:18
placed 21:25
places 17:18
20:15 31:21
planning 17:2
play 35:6

please 3:9 9:19
24:13 45:20
54:13 72:22
77:19 80:19
pleased 6:4
pleasure 3:3
22:23
plough 75:16
plus 59:23
podium 10:7
point 20:7 29:6
45:18
pointed 20:9
points 68:2
police 11:13
12:20 43:9,12
43:14,15,17,18
69:17 72:3
73:7
policies 57:12
policing 43:10
45:1
policy 23:22
25:13 27:20
37:12 58:25
61:15 63:14
political 27:24
31:16,17 33:15
33:18,21 35:20
42:1 48:16
74:3 75:9
politically 75:8
politico 40:9,10
polled 18:1

polling 17:20
18:22 19:5
33:17 58:2
polls 49:23
popko 1:19
82:2,17
popular 75:12
populations
59:6
portion 10:4
13:10
pose 70:5
position 13:6
17:14 31:5
42:14 44:21
45:9 46:15
71:23
positive 36:9
47:16
positives 36:13
possible 11:5
possibly 48:12
post 37:14
44:14
potent 79:8
potential 63:5
potentially
65:22
power 70:10
74:11,23,25
75:1 76:6
powered 75:3
powerful 73:24
75:3

powers 70:10	18:13,14,14,15	61:25 62:7	**pronouncing**
practice 57:12	18:16,16,19,19	63:15 65:11	54:20
74:19 76:3	18:20,22 19:3	71:16 79:25	**properly** 12:12
practices 57:4	19:14,17,23	**processes** 28:8	30:13 67:15
precipitous	20:12 30:18,20	63:22 64:18	**property** 11:19
22:17	30:22,25 33:11	**procured** 63:19	12:1 14:23
predecessor	33:16 34:1	**procurement**	15:17
47:6	41:6 43:4 49:5	36:22 37:12	**proportion**
preferences	49:7 52:5	60:13 63:22	34:19
35:7 36:4	56:12 59:18,19	64:12,18	**proportional**
preferred	**prime** 41:21	**procurements**	34:13,16 50:23
38:10 39:6	42:13 59:7	37:8	51:9,15
preliminary	61:25	**procures** 62:12	**proposal** 21:21
33:6	**primes** 75:13	**procuring** 37:9	27:6,17
prepare 49:19	**printed** 38:9	**produce** 29:23	**proposals** 9:6
prepared 49:23	39:3	**produces** 34:10	26:22 27:5
83:3	**prior** 10:19	51:13	28:18,20 37:19
preparedness	52:1 82:5	**productive**	61:4 62:6
42:8	**priority** 77:3	22:13 23:15	72:14
presented 22:7	**prisoners** 75:8	24:2	**proposed** 28:5
78:21	**privilege** 78:8	**professional**	29:4 31:3
presently 74:1	**problem** 52:2	46:22	36:24 75:11,14
president 3:8	54:8	**profound** 21:12	**protect** 69:4
6:6 44:20 74:2	**problems** 62:25	**program** 11:8	**protective**
pressure 26:21	**procedure** 64:7	58:5	19:13
pretty 26:24	**proceeding**	**programmatic**	**proud** 7:16
prevent 28:8	83:4	64:18	77:13,19
preventing	**proceedings**	**programs**	**proven** 30:11
67:18	82:3,4,6,8 83:6	61:23 62:8,18	**provide** 17:18
primaries	**process** 9:5	63:1,6	17:19 38:9
17:23 19:7,12	26:6,12 28:3	**promote** 33:21	**provided** 56:23
19:21 20:3	29:7,9 53:19	60:3,22	63:24
30:10 33:14	55:17 56:25	**promoting**	**providers** 55:5
primary 17:13	57:20 58:4	30:12	60:6,9,15
17:15,16 18:11	60:6,10,13,14		61:18,22 62:1

