

NYC Charter Revision Commission

Moderated by Chair Richard R. Buery, Jr.

Monday, July 7, 2025

5:05 p.m.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,

Langston Hughes Auditorium

515 Malcolm X Boulevard

New York, NY 10037

Reported by: Kiyziah Vaughn

JOB NO.: 7363263

A P P E A R A N C E S

List of Attendees:

Sharon Greenberger, Vice Chair

Leila Bozorg, Secretary

Grace C. Bonilla, Commissioner

Shams DaBaron, Commissioner

Anita Laremont, Commissioner

Dr. Lisette Nieves, Commissioner

Anthony Richardson, Commissioner

Julie Samuels, Commissioner

Diane Savino, Commissioner

Carl Weisbrod, Commissioner

Valerie White, Commissioner

Kathryn Wylde, Commissioner

Brad Lander, New York City Comptroller

Joann Ariola, NYC Council Member, District 32

Frank Morano, NYC Council Member, District 51

Selvena Brooks-Powers, NYC Council Member, District 31

Jumaane Williams, NYC Public Advocate

Ahmed Tigani, Commissioner, NYC Department of Housing  
Preservation & Development

Michael Sandler, Associate Commissioner, NYC  
Department of Housing Preservation & Development

Sophie Sharps, Associate Director of Policy, NYC  
Campaign Finance Board

A P P E A R A N C E S (Cont'd)

List of Attendees (Cont'd):

Candis Tall, Executive Vice President and Political  
Director, SEIU Local 32BJ

Kyron Banks, Deputy Political Director, SEIU Local  
32BJ

Jim Walden, NYC Mayoral Candidate

Michael Piccirillo, Director of Area Standards, New  
York City District Council of Carpenters

Jasmine Gripper, Co-Director, New York Working  
Families Party

Kai Rosenthal, Co-President, League of Women Voters of  
the City of New York

Annemarie Gray, Executive Director, Open New York

Samir Lavingia, Second Vice Chair, Community Board 5

Jessie Fields, M.D., Board Member, Open Primaries

Grace Rauh, Executive Director, Citizens Union

Tricia Thompson, Member, Communication Workers of  
America

Karen Wharton, Political Organizer

Barika Williams, Executive Director, Association for  
Neighborhood & Housing Development

Jerrod Delaine, CEO, The Delaine Companies

Oscar Pocasangre, Senior Data Analyst, New America

Nia Alvarez-Mapp, Lead Organizer, Rank the Vote NYC

1                   A P P E A R A N C E S (Cont'd)

2   List of Attendees (Cont'd):

3   Gale O'Dell

4   Fabien Levy, Deputy Mayor for Comms, NYC Mayor

5   John Ketcham, Director of Cities, Manhattan Institute

6   Gale Brewer, NYC Council Member, District 6

7   Jeremy Joseph, Data Director, New York Civic

8   Engagement Table

9   Asher Ross, Senior Strategist, New York Immigration  
10   Coalition

11   Leon Bell, Public Policy Director, New York State  
12   Nurses Association

13   Emily Skydel, Hudson Valley Organizer, Food & Water  
14   Watch

15   Zakiyah Shaakir-Ansari, Co-Executive Director,  
16   Alliance for Quality Education

17   Susan Lerner, Executive Director, Common Cause/New  
18   York

19   Elias, Member of the Public

20   Johana Pulgarin, District Manager, Community Board 1  
21   Brooklyn

22   Catherine Du, Student, Hunter College High School

23   Susan Stetzer, District Manager, Manhattan Community  
24   Board 3

25

A P P E A R A N C E S (Cont'd)

List of Attendees (Cont'd):

Heather Beers-Dimitriadis, Chair, Queens Community  
Board 6

Alan Cox, Member of the Public

Angelo Pis-Dudot, Legal Fellow, Local Progress

Torsha Childs, Member of the Public

Howard Edelbaum, Member of the Public

Gia Lowe, Member of the Public

Rafael Moure-Punnett, District Manager, Bronx  
Community Board 6

Danny Battista, Member of the Public

Cheryl Williams, Member of the Public

Neferkara Aaron, Member of the Public

Yvonne Lee, Member of the Public

David Green, Statewide Organizing Director, Unite NY

Jeffrey Aron, Member of the Public

Edward Brady, Member of the Public

Richard Ronner, Member of the Public

Maria Danzilo, Executive Director, One City Rising

Sidharth Ghoshal, Member of the Public

Keanu Arpels-Josiah, Organizer, Fridays for Future NYC

Shane Moynihan, Co-Founder, New Leaf Democrats

Julien Segura, Political Activist/Political Strategist

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

2 CHAIR BUERY: Welcome to this public  
3 hearing of the Charter Revision Commission. My name  
4 is Richard Buery. I have the honor of serving as the  
5 Chair of the Commission. I want to thank you all for  
6 joining us this evening.

7 As everyone knows, our mission as a  
8 commission is to look at ways to make city government  
9 more transparent, more responsive, more effective,  
10 with a particular focus on the city's housing crisis.

11 We're also taking a close look at the  
12 problem of chronically low voter turnout in city  
13 elections. We, as a city, despite the vibrancy of our  
14 city, suffer from consistently low turnout for local  
15 elections and so that's also something that we've  
16 begun to tackle in our review.

17 We have the responsibility to review  
18 the entire charter and suggest changes for voters'  
19 consideration, but ultimately, those are only  
20 recommendations. Only if the voters agree to those  
21 changes at an election would any changes to the city  
22 charter go into effect.

23 To that end, last week, we released our  
24 interim report with five potential proposals to reform  
25 the city charter, plus one which we continue to

1 consider.

2 Those reforms are fast tracking  
3 affordable housing development, a new simplified land  
4 use review procedure for modest housing and climate  
5 infrastructure projects, an appeals board for land use  
6 proposals that would replace the mayor's veto,  
7 modernizing the city map, and shifting local elections  
8 to even numbered years.

9 We also continue to consider whether to  
10 shift to open primaries, as I know everyone here is  
11 aware.

12 The interim report can be  
13 found -- along with the modified charter text, can all  
14 be found on our website at [nyc.gov/charter](http://nyc.gov/charter). I know  
15 that I speak for my fellow commissioners that it has  
16 been an honor to do this work.

17 We've been committed to hearing from a  
18 broad spectrum of New Yorkers throughout this process  
19 from every borough, including nine hearings prior to  
20 this one and hundreds of submitted written testimony,  
21 and those testimony, both written and oral, have  
22 really driven what we are considering.

23 The important thing, also, I want to  
24 mention -- to remind everyone: This is an independent  
25 commission. In making our recommendation to the

1 city's voters, we are bound only by our judgment and  
2 by our values. We have really striven to pursue ideas  
3 regardless of who propose them, regardless of who  
4 supports them, and regardless who opposes them.

5 Joining me in this task are my 12  
6 fellow commissioners, our vice chair, Sharon  
7 Greenberger, our secretary, Leila Bozorg, Grace  
8 Bonilla, who is in transit, Shams DaBaron, Anita  
9 Laremont, Dr. Lisette Nieves, Anthony Richardson,  
10 Julie Samuels, Senator Diane Savino, Carl Weisbrod,  
11 Valerie White, and Kathryn Wylde.

12 Testimony at this hearing is on any  
13 topic, so you're not limited to the topics I described  
14 before. And before we get started, I just want to say  
15 a few things about how this will unfold. Members of  
16 the public are asked to testify for no longer than  
17 three minutes.

18 We will call for testimony from three  
19 people at a time, followed by questions from the  
20 Commission. I'll ask commissioners to hold their  
21 question until an entire panel is finished. We have a  
22 full house tonight. I'm expecting lots of testimony,  
23 both in person and online, so I'm going to really work  
24 hard to keep us to our allotted time.

25 So I'm going to ask you to pace your



1 time. I don't want to interrupt or cut you off, but I  
2 will if we need to because I want to make sure that  
3 everybody has a chance to speak.