62:16,21,25
63:22
providing 57:1
58:2
provision 75:11
provisions
75:13
public 1:1 3:13
3:15 4:2,24
8:21 9:4,10,16
25:13 26:12,12
26:14 28:24
29:8 31:25
32:14,15 36:23
37:3,15 44:4,8
44:13,16,18,19
44:19,22,24
45:2,9,11
46:23 69:14,15
69:25 70:2,6,9
70:15 72:25
74:3 80:14
82:18
public's 25:25
29:12
publisher
39:18,18
pure 74:15
put 11:25 27:16
41:12,23 45:7
53:23 61:4
62:21 73:1
75:24
puts 73:6

putting 7:11
8:7 11:9 24:8
37:6 70:15

q

qualified 82:7
quality 10:24
12:25 14:10
15:18 66:10
68:24
queens 14:9
17:3 39:20
43:25
question 9:7
20:4 21:6,13
26:21 38:8
70:6
questioning
70:12
questions 9:8
15:21 24:13
27:2 31:11
37:22 46:2
50:15 54:18
58:14,14
quick 7:25 31:7
80:8
quite 55:19
quotes 76:17

r

r 2:1 3:1 57:5
race 39:6 48:14
49:11
races 48:18
49:1

racial 26:25
29:22
rafael 2:10 10:3
raised 14:7
ralph 52:16
ran 22:5 44:6
randomly
69:21,22,23,24
ranged 16:18
ranges 17:2
rank 16:6
46:17 48:20,25
49:20 52:5
ranked 16:12
16:14,16,17,23
17:8 20:8,9,13
20:15 21:25
23:1 24:8 30:8
30:9 33:10,20
34:5,10,17
40:11,14 41:13
41:14,22,24
42:4,9,14,23
46:19,24 47:8
47:14 48:9,14
48:16,23 49:4
49:6,10,25
51:14,25 52:8
52:12,20 54:12
59:8,15,20
61:1,11 70:18
70:20 71:1
73:12
ranking 49:9

rankings 49:8
rapidly 69:6
rate 20:18,23
56:19,20
rather 52:7
57:1
rcv 49:11,14
50:10 59:10,24
reach 38:24
59:2
read 32:3 36:7
47:1 71:8 78:4
78:9 80:21
ready 10:12
reaffirm 30:9
real 41:11
57:20 77:3
reality 13:21
39:2 57:12
60:8 74:22
75:4,7
really 4:14
16:18 17:1,8
21:1,17,19
23:16,24,25
24:4,19,23,25
35:12,16 45:10
52:13,18,20
64:15 66:16,20
67:19,22,24
69:2,6 78:14
80:22
reason 44:22
45:10 70:21
71:6

reasonable 20:14 37:16

receive 34:19 65:13 66:3

received 37:15

receiving 60:15

recent 59:17,22

recently 13:9 44:15 65:9

recommend 22:2 26:18 28:16,21 33:22 35:1,22 36:22 64:7

recommendat... 27:22 28:12 29:17 36:9 63:25 64:11

recommendat... 9:2 26:3,4 29:16 33:7 47:4 51:19 64:21 65:10 67:5

recommended 22:9 26:19 76:13

recommending 8:24

recommends 60:4

record 41:23 82:9 83:5

recorded 82:6

recording 82:8 83:4

records 43:18

recurring 80:11

reduce 29:22

reduced 82:6

reducing 53:15

referendum 28:22

referring 27:21

reflect 29:1 45:23 47:21 49:13 72:15

reflected 35:20

reflects 46:21

reform 3:23 17:11,13,15,17 18:12 19:17 21:10 23:4,10 23:12 24:10 30:1,19 31:3 35:15,21 36:14 40:8 47:16 69:18

reforming 25:19

reforms 33:19 36:21

regarding 65:10 68:18 71:8

regardless 30:23 34:2,4

register 18:21 19:8 63:12

registered 18:23 30:24,25 34:2 40:3 55:23 56:10 62:15,23

registration 17:24 20:16 35:5 56:16 58:7 62:9 63:18 64:1,10

regularly 63:16

regulations 67:16

reimagine 47:14

reimbursement 65:14

reiterate 31:4 33:7 80:17

rejected 56:5,8 56:22

rejects 57:1

related 26:5 27:23 29:16,17 37:10 66:20 82:11 83:7

relative 82:13 83:10

relatively 20:6 22:6

reliably 20:7

rely 49:15

remains 33:13 50:11

remember 49:1

remove 24:4

repeal 47:8 61:4

repealing 36:22

repeat 65:15

replace 37:2

report 28:19 30:6 62:11 63:16

reported 1:19 19:25

represent 59:1

representation 34:13,17 50:24 51:10,15 60:1

representative 47:18

representing 61:17

represents 10:4 40:25 65:5

republican 42:2 53:5

request 30:5 56:4 62:6

requests 56:7 56:18 58:7

require 21:7 30:4 36:11 37:9 63:14

required 19:8 28:23 37:14

53:3

requirement
36:23 64:7

requirements
28:14

requires 21:23
29:2 37:12

requiring
28:16 58:4

rescinding 45:8

research 33:2
38:25 61:15

reshape 47:3

resident 68:11

residents 6:24
14:11 21:9
62:24

resource 69:12

resources
63:22 69:4

respect 74:4

respectfully
33:22 37:5

respective
75:13

responsibilities
64:14

responsibility
3:21 12:15
33:8 56:25
57:7 60:3,3,23
66:8 75:17

responsible
57:18 64:8
67:13,21

responsive 60:7
67:7

rest 17:9

result 56:18
63:3

resulted 42:7

resulting 63:22

results 50:2
59:21

retain 55:12

return 56:19

returned 56:1

revenue 54:3

revenues 62:3

reverse 44:6

review 1:1 8:23
26:11,17 37:16

reviewed 29:4

reviewing 8:23
9:1

reviews 25:23

revise 7:3

revised 11:3

revising 60:12

revision 3:14
8:3 11:1,24
21:24 22:3,4
22:10 26:2
28:4,4,7,14,19
29:7 30:11
32:12,13,14,23
38:6 47:2
57:22 70:4
73:21 74:9

revision's
28:17

revisions 12:3
28:8 29:14
32:11 76:14

rewards 63:18

rhetoric 69:16

rich 36:2

richness 35:19

right 3:12 4:8
5:22,25 10:7
10:14 12:14
14:24 35:13
38:19 45:17
51:20 53:12,17
55:12 65:16
66:4 67:16
71:24 77:22

rights 57:6

rikers 55:11,24
56:9,20

risks 62:17

robert 52:16

robust 3:22

roker 4:19 5:4

role 35:6 39:24
40:2 43:23

roles 39:24

roosevelt 75:12

ross 52:16

round 34:7

rounds 78:14

routinely 37:13

rowe 2:7 3:11
4:10 7:7,8

37:24 39:7
77:11

roxanne 2:21
68:7,11

ruben 74:2,6
78:10

rule 37:12

run 18:12,15
19:15 48:12
53:4,7,20 54:6
57:17

running 35:8
36:5 53:20
54:9

rushed 21:24
27:7 28:2

s

s 2:1 3:1

safe 43:17
44:25 77:23

safely 69:20

safety 4:2
39:24,25 44:5
44:8,13,13,13
45:1 69:14,15
69:25 80:14

salamanca 2:10
10:3,10,14
13:7 14:6,16
14:24 15:24

salaries 72:10

salary 53:24

sanitation 11:7
11:13,17,20,21
11:25 12:19,20

12:23 14:21
15:2,10,11,16
sanitation's
11:8,11,23
sanitations
11:9
satisfaction
33:20
saturday 56:14
savings 29:24
saw 59:21
saying 53:12
says 72:3 74:17
scale 30:15
school 39:25
44:12,13,25
schools 35:18
44:25
scissura 1:6 2:3
3:2,12 4:5,25
5:8,15,19 6:17
7:6,21 8:12
10:12 13:2
14:3,17 15:19
16:1 22:22
24:12 25:4
31:9 32:18,21
32:22 36:17
37:21 39:8,15
45:14 46:1,9
53:1 58:16,19
60:25 64:24
68:6,9,12,15
72:18,21 73:10
73:18 74:5