4 We are scheduled to go until 8 p.m. In  
5 the event that we don't get to hear someone's  
6 testimony, I want to remind you that you can also  
7 submit written testimony to the Commission by emailing  
8 chartertestimony@citycharter.nyc.gov. That is  
9 chartertestimony@citycharter.nyc.gov. You can also  
10 submit online on our website as well.

11 So before we begin with testimony, I  
12 would like to ask for a motion to approve the minutes  
13 from our June 23rd public hearing.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: I move --

15 CHAIR BUERY: Is there a second?

16 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Second.

17 CHAIR BUERY: Any discussion? All in  
18 favor say, "Aye." Any opposed or abstentions? All  
19 right. The minutes are adopted and with that, we will  
20 begin our testimony. Despite what I said before,  
21 we're going to start with a few invited guests,  
22 beginning with the New York City Comptroller, Brad  
23 Lander.

24 Welcome.

25 MR. LANDER: Thank you. Good evening,

1 Chair Buery and Vice Chair Greenberger and all the  
2 esteemed members of this commission and to the staff.  
3 I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak to you.

4 I come to you just days after the 2025  
5 Democratic primary for mayor in which, as you know, I  
6 was a candidate, and my testimony this evening is  
7 formed strongly by that race in two key ways.

8 First, from beginning to end, I focused  
9 aggressively on housing affordability, which has been  
10 the work of my whole career, as did all of the other  
11 candidates. New Yorkers are desperate for more  
12 affordable homes, so I am proud to be here tonight in  
13 support of proposals one through four.

14 And second, while the June election did  
15 not go exactly as I mapped it out, I am proud of the  
16 campaign that I ran. I ran as a Democrat in a  
17 Democratic primary. I lost fair and square. I'm  
18 grateful to have been a part of a history-making race  
19 that saw the highest turnout in a local primary  
20 election since 1989.

21 A diverse electorate of nearly 1  
22 million New Yorkers showed up. More than half a  
23 million voted for Zohran Mamdani, who I proudly cross  
24 endorsed, just like rank choice voting was meant to  
25 encourage. And many voters who had never cast a

1 ballot in a primary before turned up. Registration  
2 surged in the final days before the deadline.

3 We thoughtfully debated serious ideas  
4 about what sort of message and approach the Democratic  
5 Party candidate should take to govern our beloved city  
6 and run in the election in November. I lost. Andrew  
7 Cuomo lost. Zohran Mamdani won, and he'll be the  
8 Democratic nominee for mayor in November.

9 That's democracy as we have practiced  
10 it here for generations, but now it appears some  
11 people, for whom the race didn't go the way they  
12 wanted, want to change the rules. So I'm also here  
13 this evening to strongly urge this commission to leave  
14 its proposal to eliminate partisan primaries, like the  
15 one we literally just had, off the ballot.

16 And I'll summarize the rest of my  
17 testimony, which is here in writing, but first, I  
18 really think you did a great job on proposals one  
19 through four. I'm happy to talk about the details.

20 I think there's some questions that are  
21 worth digging in on about whether communities could  
22 get a chance to plan for their futures if they happen  
23 to be one of the 12 that have produced the fewest  
24 housing, but broadly, I think you did a great job.  
25 You were given a mission to address the critical

1 crisis of land use and affordability.

2 I think on those issues, this is the  
3 best Charter Revision Commission that we have had  
4 since 1989, and I give you your props for it. And I  
5 also think proposal five is a perfectly thoughtful and  
6 reasonable proposal to bring more voters out in  
7 primary election years.

8 But I would just strongly urge you a  
9 proposal to end party primaries of the sort we just  
10 literally had that New Yorkers have utilized for  
11 generations, just weeks after a historic race like  
12 that, is a big mistake.

13 You know, I think it will be viewed,  
14 whatever the intentions -- and I don't doubt the  
15 motivations of anyone on this panel -- as trying to  
16 overturn, essentially, an election we just had.

17 And I think the fact that some of the  
18 folks who were talking about spending money for this  
19 proposal are folks who spent money in Andrew Cuomo's  
20 Super PAC tells you the story that you need to know.

21 Democratic -- I mean, the political  
22 parties are not perfect, God knows, and I have spent a  
23 lot of my time fighting against them at the local, at  
24 the state, and at the national level, but they are how  
25 we do politics here.

1                   Community groups, labor unions,  
2   interest groups, people get engaged in party politics  
3   and try to put candidates forward and in the absence  
4   of it, you're not going to wind up with some  
5   beautiful, Athenian democracy with every single voter  
6   kind of, you know, making the decisions for  
7   themselves.

8                   It will be ripe for spending at  
9   unlimited levels. It will not produce better  
10  government.

11                  You have a chance at this moment to  
12   achieve an incredible mission that you were assigned  
13   to help New York City confront the affordability  
14   crisis and I strongly urge you to do it by using  
15   proposal six off the ballot and putting one to five  
16   there that I will wholeheartedly support and think can  
17   build a broad coalition for the future of the city we  
18   love. Thank you.

19                  CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much --

20                  UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: Thank you,  
21   Brad.

22                  CHAIR BUERY: Are there any questions  
23   for the Comptroller?

24                  COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Yes. Thank you.  
25   Good to see you, Mr. Comptroller.

1 MR. LANDER: You as well.

2 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: And I'm happy  
3 that you're in support of a lot of the proposals that  
4 the Charter Revision Commission put forward --

5 MR. LANDER: Five out of six.

6 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: I like that. On  
7 the sixth question, I just have a couple of questions.  
8 So you and I have been -- we're probably the only two  
9 people in this conversation right now that have  
10 actually had to run competitive primaries.

11 And what's happened in a city with five  
12 and half million registered voters, of which three and  
13 a half million are Democrats, yet only a million  
14 turned out to vote, you find yourself campaigning to a  
15 smaller and smaller group of people.

16 So is it not entirely possible that had  
17 the -- more voters been in this discussion, which  
18 would -- could potentially include all voters -- all  
19 the registered voters, you might have had a bigger  
20 shot in the primary? Do you think that's possible?

21 MR. LANDER: We don't know what would  
22 have happened if we didn't have political parties and  
23 how the world would work, but no. I mean, I think you  
24 could see in the ways that Assembly Member Mamdani  
25 appealed to a much broader group of people than in the

1 past, brought a whole set of new registrants in, many  
2 more than four years ago.

3 There are changes I would support, like  
4 I think in Albany, making it possible to change your  
5 party registration much closer to the date of the  
6 election. It should not be Valentine's Day that's  
7 your last chance to change your party registration.  
8 We should have same-day registration and we should let  
9 people change their registration later.

10 But saying to people you can't have a  
11 Democratic primary even though, like, that's how we do  
12 politics in America, I don't think it will improve  
13 outreach. I think it will actually diminish outreach.  
14 People won't know who you're talking to or understand  
15 why they're, you know -- like what kind of primary  
16 they're coming out to engage in.

17 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: But those are the  
18 very people you have to speak to in a general election  
19 if you're successful in --

20 MR. LANDER: And we'll have a general  
21 election in November like we always do. I mean,  
22 objecting to say we shouldn't -- this is like saying  
23 to me we shouldn't have political parties, like we  
24 should, like, erase them from American politics.

25 We have primaries and then we have a

1 general election, and you form up into a party, you  
2 debate what the vision for that party should be.  
3 That's what a primary is, and then you go have a  
4 general election. That's American political history.  
5 It's New York political history.

6 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: So I just have  
7 two more questions, then I'll move -- then I'll let  
8 you go, or maybe other people have questions for you.

9 So -- but what do we say to the 1.1  
10 million and growing number of unaffiliated voters who  
11 are deliberately cut out of this process because they  
12 don't want to belong -- they don't want to register in  
13 a party?

14 They don't want to party raid, which  
15 would be join the party so I can vote for Brad Lander  
16 and then disenroll as quickly as possible so I'm not  
17 beholden to that party whose views I may not  
18 necessarily agree to. What do we say to those people?