76:16 77:10,24
78:23 79:13
80:3 81:5
scope 27:6
scroll 47:1
scrutiny 53:16
sealed 37:1
seat 48:5
seats 34:19
second 3:4,16
17:24 34:8
secondly 70:17
section 36:23
37:8 57:22
see 6:4 10:13
10:14 12:9
14:20 18:4,7,8
19:7,16,24
20:19 22:23
38:20 42:5
45:22 46:6
51:16 54:10
77:16 78:6
80:25
seeking 53:25
seeks 57:13
seem 16:12
31:22,25
seen 14:18
20:13 24:2
28:10,10,11
50:6 51:12
54:6
select 34:6

sends 41:10
senior 58:22
seniors 41:22
41:22 42:13
sense 8:17
10:24 38:12,13
44:7
sent 27:2 28:22
separate 21:24
series 9:15
60:20
serious 29:7
54:9
servant 74:3
serve 6:20,22
9:1 59:14 60:8
70:25 73:3
served 4:9
10:19 53:1
74:3
serves 66:11
service 11:4,4
24:7 55:5
62:14
services 12:5
60:5,16 61:16
61:17,21,22
62:1,13,19
63:5,5,24
64:15 66:3
serving 10:18
55:9
sessions 9:17
set 9:12 28:6
32:15 60:12

62:8 63:14
settlement 59:1
59:4,13 60:7
seven 31:24
37:3,17
seventh 39:22
several 20:12
26:20 30:15
51:2,2 61:20
share 66:13
shared 65:9
shares 34:20
sharing 66:8
sheltering 63:7
short 19:9
21:20 22:6,14
26:9 27:14,15
27:16 31:22,25
50:6
shorter 21:18
27:10
shortly 34:22
shot 45:5
shoulders
78:11
shoutout 3:7
show 6:9 18:21
showed 19:5
59:23 62:11
showing 75:4
shown 26:16
39:1 54:8
shows 19:1,1
55:19

side 5:7,11
sign 37:4
signal 36:2,3
  38:10,12,21
signature 82:16
  83:14
signatures 53:3
  53:6,8,10,15,16
  53:18,22 54:1
  54:5
significant
  21:21 22:11
  29:23 59:16
  60:9 65:11
significantly
  20:18 56:20
signing 62:17
silos 67:3
similar 20:14
  59:17
similarly 28:1
  28:21
simmons 4:23
  5:3,10,16
simple 74:19
simply 44:7
  49:15
single 34:6,9
  35:14 51:20
sit 7:10 73:23
  77:13
sites 55:13 58:2
sitting 6:5,8
situation 67:22

six 13:8
skills 49:17
  82:10 83:6
slight 20:11
small 30:15
smashed 48:3
social 17:4
  58:25
society 55:3
solely 74:16
soliciting 9:2
solution 20:10
son 5:23
sorority 17:4
sorry 27:8
  29:16 30:18,25
  38:1 42:4
  44:21 46:25
  68:13,14
sort 17:11
  26:17 28:9
  31:6
sorted 62:20
south 10:16
  13:19,22 40:22
  42:19 65:7
  66:1,18
southeast 43:25
spaces 15:17
speak 8:16 9:21
  21:15 25:15
  33:4 42:24
  43:7,8 44:19
  45:2,3,4,5 50:9
  79:22,23

speaker 2:10
  2:11,12,13,14
  2:15,16,17,18
  2:19,20,21,22
  16:2 39:9 46:4
  46:4,12,15
  47:19 48:7,7,7
  50:14,16 51:24
  54:19 75:3
speakers 8:21
  51:2 76:20,21
  81:4
speaking 23:11
  31:15 44:8,9
  44:11
speaks 40:25
  45:6
special 30:15
  33:11 52:6
specific 66:5
specifically
  40:13 74:21
specifics 65:18
spoiler 48:2
  52:17,23
spoiling 48:13
spoke 40:13
sponsored
  44:24
spot 18:21
spread 9:19
  77:20
staff 4:13 53:11
  56:15 59:13
  62:17 72:6,6

staffer 74:4
stage 60:13
stakeholders
  29:9
stance 35:15
stand 78:11
standards
  25:21
standing 46:22
standpoint
  66:25
start 6:3 22:24
  26:5 64:5
  76:25
started 11:9
starters 52:14
starting 62:17
starts 3:4
state 18:17
  21:7 23:7 24:3
  25:20 29:1,2,3
  36:11 37:1
  53:13 56:20
  57:5 66:14
  82:19
statement 21:8
staten 39:19
  40:13 41:2
  44:1
states 54:4
status 30:23
stein 52:16
stephanie 2:8
  7:23 8:2

steps 63:17	**subgroups**	35:17 50:9	30:21,22 31:6
stop 15:6 68:18	34:14	60:4,11 67:14	32:11 34:12,25
stopping 14:14	**subjects** 3:25	74:11,18 76:5	48:10 49:3
stops 42:25	**submit** 26:22	**supported**	50:11 52:2,4
44:7,23	37:9 80:19	25:23 30:19	62:4 63:19
storms 61:24	**submitted** 9:23	59:11	**systems** 33:24
stottlemyer	32:6 56:4	**supporting**	34:3,17,21
2:17 54:19,21	**submitting**	49:12	36:22 61:6
54:23,25 55:2	53:22	**supports** 30:7	**t**
strain 63:2	**subsequently**	**supposed** 73:6	
street 1:12 43:8	20:23	**sure** 7:3 11:4	**table** 25:2 48:5
65:6,6 67:11	**success** 4:15	14:19 42:10	50:5
67:24	16:13 17:10	49:22 53:14	**take** 3:18 9:6
streets 11:10,18	48:10 59:7,16	58:11 65:22	9:13 11:7
strengthen	**successes** 75:21	66:7 67:2,6	24:24 29:14
29:10,12 58:3	**successful**	71:7 80:6	31:14 53:6,7
stripping 74:24	16:11 40:11	**surprise** 19:4	62:16,21 75:7
strong 21:8	41:14	**surprised**	**taken** 6:11
50:9 75:22	**successfully**	19:10	14:14 31:7
76:5	16:24 22:19	**surprisingly**	82:3,12 83:9
stronger 75:16	**suggest** 21:21	19:13	**talk** 16:7,10
strongly 35:1	37:5,8 53:19	**surveillance**	17:12 20:3
struggle 55:14	64:2	12:17	23:18 39:23
stuck 69:5	**suggestion**	**surveys** 59:23	40:6 41:6
studied 50:1	54:15	**susan** 2:11 16:3	44:12
study 20:20	**suited** 34:23	16:5 22:22	**talked** 17:25
22:9,17 50:2	**summarily**	25:6 30:3 32:1	**talking** 40:17
studying 65:24	56:25	78:6	41:17 43:22
66:13	**summary** 62:11	**sustainable**	47:1 59:13
stuy 39:20	**summer** 26:7	67:19	72:17
40:23 42:20	27:15	**switching** 51:9	**talks** 52:14
43:12	**support** 16:16	52:2	**tap** 65:8,15
stv 34:9	16:25 17:20	**sworn** 82:5	**task** 6:11 21:18
suarez 2:20	24:11 29:19	**system** 16:22	25:17
64:25 65:1,2	30:9 31:6	18:20,24 30:17	**tasked** 8:23
			56:16

taxpayers 70:14 77:22

team 3:8 4:24

technical 8:15

tell 19:23 31:22 43:9,13 51:8 76:16

ten 13:17 70:4

term 75:1

terminates 72:5

terminating 45:9

terms 51:19,21 67:5,12

terrible 24:22

tested 30:1

testified 28:2 40:12 61:19

testify 32:24 55:1 58:21 61:14 64:23 76:22 79:18

testifying 82:5

testimonies 32:2

testimony 9:14 9:23 14:7 17:19 24:15 28:15 29:13 32:5 37:18,25 46:21 75:20,22 79:5,7 80:10 80:16,20