19 MR. LANDER: Well, one, I mean, we  
20 could go to Albany and make it more possible for them,  
21 at a later stage in the election, to decide that they  
22 do want to engage in a party primary this year because  
23 they're excited about candidates or unhappy about  
24 candidates who are offering.

25 They're perfectly free to choose do



1 they want to engage in a party primary in the primary  
2 election or not, and then they'll get to vote in the  
3 general election. And honestly, this year is offering  
4 people multiple candidates in the general election.  
5 It's not just going to be the two major party  
6 candidates.

7 They're not excluded. They're offered  
8 an opportunity to engage in a party primary and then  
9 an opportunity to engage in the general election. And  
10 if they don't want to take part in the party primary,  
11 that's 100 percent their choice. No one's forcing  
12 them one way or another.

13 That's how we've done politics in this  
14 country for 250 years. It is not perfect, but I don't  
15 see why we would change it now other than some sour  
16 losers want to overturn the results of an election we  
17 just --

18 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: I don't really  
19 think that's the motivation of the hundreds of people  
20 who have come to us to say that they feel that they  
21 are carved out of the decision-making process of who  
22 gets to run the city because of the fact that they do  
23 not want to belong to either major party or even any  
24 of the minor parties.

25 And so I just think that towards the

1 extent that we're able to expand the franchise, that  
2 is something that needs -- that definitely should be  
3 considered. Whether we arrive there or not is still  
4 an open question.

5 But expanding the franchise is  
6 important and it was so important that I think a few  
7 years ago, you and several others participated in  
8 passing legislation to expand non-citizen voting in an  
9 effort to expand the franchise, that people who did  
10 not have the ability to choose their leaders in this  
11 city, although they were paying taxes, although they  
12 were participating, sending their children to school,  
13 they should have that right.

14 So I'm just trying to figure out why  
15 it's okay for one group but not for the other.

16 MR. LANDER: Well, I absolutely agree  
17 with work to expand the franchise. It's why I support  
18 your proposal to shift it from -- to even years. It's  
19 why I would support efforts in Albany to push back the  
20 deadline when you can change your party primary. It's  
21 why I supported universal mail-in voting.

22 There are many other -- and it's why I  
23 supported non-citizen voting in that election. But  
24 doing away, essentially, with political parties,  
25 saying we're not going to have party primaries or

1 allow there to be -- like I don't know what a  
2 political party even is if you can't have a primary  
3 and choose your candidate.

4 And I mean, the founders had some  
5 anxieties about political parties, but we have had  
6 them for 250 years. I have a lot of times when I'm  
7 livid with Democratic Party leadership and  
8 institutions, but I think it's valuable to have  
9 primaries in which you put your ideas out and choose  
10 your fighter, and that's what a primary election is.

11 It's what a political party does. It's  
12 what general elections are for, and I do think that's  
13 valuable in -- so in addition to other efforts to  
14 expand the franchise. This one, I don't support.

15 CHAIR BUERY: Any other --

16 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Thank you.

17 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you. Any other  
18 questions from the Commission?

19 COMMISSIONER DABARON: Yes. Real  
20 quick.

21 How you doing, Brad?

22 MR. LANDER: Nice to see you, Shams.

23 COMMISSIONER DABARON: Good to -- so I  
24 wanted to ask something about housing. What type of  
25 coalition you think can be formed and how should that

1 be formed to support the housing proposals that you  
2 see have been suggested?

3 MR. LANDER: Thank you for this  
4 question and even more for the work to put these four  
5 ballot propositions on the ballot that I think really  
6 get at this.

7 I think we have an exciting moment  
8 right now when there is broader than expected support  
9 for the idea that we need to build more housing all  
10 across the city, especially in the neighborhoods that  
11 haven't done so, with a real focus on affordability.

12 That has not been a broad consensus for  
13 recent years and some of us have been fighting those  
14 battles, but it's an exciting moment.

15 I thought it was really significant  
16 that when Democratic nominee Mamdani was asked in The  
17 New York Times, "What's one thing you've changed your  
18 mind on," that this was the answer he gave, that he  
19 said, "We need private sector produced housing within  
20 this sort of mixed market context if we're going to  
21 confront the affordability crisis."

22 And it seems to me if we could have a  
23 coalition of people who have long been for more  
24 housing growth, who have been fighting for fair  
25 housing, who see that the affordability crisis is

1 crushing, people who build and maintain the housing,  
2 people who love their neighborhoods and want to find a  
3 way to have them be more affordable even as we invest  
4 in open spacing, community institutions, and culture,  
5 that seems really exciting to me.

6 And the four proposals you've put here  
7 that help tilt the playing field more in the direction  
8 of building the housing and the affordable housing our  
9 neighborhoods need -- I think you've actually done a  
10 good job of building the ground for that coalition.  
11 It's honestly one of the reasons I'm here tonight.

12 Like I'm not here tonight just to say,  
13 "I encourage no on six." I want to be broadly  
14 supportive with a big coalition on one through five,  
15 not just -- and it won't be easy to pass all those  
16 proposals because there still are a lot of folks who  
17 aren't yet sure.

18 And I know that building more housing's  
19 what we need to confront the affordability crisis, but  
20 even past November, into the next administration, we  
21 are going to need a broad coalition if we're going to  
22 actually follow through on, implement, and build a  
23 housing that's here.

24 I find that really exciting. I think  
25 you guys have set the table for it. Like you've got

1 an assignment from the mayor. You've done it really  
2 well, and I'm hopeful that we can collectively build  
3 on it for years to come.

4 CHAIR BUERY: I have two questions, one  
5 about elections, one about housing. Well, actually,  
6 the housing question first.

7 You alluded to ensuring that the 12  
8 districts who produce less housing who then have the  
9 expedited process ensuring their vision for community,  
10 if given voice. Can you say more what you meant by  
11 that, or do you have a particular recommendation?

12 MR. LANDER: Yeah, and some of this is,  
13 like, trying to understand, you know, kind of the  
14 proposal in the way you've written it. As I  
15 understand it, the, you know -- the fair housing study  
16 is done. That's done every five years.

17 And if -- in the 12 neighborhoods that  
18 had produced the least housing, the accelerated ULURP  
19 would apply, and that makes sense to me.

20 In some places where they use that  
21 approach at a statewide level with the Fair Share,  
22 they give those communities an opportunity to say:  
23 "Okay. Let us proactively engage. We would like to  
24 put forward some re-zonings that might help increase  
25 density and offer housing in our neighborhoods."

1                   And maybe this would provide the  
2                   incentive for those communities rather than, for all  
3                   five years, have every proposal that would be brought  
4                   by a developer go through the accelerated process.

5                   There might be some planning  
6                   opportunity and if they did, in fact, produce a lot  
7                   more housing or support re-zonings that open up much  
8                   more opportunity, there could be a, you know,  
9                   mid-cycle process that adjusted.

10                  It's not, you know, make or break for  
11                  me. I'm supporting proposals one through four, but if  
12                  you're going back and doing, you know, a little more  
13                  tweaking, that was one thing that struck me that might  
14                  be worth taking a look at.

15                  CHAIR BUERY: Thank you. Thank you.  
16                  That's very helpful. And the other  
17                  part -- clarification, in part, question. One of the  
18                  things that you described in describing your  
19                  opposition to proposal six is the important role of  
20                  parties in elections and not wanting to take parties  
21                  out of the process.

22                  One just point of clarification is that  
23                  the -- to state the obvious, the proposal did  
24                  not -- speak to removing parties, and people are able  
25                  to assert their party identification on the ballot.

1                   But one of the things I wanted to  
2                   question is that my understanding from testimony we  
3                   received is that the majority of the largest cities in  
4                   America, I believe 42 of the 50 largest cities in  
5                   America, have some form of open primaries, including  
6                   places like Boston where the Democratic Party remains  
7                   alive and vibrant and well.

8                   And so I'm wondering -- and you may not  
9                   have a reflection on this, but I'm wondering if you  
10                  have a reflection on the idea that somehow that what  
11                  is proposed or is being considered is somehow radical,  
12                  both in its approach to parties and its approach to  
13                  the role of parties, when we're actually an outlier  
14                  among large American cities in having the -- if I  
15                  understand it, in having the kind of process that we  
16                  have.