thank 3:9 4:12 4:18,21,22,22

4:25 5:15,16 5:19 6:7,19 7:5 7:6,11,19,21 8:1,7,10,11,12 8:13 10:6 14:3 14:5,15,16 15:19,23,24 16:1,4,22 22:20,22 24:14 25:3,4,6,14 26:13 31:8,9 32:18,20,23 36:19 37:20,21 37:24 38:7 39:7,8 45:25 46:1,9 50:8,11 50:13,20,21 54:16,17,25 58:13,14,16,20 60:24,25 61:13 64:22,24 68:4 68:6 73:10,17 73:18,21 76:14 76:18,18 77:1 77:2,8,10,11,22 77:24 78:19,21 78:23,23 79:2 79:5,12,13,17 80:1,1,3,24,25 81:1,5

thanking 77:12

thanks 58:12 65:1

thea 1:19 82:2 82:17

theory 76:3

thing 23:13 40:6 44:5,12 51:1,11 52:24 53:13 72:12

things 20:6 23:8 30:2 32:17 39:5 53:1,8 61:4 62:19 65:7 71:22 78:3 80:15

think 4:16 6:10 6:23 10:8,24 11:23 12:24 14:7,11,17 17:9,15,22 18:2 19:4,20 20:3,25 21:13 22:12 23:3,15 24:1,4,8,17,20 24:23 26:9 28:6 29:3,9 31:6 32:1 39:2 40:8 44:15 51:15,19,21 53:17 54:22 61:2 63:13 65:15,20,21 66:2,4 67:12 70:17 71:20,22 72:12 80:9,11 80:15,20 81:3

thinking 80:23

third 9:15 20:2 23:9 27:22 52:15 65:2,4 68:3

thorough 21:23 26:11

thought 22:8

thoughtful 18:8

thoughts 7:2 24:16 76:24 79:11

thousand 36:25

three 3:17 15:8 33:23 40:8 78:9,14

thrilled 3:13 74:6

thrive 61:24

thrown 14:18

thursday 4:1 33:7 80:12 81:1

ticketing 11:13

time 6:12 13:15 15:22 19:9 21:18,20 22:5 22:6,13 23:16 25:16,16 26:10 27:10,14,16,18 28:9 29:6,8 32:15 40:2 41:23 47:24 50:6,12 53:4 64:23 68:5 69:24 76:15

78:20 79:10,10
80:2
timeframe
22:15 31:23
37:17 63:11
timeframes
28:14 29:4,10
60:12 63:20
timeline 27:7
28:1 31:8
timelines 27:23
28:7 29:15
63:15
timely 64:1
times 11:12
today 3:22 4:7
4:20 5:17 9:10
10:22 11:11
14:13 24:19
25:2,15 26:5
32:25 40:10
46:16 55:1,11
64:23 77:5
79:5
today's 40:7
together 7:12
8:8 31:20
43:16 59:1
told 19:18
48:11 69:9
tonight 3:9
9:15 50:12
61:2,14 78:3
78:21 79:1
80:19

took 59:18
tool 71:12,12
tools 59:4 69:4
top 30:20 31:1
34:2 75:2
topic 20:2
topics 3:18
16:8
torres 2:22
73:19,20,23
74:8
total 62:13
totally 52:6
touch 16:8
towards 51:23
79:24
town 5:9,11
track 43:19
tracked 78:4
train 15:2
transcriber
83:1
transcript 83:3
83:5
transcriptionist
82:7
transferable
34:9 51:20
transferred
61:21
transparency
26:15 37:16
62:5
trash 12:10,11

tremendous
66:9
triple 41:21
42:12
true 82:9 83:5
truly 45:22
47:21
trust 17:21
29:12
try 8:16 23:18
69:16
trying 12:6
19:21 28:25
46:25
turn 23:20
48:11,15 56:13
76:23
turning 49:15
68:24
turnout 20:5,5
20:8,10,12,18
20:23 21:2
24:16,20,25
29:18,21 30:2
33:13,22 40:12
40:15 41:1,3
41:11,15 42:12
43:3 49:5 51:5
51:7,11,13
59:19 71:4
twenty 27:8
twice 28:23
two 3:15 11:9
21:24 22:11
26:7,17 29:2

29:11 30:21
31:1 33:9
39:23 46:20
47:15 48:11,13
49:6,10 51:17
57:9 61:3 69:7
73:4
type 34:20,22
types 17:16
18:11
typewriting
82:7
typically 11:23

u

ultimately
47:17 55:25
62:24
unable 9:14
75:9
unaffiliated
17:21,25 18:1
18:3,4 19:2,6
19:11,18 31:1
35:4
unbelievable
69:8 71:18
under 26:8,21
28:10 30:21
47:15 48:6,10
52:3 55:18
undercurrents
73:24
underfunding
63:10

underneath 15:1,2	**unproductive** 76:8	**vegas** 20:20,23	28:23,25 34:3
underreprese... 59:6	**unproven** 51:22	**vehicle** 15:15	34:9,20 43:6
underserved 66:22	**unsure** 53:11	**vehicles** 11:14	46:17 48:14,23
understand 14:20 16:21	**unusually** 21:20	**vending** 67:11	48:24 49:2,12
38:2,5 41:22	**uplift** 60:11	**vendors** 62:21	49:20 51:20
42:14,16 49:11	**upside** 68:25	67:14,24	52:5 55:3,11
undo 47:7	**urge** 12:2 52:7	**verbal** 62:19	55:12,23,25
undue 69:2	52:9,11	**versus** 54:9	56:11,11 74:12
unequivocal 47:5	**use** 10:3 11:20	**vibrant** 47:22	**voted** 41:13
unfair 48:15	13:6,8 14:2	**vice** 2:6 4:8	43:1 45:21,23
unfortunately 26:10	22:13 30:9	**victims** 73:16	61:8 74:10
unfulfilled 56:19	34:5,17 35:16	**videoconfere...** 2:9	**voter** 16:17
unh 58:25	66:20 67:6	**violated** 79:25	19:1 20:5,5,8
59:10 60:4,11	**used** 11:5 18:24	**violation** 57:4	20:16 24:16,20
60:17	34:11 49:8	**virtual** 42:5	24:25 29:21
unilateral 74:25	**useful** 30:12	**visit** 80:13	30:24 35:2
union 25:13,18	**uses** 33:25	**viverito** 2:15	40:3,12,14
40:1	**using** 59:24	39:12 46:5,7	41:1,3,11,11,15
united 58:23,24	**usually** 72:15	46:10,12 51:24	42:12 51:5,6
units 13:16	**v**	**voice** 6:12 7:17	51:11,13 52:4
university 9:19	**valid** 56:4	8:5 16:12,24	**voter's** 58:11
unlicensed 67:11,14	**validates** 50:4	39:19,19,20,20	**voters** 9:7
unmet 55:7	**value** 62:13	39:20,21 48:21	16:15,20,21,24
unnecessary 76:7	**values** 35:7	58:11 77:8,17	17:6,21,25
	36:4 49:12	77:21	18:1,3,4,20
	vanessa 3:8,9	**voiceless** 7:17	19:6,11,18
	varieties 34:20	**voices** 7:13,14	21:10,14 22:1
	variety 21:20	8:9 16:23	23:18,19 24:5
	34:9	55:15 79:20,21	24:9 30:23
	various 29:8	**volume** 67:18	31:1 33:18
	33:2 35:9,10	67:24	34:2,5 35:7,23
		vote 16:7 18:22	36:4 37:6
		19:3,7,12,25	38:11,12,21
		20:1 21:22	39:3 41:8,21
			42:13 43:3,5

46:20 47:8,13
47:16 48:19,20
48:21 49:6,8
49:10,11,22
54:6 55:7
56:23 57:2
58:6,8 59:24
75:16
votes 18:10
34:7,18 47:14
voting 16:12,14
16:16,18,24
17:8 19:22
20:9,9,13,15
21:25 23:1
24:9 30:8,10
33:10,21,25
34:6,10,18
38:4 40:11,14
41:13,14,15,23
41:25 42:4,9
42:15,23 46:19
46:24 47:9,15
48:9,14,16,23
49:4 50:1
51:14,25 52:8
52:12,15,18,19
52:19,20,21
54:12 55:13,17
56:25 57:5,25
59:8,15,21
61:2,11 70:19
71:2,4,4 73:12
79:24