17                  So I'm just wondering if you have a  
18                  reflection on that.

19                  MR. LANDER: Yeah. I mean, I guess I  
20                  think if you did what's being proposed here broadly at  
21                  state and national levels, which obviously is not  
22                  what's being proposed, I don't know what political  
23                  parties would be.

24                  Like what political parties are, by and  
25                  large in the context we have, are entities that have



1 primaries, select candidates, and run them in general  
2 elections. Like that's just American politics.  
3 That's what we do at the national level. That's what  
4 we do at the state level here in New York. It's what  
5 we've done at the local level.

6 And yes, in Boston, you know, and other  
7 places, they still have Democrats, but mostly because  
8 they have state and federal elections that still  
9 operate with traditional primaries and traditional  
10 general elections. So, you know, it's not that I'm  
11 saying if you do away with it here, that will be the  
12 end of political parties in America.

13 But I -- to me -- again, for all the  
14 frustration that I have had, you know, with the  
15 Brooklyn Democratic -- with the Kings County  
16 Democratic Party, with the York State Democratic  
17 Party, and the National Democratic Party, the way I  
18 understand what you do in an election is say, "Here's  
19 a set of values that we're debating, and I want to  
20 carry the Democratic Party banner into the general  
21 election."

22 And I mean, you could disagree with  
23 that and say it's not good. It's just -- but that's,  
24 to me, like, how I understand what politics is in the  
25 American political context. And it's not perfect, but

1 I think it has served us well.

2 And in the primary that we had two  
3 weeks ago tomorrow, I think it raised a whole lot of  
4 interesting, thoughtful debate and people suited up  
5 and put their ideas out there and Democratic voters  
6 got to come out and choose the candidate they want to  
7 have in November.

8 And to choose to undo that, to say,  
9 "We're going to eliminate a Democratic Party  
10 primary" -- and yes, other voters can come and  
11 participate in round one who now are choosing only to  
12 participate in round two.

13 You're going to say to me and other  
14 Democrats, "You don't get to have a Democratic Party  
15 primary in which you choose the Democratic candidate  
16 for the fall."

17 And I just don't see any urgent -- I  
18 think it will do harm to the good housing proposals  
19 you have on the ballot. I don't even think the  
20 evidence suggests it increases turnout very likely  
21 where it happens, and I don't see an urgent reason to  
22 overturn how we've been doing things here for  
23 generations.

24 COMMISSIONER DABARON: So --

25 CHAIR BUERY: Before you -- I just want

1 to make sure any other commissioners have questions  
2 first before we go -- okay.

3 VICE CHAIR GREENBERGER: Oh, Lisette  
4 does.

5 CHAIR BUERY: Let Commissioner Nieves  
6 because she hasn't had a chance to ask yet.

7 COMMISSIONER NIEVES: Hi, Brad.

8 MR. LANDER: Great to see you.

9 COMMISSIONER NIEVES: Good to see you.  
10 My question has to do with -- you're making such a  
11 strong assertion that it's a dilution of the vote, and  
12 I get the data that shows that. I'm trying to  
13 understand that. I'm looking at other places. I'm  
14 looking at six in particular.

15 And it was mentioned before when we  
16 look at other large metropolitan cities, that's not  
17 been the outcome. So I'm curious about that and so I  
18 just want hear a little bit more about that assumption  
19 because I haven't seen data that supports that  
20 assumption.

21 MR. LANDER: On the dilution  
22 specifically of the African American vote --

23 COMMISSIONER NIEVES: Dilution of  
24 particularly if we have primaries, the Democratic  
25 Party vote.

1 MR. LANDER: Well, I mean, what I mean  
2 there is, I mean, the way a primary works now are that  
3 voters who identify as Democrats get to choose the  
4 candidate we want to have represent us in the general  
5 election in the fall and if we don't have a Democratic  
6 Party primary, we won't have an opportunity to do  
7 that.

8 Like everyone, you know -- if you  
9 have -- like it's -- yeah. I mean, that's all I mean  
10 there. That's not dilution. That's -- the way our  
11 system works right now by having a party primary, you  
12 get to choose.

13 I mean, you can decide "do I want to  
14 identify with one of these parties," and go choose  
15 that party's candidate in the general election and if  
16 you do, you register with that party. It's not hard.  
17 You should be able to change it later.

18 And you have a debate within the  
19 context of how do I think about what a Democratic or  
20 Republican or Working Families or Conservative or  
21 Green candidate should be so we can put that candidate  
22 up in the fall's election. And that's -- I mean,  
23 that's how we have historically done politics and for  
24 all its flaws, I like doing it that way.

25 I mean -- and I think it's valuable

1     what we did here not only for Democrats to be able to  
2     choose the Democratic candidate in the fall's  
3     election, but participate in the broader national  
4     American context. What do we want from Democrats  
5     right now as we're thinking about next year's  
6     elections and as we're thinking about the future?

7                     Like that's how we do politics. We  
8     say, you know: "What should our party be? Who are the  
9     folks within it that stand up and fight? Who else am  
10    I relating to? What kind of coalitions are we  
11    building?"

12                    Again, I mean, it's, you know -- it's  
13    messy, it's got its downsides, but that's American  
14    democracy and it seems strange to me to choose to undo  
15    it.

16                    CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much,  
17    Comptroller. I really appreciate it. Thank you for  
18    your testimony.

19                    MR. LANDER: I really do appreciate all  
20    your service and thank you for the opportunity.

21                    CHAIR BUERY: Thank you for the kind  
22    words about our work. I appreciate it.

23                    UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 3: Thank you.

24                    CHAIR BUERY: Next, want to welcome  
25    Council Member Selvena Brooks-Powers who I believe is

1 on Zoom. No -- okay. I'm sorry? Should we move to  
2 the next -- yeah. Could we -- do you have her? All  
3 right.

4 Council Member Ariola, welcome. You  
5 have three minutes to testify, please. Thank you.

6 MS. ARIOLA: Yes. Good evening,  
7 everyone. I'm here tonight because this commission is  
8 on the verge of advancing proposals that amount to  
9 clear government overreach, and I cannot stay silent  
10 while it happens.

11 Most frightening of all things being  
12 discussed by the Commission are the dramatic changes  
13 that are being proposed to the ULURP process. These  
14 changes would strip land use authority away from the  
15 City Council and hand it over to unelected bureaucrats  
16 who have no idea about the intricacies of the  
17 neighborhoods they're seeking to change.

18 The removal of ULURP is a direct attack  
19 on the legislative body that represents the people and  
20 prevents us from advancing on behalf of those who  
21 trust to represent them in City Hall. Council members  
22 know our neighborhoods inside and out.

23 Weakening our role only serves to  
24 disconnect communities from the decisions that shapes  
25 the future and makes our communities more overburdened

1 and more difficult to live in. The ULURP changes also  
2 prevent council members from negotiating with  
3 developers regarding the communities and what they  
4 would like to see as a part of upcoming projects.

5 These negotiations also enable council  
6 members to advocate for union labor projects within  
7 their district. Removing that ability from the  
8 Council would also remove a key protection that is  
9 often provided for our unions to ensure that our  
10 laborers are hired and protected at some of the city's  
11 biggest jobs.

12 The Commission is also considering  
13 dramatically expanding the powers of the borough  
14 presidents. With this in mind, I believe it is  
15 imperative that we give New Yorkers the ability to  
16 vote on whether council members should have  
17 appointment input in their local community boards.

18 The decision to appoint community board  
19 members, if made solely behind closed doors by a  
20 borough president, would be another example of  
21 centralized control overriding local representation.

22 It sends a message to those closest to  
23 the community should have less to say and while  
24 politically appointed bodies gain more influence  
25 without direct accountability.

1                   The proposal would move  
2       municipal -- the proposal to move municipal elections  
3       to even years too serves to dilute the power of local  
4       representation by virtually ensuring that their races  
5       get overshadowed by larger national campaigns.