w

wait 48:10 70:5
waiting 63:23
walk 69:20
walks 59:2
wall 72:13
want 3:7 4:12
5:11 7:11 8:8,8
10:15 14:19
18:5,6 19:8
21:9,16 23:6
27:25 30:9
31:4,12 32:6
35:4 37:25
39:23 40:6
41:12 42:24
43:9,10,11,14
43:14,15,15,17
44:1,12 47:4
48:25 49:25
51:25 61:3,9
65:8,17 68:3
69:1,2,18,19
70:6 75:19
77:16 79:4,9
79:25 80:4
wanted 19:6,7
53:4,6 60:11
65:7,14 66:19
68:17 79:17,18
wants 53:20
wasting 48:22
watch 77:14
way 14:18 15:7
21:22 52:5,6

74:5
ways 11:2
14:13 60:22
we've 7:22 10:6
13:9,25 14:17
20:13 24:2
26:1 28:10,10
28:11 50:5
51:12 78:7
weaken 74:22
76:6
weakened 75:8
weather 61:24
website 9:22
37:15 42:3
wednesday
56:10
week 3:20 4:1
11:15 15:15
31:24 40:9
61:2
weeks 40:8
78:9
weinberg 2:12
16:3 25:8,11
25:12 32:8,20
welcome 5:4,12
9:10 10:2,15
10:16 15:24
went 17:25
20:11 41:4,19
44:18 56:9
wheelbarrow
12:10

wheelhouse
11:24
whim 71:24
whims 72:7
wide 17:1
21:20 24:11
30:14 40:16
49:21 56:20
widespread
55:20
win 46:21
winner 19:17
34:6
winners 34:10
wisely 53:9
wish 73:25 75:5
76:22
wishes 9:21
74:22
withstood
53:16
witness 82:4
woman 48:6
women 17:6
46:23 47:23
48:1,4,4,12,13
48:17,18 50:4
70:24 71:2
78:11
word 7:19 9:19
77:20
words 6:2 8:22
78:24
work 4:21 6:25
8:25 11:25

13:9 16:20
17:17 26:20
27:1 31:18
47:6,11,20
49:18 52:25
59:3 67:1 78:2
78:7,9
working 4:14
31:24 43:16
60:4,21 67:3
works 16:22
47:11
workshops
41:25 42:5
59:11
world 31:17
worry 48:22
worse 48:11
74:24
worst 51:22
wrap 36:18
45:15,16 72:21
72:23 80:7
wrinkle 36:13
write 33:2
writing 9:23
written 17:19
28:15 29:13
34:21 37:18
wrote 76:4
www.nyc.gov
9:22

y

yeah 14:17
68:16
year 27:2,3
36:10 53:9
56:3 59:3
62:10,15 63:6
63:7,8
years 10:19,21
11:9 13:5,8,18
15:9 18:25
20:22 24:4
26:2 29:20
30:21 33:9
49:5 60:23
63:23 69:7
70:4 73:4 78:7
yesterday
44:15
york 5:5 6:25
7:4 10:18,25
12:14,15,21
13:1,13 15:1
16:6,11,18,21
17:6,7,14,21
21:4,9 25:19
29:19 33:3,11
34:11 39:19,25
40:1 44:14
46:13,17,19
47:14,21 48:8
50:3,7,11 55:8
55:8,13,18
56:12 57:5,9
58:1,3 59:1,8,9

60:12 61:18
74:23 75:23,24
76:12 78:18
82:19
york's 47:10
55:3
yorker 33:5
49:22 78:19
yorkers 3:25
4:6 6:11 7:1
9:1 11:6 13:24
31:18 32:7
35:4 47:12
55:5,14,24
56:10 57:2,24
59:2,12 60:4
60:15 61:5,22
61:24 67:9
78:12 80:23
young 74:3
79:22

z

zero 56:11
zeta 17:3,3
zip 66:5
zoning 35:15
zoom 4:10,16
9:11,12,13
10:9 39:13
46:3,4 76:21
79:14 80:5,18
zooms 39:10