6                   By having our local races compete for  
7       attention with federal and state elections, we can  
8       also guarantee that attention will be diverted away  
9       from the elections on the community level and thus,  
10      our electorate will be less informed than they should  
11      be.

12                  Having elections on odd numbered years,  
13      however, will allow New Yorkers to better focus on  
14      elections and the issues that can have direct impact  
15      on their lives and thus will give the best chances for  
16      the neighborhoods for an informed decision for  
17      themselves and their neighborhoods.

18                  Finally, the issue of open primaries is  
19      one which threatens to bring in tyranny by  
20      majority -- by the majority that the philosophers of  
21      the past have warned about.

22                  By opening primaries to everyone  
23      regardless of party would effectively usher in one  
24      party rule the -- and prevent opposition parties from  
25      ever gaining a foothold in the elections and thus a



1 real platform to bring about change.

2 The beauty of the current system lies  
3 in the fact that the opposition is guaranteed a voice  
4 in the larger political conversation. But a system  
5 that does away with primary -- virtual connectivity  
6 interruption -- this would be abolished.

7 These proposals as they are do not  
8 empower the public. They fly in the face of all that  
9 we hold dear as Americans. I urge this commission to  
10 reconsider these proposals. The people of New York  
11 deserve a government that listens to one and not one  
12 that controls the above and I will be --

13 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much,  
14 Council Member.

15 MS. ARIOLA: Thank you.

16 CHAIR BUERY: Are there any questions  
17 for Council Member Ariola?

18 All right. Thank you so much for your  
19 testimony. We look forward to seeing your written  
20 testimony as well.

21 MS. ARIOLA: Thank you. Thank you so  
22 much.

23 CHAIR BUERY: Next, we have Council  
24 Member Frank Morano, also on Zoom.

25 MR. MORANO: Can you hear me -- thank

1     you very much. Good evening --

2                   CHAIR BUERY: Good evening. You have  
3     three minutes, please, Council Member --

4                   MR. MORANO: Got it. Good evening.  
5     Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify  
6     before this commission. I suspect by now you've heard  
7     enough from me to last a lifetime, but given how  
8     important these decisions are, I hope you'll indulge  
9     me one final time for one final three-minute  
10    commentary.

11                   First, I want genuinely thank each of  
12    you for the time, energy, and sacrifice you've poured  
13    into this process.

14                   I know how demanding this work is.  
15    You've sat through endless hearings, read more reports  
16    than anyone would envy, and heard passionate arguments  
17    on every side, and that's real public service and I  
18    appreciate it even when me or other members of the  
19    public may disagree on the details.

20                   Tonight, I want to zero in on a few of  
21    those details that are in the interim report and one  
22    big one that's left out of the interim report that I  
23    hope you'll consider before finalizing your  
24    recommendations.

25                   First, please do not pursue the

1 so-called "top two system." You've heard me say this  
2 before but let me put it in plain terms. And, you  
3 know, from two people that disagree politically as  
4 much as Council Member/Minority Leader Joann Ariola  
5 and Comptroller Brad Lander do and both of them are  
6 saying, "Don't do this," and there's a reason.

7 Top two is a political trap disguised  
8 as reform. It may sound good on paper, but in  
9 practice, it shuts out minor parties, discourages  
10 outsider candidates in most of the city, it shuts down  
11 Republicans, both voters and candidates, and it leaves  
12 voters with a false choice.

13 If you want a real-world example,  
14 imagine if we had top two in place right now for this  
15 year's mayoral race.

16 The final two candidates would almost  
17 assuredly be Zohran Mamdani and Andrew Cuomo and for  
18 many Republicans, Independent, Moderates, and, heck,  
19 for a lot of Democrats, that match up feels like the  
20 political version of Alien vs. Predator. No matter  
21 who wins, we lose.

22 That's not hypothetical. It's exactly  
23 what we've seen happen in California where top two has  
24 produced lopsided runoffs that fail to represent the  
25 full political spectrum. We've seen race after race

1 where two Republicans are facing off in a Democratic  
2 district or vice versa, often silencing Independent  
3 and third-party voices entirely.

4 We should be building a system that  
5 encourages more choice, not less. The solution isn't  
6 to import California's broken model. It's to expand  
7 what already works here: Nonpartisan special elections  
8 with ranked choice voting. I was selected through  
9 that system.

10 It was clean, competitive, focused on  
11 ideas, not party labels, and in New York, we've been  
12 doing it for over 30 years. It worked for voters, and  
13 it worked for the city. So why stop there? Let's  
14 make every municipal election operate the same way  
15 with more choices, fewer spoilers, and elections  
16 decided by merit, not machinery.

17 And let's say this clearly: Stop  
18 calling top two an open primary. It's not. The U.S.  
19 Supreme Court doesn't call it that. Political  
20 scientists don't call it that. And when you misuse  
21 the term, you're confusing voters and confusion is the  
22 enemy of trust in our democracy, and I wish you'd stop  
23 saying it.

24 If we want to boost turnout,  
25 competitive elections are the answer, not rhetorical

1 slight of hand. Look at the numbers. This year's  
2 Democratic mayoral primary saw the highest turnout  
3 since 1989. Why? Because --

4 CHAIR BUERY: Council Member, you're at  
5 time. Can you wrap up, please?

6 MR. MORANO: Yeah, I will, and I  
7 appreciate you enforcing that three minutes with  
8 Comptroller Lander as well.

9 So -- and that brings me to another  
10 proposal that I strongly oppose: Moving municipal  
11 elections to even numbered years. Sure, presidential  
12 years bring more people to the polls, but let's be  
13 honest: They come to vote for president, not for City  
14 Council or borough president.

15 All moving the elections does is drown  
16 out locals races in a tidal wave of races --

17 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much --

18 MR. MORANO: And I think it says a  
19 great deal about your agenda that you would  
20 give -- keep me to the three minutes, but you have no  
21 problem allowing Comptroller Lander to go on --

22 CHAIR BUERY: Council Member, in his  
23 defense, he testified once.

24 Any questions for the Council Member?  
25 Any questions for the Council Member?

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: No.

2 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: No, we'd just  
3 like to thank him for his avid participation in this  
4 process. He's been at every hearing --

5 CHAIR BUERY: Yes. Yes, we  
6 appreciate --

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 5: Every hearing.  
8 Yeah.

9 CHAIR BUERY: We appreciate your  
10 service as well. Thank you so much. Appreciate you.  
11 All right. Next will be Public Advocate Jumaane  
12 Williams --

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 6: He needs a  
14 minute.

15 CHAIR BUERY: Oh, he needs a minute?  
16 All right. Who's next? All right. Next on Zoom, we  
17 have Council Member Kristy Marmorato. All right.  
18 Then we'll hear next from Council Member  
19 Brooks-Powers.

20 MS. BROOKS-POWERS: Hi. Can you hear  
21 me?

22 CHAIR BUERY: Yes.

23 MS. BROOKS-POWERS: Hi. Good evening,  
24 everyone. Good to see everyone virtually.

25 I have the privilege of representing

1 the 31st District in Southeast Queens for the New York  
2 City Council, and I'm here tonight to raise serious  
3 concerns about several proposals advanced by the  
4 Mayor's Charter Revision Commission, proposals that  
5 would significantly diminish the role of the Council  
6 and our communities in land use decision.

7 These changes are being framed as  
8 efficiency measures, but in practice, they sideline  
9 the very people who understand our neighborhoods best.

10 As someone who inherited a number of  
11 development projects, and even voted for several, I  
12 have a unique perspective as to why it is critical to  
13 include local voices into the process so that we may  
14 address our housing crisis while accounting for local  
15 nuances.

16 Communities like mine where unchecked  
17 development has long outpaced infrastructure, simply  
18 put, cannot afford to be cut out of these decisions.

19 Let's take the first proposal to fast  
20 track affordable housing. On its face, it sounds  
21 positive. We all support more affordable housing, but  
22 this proposal would allow projects with mandatory  
23 inclusionary housing components to bypass the Uniform  
24 Land Use Review Procedure entirely.

25 That means neither the Community Board

1 nor the Council would have any role. In my -- in  
2 districts like mine where we're already grappling with  
3 overstretched sewer systems, flood risk, and  
4 underfunded schools, that's a recipe for deep  
5 inequality and strain in an already crumbling  
6 infrastructure, not addressing it.

7 The second proposal would simplify  
8 review of so-called "modest re-zonings," but what the  
9 Charter Commission defines as "modest," a four-story  
10 building or a 30 percent increase in density can have  
11 major consequences in low rise communities.

12 The City of Yes proposal taught us this  
13 lesson. Council input was critical in modifying that  
14 plan to prevent basement apartments and ADUs in flood  
15 prone areas. Without the local expertise, we risk  
16 building housing without the infrastructure to support  
17 it, worsening conditions, not improving them.

18 The third proposal would create an  
19 appeals board that could override the City Council's  
20 vote on land use application. Today, the Council has  
21 de facto authority over ULURP, the process that  
22 determines how our communities grow.

23 Removing the Council's authority, an  
24 elected body, over re-zonings undermines the very  
25 purpose of ULURP: To give communities a seat at the



1 table in shaping their own futures. This proposal  
2 would allow citywide interests to overrule the voices  
3 of communities that would bear the brunt of these  
4 impacts.

5 This would set a dangerous new  
6 precedent, one that would leverage a panel to overrule  
7 local elected officials that are tasked with  
8 representing the interests of their respective  
9 districts. At a time when trust in government is  
10 fragile, we should be doing more to bring communities  
11 into the process, not less.

12 The Council must remain an integral  
13 part of the land use decisions in the city. Removing  
14 the Council from these processes would undermine  
15 accountability, silence local voices, and ultimately  
16 lead to worse outcomes for the very communities we all  
17 seek to serve.

18 I thank you for your time and for your  
19 partnership. Thank you again.

20 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much for  
21 your testimony. Deeply appreciate it.

22 Are there any questions for Council  
23 Member Brooks-Powers?

24 Okay. Thank you very much. Appreciate  
25 it. Next, if he's ready on the call, Public Advocate

1 Jumaane Williams. Sorry.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 7: He's ready.

3 CHAIR BUERY: He's ready? You can come  
4 down this aisle. Yeah, to -- thank you. Perfect.  
5 Thank you. Thank you, Public Advocate.

6 MR. WILLIAMS: Yeah. We're good?  
7 Okay. All right. Peace and blessing, love and light  
8 to everyone. Thank you so much. I will start just  
9 from the framework.

10 I want to be clear. When it comes to  
11 the Adams Administration, I've lost all full faith and  
12 confidence, so I'm concerned about that. But I have a  
13 lot of faith and trust in a lot of folks who are on  
14 this board. So I'm going to try and have a  
15 conversation as if the Adams Administration had  
16 nothing to do with it.

17 Public Advocate for the City of New  
18 York, and I want to thank Chair Buery as well as the  
19 members of the Commission and my fellow New Yorkers  
20 for allowing me to testify before you today.

21 I want to start off by saying many of  
22 the proposals that this Commission has put forth I  
23 agree with in theory, but I have a lot of questions  
24 concerning the implementation of some, the legality of  
25 others, and the impact of all.

1                   On the housing and land use questions,  
2                   while I do support shortening the length of the  
3                   overall review process, I have some concerns about  
4                   consolidating the review time for the community boards  
5                   and the borough presidents.

6                   I believe a consecutive process with a  
7                   30-day allotment for borough presidents, community  
8                   boards, and the Department of City Planning, each  
9                   would fulfill the goal of shortening the process while  
10                  providing these groups with their own dedicated time  
11                  to deliberate and come to their own conclusions.

12                  I also have questions concerning the  
13                  use of mandatory inclusionary housing under the  
14                  proposed affordable housing fast track. During my  
15                  time in the New York City Council, I found the highest  
16                  income bands allowed under MIH to be unaffordable for  
17                  many and as such, I voted against the introduction of  
18                  MIH.

19                  I have questions on this particular  
20                  point and chief among them is what specific income  
21                  bands would be covered under this proposal. The  
22                  interim report mentions a range of incomes "generally"  
23                  between 40 and 80 percent of Area Median Income, AMI.

24                  We should have some specifics -- would  
25                  be changing the process and timing for land use

1 matters that have been in place since 1989 and that  
2 was necessary since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the  
3 Board of Estimates process for land use matters  
4 unconstitutional since the mayor, the comptroller, and  
5 the council president had two votes each as opposed to  
6 the borough president that each had one, violating the  
7 one person, one vote rule.

8 In regards to ballot measures number  
9 three that propose the creation of an appeals board  
10 and would eliminate both the mayor's veto power in the  
11 Uniform Land Use Review Process [sic] and the New York  
12 City Council's power to override vetoes, I'm unclear  
13 as the constitutionality of this proposal and wonder  
14 whether it violates New York City Charter that would  
15 eliminate a crucial part of our system of checks and  
16 balances in the legislative process.

17 It is important to note that land use  
18 matters are legislative matters. But if it is  
19 actually constitutional, then I might support this,  
20 but only if the appeals board is expanded to five  
21 members, requiring three out of the five to vote in  
22 the affirmative.

23 I'd recommend expanding the board to  
24 including the two citywide elected officials,  
25 comptroller, and the public advocate.

1                   On question four, I have a lot of  
2                   concerns and don't look favorably on this proposal as  
3                   it would remove the powers that the borough presidents  
4                   currently have to vest all responsibilities and power  
5                   on a city agency whose agency head is appointed by the  
6                   mayor and we often have problems with the agencies  
7                   getting the proper funding that they need.

8                   Finally, on the questions of even year  
9                   elections and deliberation of open primaries, I  
10                  actually tend to support these proposals in theory,  
11                  but as the Commissioner laid out in the interim  
12                  report, open primaries would have a number of positive  
13                  effects from allowing unaffiliated voters to  
14                  participating in the primary process to increasing  
15                  local turnout and reinforcing rank choice voting.

16                  However, given the relative success of  
17                  rank choice voting in New York City, I do believe more  
18                  research needs to be done into the potential impacts  
19                  these would have on the process, as well as other  
20                  potential impacts such as election burnout and down  
21                  ballot burnout.

22                  In conjunction with even year  
23                  elections, I think this would potentially lead to a  
24                  drop off in voting down ballot in addition to a less  
25                  informed electorate on local race candidates. So

1 while in theory I support these, I'm concerned that we  
2 won't have time to answer some of the questions I have  
3 before the general election.

4 Now, I know my time is up, but  
5 I -- when I had the City Council Charter Commission,  
6 we did talk about making sure that the Board of  
7 Corrections and CCRB had 1 percent of expense budgets  
8 of the NYPD and the Department of Corrections, and we  
9 asked for my office to have subpoena power and the  
10 standing to sue.

11 Thank you so much and happy to answer  
12 any questions.

13 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.  
14 Appreciate it.

15 Are there any questions -- Shams?

16 COMMISSIONER DABARON: Good to see you,  
17 brother Jumaane.

18 MR. WILLIAMS: You too. Peace.

19 COMMISSIONER DABARON: All right. So I  
20 will be honest. I didn't -- I wasn't able to capture  
21 everything you said.

22 MR. WILLIAMS: Because I spoke fast?

23 COMMISSIONER DABARON: Yeah. Please  
24 tell me you got written testimony, also.

25 MR. WILLIAMS: We're going to have the

1 written testimony for you in a few days, but if you  
2 want me to repeat any of it, I'm happy to do as well.

3 COMMISSIONER DABARON: Yeah. If I'm  
4 saying it correct, if you could kind of articulate the  
5 specific points, specifically regarding the housing  
6 and what your thoughts are on that, and then anything  
7 else that you think is important. You also mentioned  
8 something about the civilian --

9 MR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER DABARON: So those things  
11 are important, and I just want to make sure that I get  
12 what you're saying.

13 MR. WILLIAMS: So I guess proposals one  
14 and two, which is primarily shortening the time  
15 process, which I think we should, but I had some  
16 concerns with the fast track, particularly around  
17 collapsing the community boards and the borough  
18 president into -- I think you had it 60 days.

19 I still believe community boards should  
20 go first, and borough presidents go second. So the  
21 timing was less of a issue but making sure that if it  
22 could happen consecutively.

23 And I believe -- I -- it seemed like it  
24 was connected to MIH and some of the income bands. I  
25 voted against MIH because I didn't think it brought

1 the kind of affordable housing that we actually  
2 needed.

3 And some of the language in the report  
4 was that the Area Median Income will be generally  
5 between 40 and 80 percent of AMI. I don't know what  
6 "generally" means and so some more specifics about  
7 what will be built would be helpful.

8 And for ballot measure number  
9 three -- for the appeals, I -- if we're going to talk  
10 about -- you know, as -- when I ran for speaker, I was  
11 actually one of the only people who talked about the  
12 issues of member deference, which might be part of the  
13 reason I didn't become speaker.

14 But I thought it was an issue then and  
15 that it is an issue now, but you want to find the  
16 right balance. I'm concerned that two votes might be  
17 a little too easy for -- at this -- I would imagine  
18 the speaker would not go against the Council, so it  
19 would be the mayor and a particular borough president.

20 I think having a third person to have  
21 to convince might be better off to find that  
22 ballot -- that balance and using three out of five as  
23 opposed to two out of three, I think, make more sense.

24 COMMISSIONER DABARON: Would that be  
25 a -- a public advocate or somebody?



1 MR. WILLIAMS: I was recommending  
2 having the public advocate and the comptroller be --

3 COMMISSIONER WEISBROD: I actually  
4 agree --

5 CHAIR BUERY: Okay. That's helpful.  
6 So not necessarily an objection to the process, but  
7 expanding the appeals board.

8 MR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

9 CHAIR BUERY: I have a question.  
10 You -- make sure I understood this well. You were  
11 objecting to the proposal four around the city map.  
12 Can you say a little bit more about your concern?

13 MR. WILLIAMS: So for my understanding,  
14 I -- it wasn't -- I thought it might add to help the  
15 borough presidents do some of the local things better.  
16 My understanding is that it would take away some of  
17 the mapping powers that the borough president does  
18 now.

19 And I feel like they actually are more  
20 locally connected, so taking that fully away, I think,  
21 is an issue. And there's also issues with agencies  
22 now not having the proper funding they need to focus  
23 on things. And so putting it back all into the  
24 agencies I'm concerned will -- would it have the  
25 resources that it actually needs?

1 CHAIR BUERY: All right. Thank you,  
2 brother.

3 MR. WILLIAMS: So if it, you know -- if  
4 it was just some kind of blend or something, it might  
5 make sense, but it seemed to be taking it fully away.

6 CHAIR BUERY: Okay. Any questions?

7 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: He answered it  
8 when he answered --

9 CHAIR BUERY: All right. Thank you.  
10 Very helpful. Appreciate it.

11 MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you very much.  
12 Lot of respect for y'all. Thank you so much.

13 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Thank you.

14 MR. WILLIAMS: Not so much the  
15 administration. Thank you.

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 8: Yes.

17 CHAIR BUERY: The next testimony will  
18 be from the Commissioner of HPD, Ahmed Tigani.

19 MR. TIGANI: Good evening, Chair Buery,  
20 Vice Chair Greenberg [sic], Secretary Bozorg, and  
21 members of the Charter Revision Commission. I am  
22 Ahmed Tigani, Acting Commissioner of the New York City  
23 Department of Housing Preservation & Development. I'm  
24 joined by my colleague, Michael Sandler, Associate  
25 Commissioner for Neighborhood Strategies.

1                   We're thankful for the opportunity to  
2     testify on how this commission's proposed revisions to  
3     the city charter will accelerate our agency's work to  
4     create and preserve affordable housing for New Yorkers  
5     and help address our longstanding fair housing  
6     challenges.

7                   We commend this commission's reports  
8     which documents the limitations and challenges of a  
9     uniform land use review procedure in balancing  
10    meaningful community involvement with the emergency  
11    confronting the current state of housing access in our  
12    city.

13                  HPD greatly values and places  
14    tremendous resources into community engagement when we  
15    advance new projects through the various discretionary  
16    approval processes.

17                  Yet, it's hard to ignore that ULURP has  
18    regularly become a speed bump, if not a roadblock, to  
19    lowering housing prices for everyone and expanding New  
20    Yorkers' choices to move to where it is best for them  
21    and their families.

22                  At a time when we need to build in  
23    every neighborhood to respond to the ongoing housing  
24    emergency, ULURP adds cost and time, ultimately  
25    limiting HPD's ability to build deeply affordable

1 housing.

2 The proposed solutions thoughtfully  
3 restores the intent of the 1989 charter to integrate  
4 local perspectives into a citywide decision-making  
5 framework while providing new tools to address the  
6 urgency of historically low vacancy rates.

7 If approved by voters in the fall,  
8 bureaucratic redundancy for subsidized affordable  
9 housing will be slashed. This means HPD will be able  
10 to get shovels in the ground faster and use subsidy  
11 more effectively. At the same time, local voices,  
12 through community board review, will still continue to  
13 be a central part of the review process.

14 To illustrate the impact, we would like  
15 to share three recent affordable housing examples.  
16 1093-1095 Jerome Avenue in Highbridge shows how ULURP  
17 disadvantages affordable housing to market rate  
18 housing.

19 Unanimously supported by the community  
20 members and elected officials at all levels, this  
21 recently approved project replaces two structurally  
22 unsound buildings with a newly constructed, 100  
23 percent affordable housing building serving low-income  
24 individuals and families.

25 Yet, even for projects like this one

1 that meet zoning requirements, ULURP is required for  
2 public land disposition, while projects on private  
3 land require no discretionary review. For this  
4 project, HPD spent over a year in pre-certification  
5 and seven months in ULURP itself.

6 Under the proposed expedited land use  
7 review procedure, projects that conform with zoning  
8 would skip pre-certification, continue to undergo  
9 community review, and then go straight to the City  
10 Council.

11 97-04 Sutphin Boulevard in Jamaica  
12 shows us how the process, even for minor changes, put  
13 projects at risk. This transit-oriented housing  
14 project replaces a single-story health center  
15 in -- that is delivering senior housing above a new  
16 facility operated by the community healthcare network.

17 This project, however, needed ULURP to  
18 re-zone the site to be part of the immediately  
19 adjacent zoning district. In the years between when  
20 the project was first conceived and when it received  
21 approvals, hard costs and interest rates --

22 CHAIR BUERY: And I'm sorry to  
23 interrupt, Commissioner, but we are over time. Can  
24 you -- if you could wrap up, I would appreciate it.

25 MR. TIGANI: I can. Sure. Let me just

1 finish by saying that recognizing the scale and  
2 complexity of our housing crisis and fair housing  
3 challenges, these are tools that we need in order to  
4 deliver affordable housing at a speed that the crisis  
5 demands.

6 We believe that these are measured,  
7 reasonable. We appreciate the input that you took to  
8 shape them, and we believe that these will have  
9 incredible impact at a time when we have too many  
10 people in shelter, too many people rent burden, and  
11 not enough choices to create the housing that New  
12 Yorkers deserve.

13 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much,  
14 Commissioner. Certainly of a -- commissioner of the  
15 agency tasked with addressing these problems. Very  
16 helpful to have your feedback.

17 Any questions -- Commissioner?

18 COMMISSIONER WEISBROD: Yes.  
19 Commissioner, I have one factual question. On our  
20 proposal number one, fast tracking with -- for  
21 publicly financed affordable housing projects going to  
22 the Board of Standards and Appeals, in those cases,  
23 would HPD's support be required in every one of those  
24 cases?

25 MR. TIGANI: It would. We would be

1 providing -- we'd work closely with the BSA and in  
2 fact, we work closely with the BSA now and we've had  
3 several examples of affordable housing come through.

4 COMMISSIONER WEISBROD: But --

5 MR. TIGANI: A letter would be required  
6 from HPD to confirm this is the project we're moving  
7 forward --

8 COMMISSIONER WEISBROD: Thank you.

9 MR. TIGANI: Or the state. So HCR will  
10 also play -- can play a role in this.

11 COMMISSIONER BOZORG: Thanks for your  
12 testimony. I know you both have also worked in a  
13 borough president's office as well. Can you -- do you  
14 have any examples of -- or talk a little bit about the  
15 challenges with the various topo offices and the  
16 proposal to kind of streamline and centralize that  
17 process from HPD's perspective?

18 MR. TIGANI: You know, a specific  
19 example doesn't come to mind, but generally speaking,  
20 the poll letter that's required -- that becomes part  
21 of a mapping change.

22 Or even when going through all the  
23 steps that we're talking about in the ULURP process  
24 now, anything that we can do to create more  
25 consistency and direction and uniformity and

1 streamline the process, especially when it's condensed  
2 within an entity that may already be handling other  
3 parts of your process, saves money.

4 It allows people who are not as  
5 familiar and not having to go and buy -- and hire  
6 extra help to deal with the complexities of moving  
7 from office to office.

8 Paperwork is less likely not to move as  
9 slowly, which, again, what we're talking about here is  
10 creating a process to build affordable housing, to  
11 build housing at a quicker pace, put that money back  
12 into the affordability of those units, put that  
13 money -- put that time back into delivering units  
14 faster for people who need that housing.

15 COMMISSIONER LAREMONT: Excuse me. I  
16 have a question.

17 CHAIR BUERY: Okay.

18 COMMISSIONER LAREMONT: Sorry. Hi,  
19 Ahemd. It's nice to see you. I have a question. You  
20 know, a lot of the council representatives that speak  
21 here talk about us cutting out communities from  
22 planning, and we know that that's not actually really  
23 where the effort with communities works.

24 So I would just like to hear a little  
25 bit about, you know, HPD's efforts in community



1 planning because it is not our intention to not have  
2 any community voice. It's just not having community  
3 veto that we're looking at here.

4 MR. TIGANI: I'm actually going to let  
5 Michael Sandler, who I -- I'm proud to say is a  
6 co-worker and runs our Office of Neighborhood  
7 Strategies, talk about that.

8 MR. SANDLER: Yeah. It's a great  
9 question. So the projects that HPD is taking through  
10 ULURP are on public land. So these are projects that  
11 are typically preceded by a request for proposal to  
12 identify a development team to advance that project.  
13 In advance of issuing that request for proposal, HPD  
14 does a community visioning process.

15 We host a series of workshops, tabling  
16 events, an online survey to solicit input from the  
17 community about what they want to see on that lot, and  
18 that's informing the selection of the team and the  
19 project that we then take through ULURP. So that's  
20 happening right now years in advance of taking a  
21 project through ULURP.

22 And then after we designate a team,  
23 we're coming to the local community board every single  
24 time to present that project.

25 And then right now, before ULURP, we're

1 coming at least once in the leadup to certification  
2 and then usually multiple times during ULURP on a, you  
3 know -- we're, right now, engaged -- we're about to go  
4 into ULURP on a project that's actually a scattered  
5 site project across four community districts where we  
6 anticipate probably 15 community board meetings as  
7 part of ULURP, and that would continue as part of the  
8 proposals that we're discussing today.

9 COMMISSIONER LAREMONT: Thank you.

10 MR. TIGANI: The only thing I would add  
11 is that is a process run -- it's an individual public  
12 site that maybe has not already gone through a  
13 neighborhood planning process. So in the neighborhood  
14 planning process, HPD is involved in shaping the  
15 housing plan in which we talk through and discuss a  
16 plan for multiple housing sites.

17 Just because we've done that, we've  
18 mapped out that work, we will still do the  
19 neighborhood planning playbook process that Michael  
20 just described.

21 On top of that, when we release the RFP  
22 or community visioning document, we'll also refer to  
23 maybe supplemental documents put out by the community  
24 board, other visioning and neighborhood planning  
25 documents created by local organizations.

1                   For us, having the full vision as part  
2 of a developer's response allows us to have better  
3 conversations and inclusive conversations down the  
4 line.

5                   COMMISSIONER LAREMONT: Thank you. I  
6 just wanted to get that on the record.

7                   CHAIR BUERY: Questions? All right.  
8 Thank you so much, Commissioner.  
9 Really appreciate it.

10                  MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Thank you.

11                  CHAIR BUERY: Next, I'd like to call  
12 Sophie Shards -- Sharps from the New York City  
13 Campaign Finance Board.

14                  MS. SHARPS: All right. Good evening  
15 and thank you to Chair Buery and members of the 2025  
16 Charter Revision Commission for the opportunity to  
17 testify. My name is Sophie Sharps and I'm the  
18 associate director of policy at the New York City  
19 Campaign Finance Board.

20                  The CFB is a nonpartisan, independent  
21 city agency that runs the city's Matching Funds  
22 Program and engages voters through our NYC Votes  
23 initiative. Our mission is to make local democracy  
24 more open, transparent, and equitable by giving New  
25 Yorkers the tools that they need to run -- to vote or

1 run for office.

2 I'm here to highlight key findings from  
3 our 2024 Voter Analysis Report, or VAR, and share  
4 policy recommendations that could reduce voter fatigue  
5 and expand voter participation.

6 The 2024 VAR, published in April of  
7 this year, shows that New York City maintained a high  
8 voter registration rate last year at 85.5 percent of  
9 the eligible population, but turnout still lags,  
10 especially for voters under 30. In 2024, 3.7 percent  
11 of young voters cast ballots in April, 5.0 percent in  
12 June, and 57.1 percent in November.

13 We also identified a participation gap  
14 for the more than 1 million unaffiliated voters in New  
15 York City, or 1 in 5. The VAR finds that unaffiliated  
16 voters turn out to vote at lower rates than their  
17 party-affiliated peers. They also tend to be younger.  
18 Nearly half of all unaffiliated voters are under the  
19 age of 40.

20 Given New York's closed primary system,  
21 unaffiliated voters cannot participate in primary  
22 elections, which may contribute to long-term  
23 disengagement from the electoral process. Our  
24 recommendations are rooted in research on voter  
25 fatigue, the concept that holding more elections leads

1 to lower voter turnout.

2 Our 2024 VAR offers three suggestions  
3 to prioritize voters when scheduling elections: The  
4 frequency of elections across years, the number of  
5 elections within a single year, and the occurrence of  
6 lastminute special elections.

7 First, the 2024 VAR renews our long-  
8 standing recommendation to align odd-year city  
9 elections with higher turnout even-year elections.  
10 Voter turnout for mayoral elections has averaged under  
11 30 percent in New York City, while turnout for  
12 presidential elections regularly exceeds 60 percent.

13 Consolidating elections would reduce  
14 voter fatigue, making it more likely that New Yorkers  
15 vote for the candidates who will represent them at  
16 every level of government. This alignment would  
17 require state legislative action, and a question posed  
18 to New York City voters through either a bill passed  
19 by the City Council or a Charter Revision Commission.

20 Second, New York City held five  
21 elections in 2024 alone. We recommend combining  
22 primaries wherever possible, which would reduce the  
23 number of election days and ease the burden on voters  
24 and election administrators alike.

25 Third, lastminute special elections

1 often yield a particularly low turnout. From 2020 to  
2 2024, the city held 12 special elections to fill 16  
3 vacancies. Aligning these context -- contests with  
4 regular election dates whenever feasible would help  
5 address voter fatigue and increase voter turnout.

6 More details on these recommendations  
7 and supporting data is included in the written  
8 testimony submitted to the Commission and also in the  
9 2024 VAR. Thank you again for the opportunity to  
10 testify today.

11 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. I  
12 appreciate it.

13 Are there any questions for -- yes.

14 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Thank you for  
15 your testimony. I just want to make sure I  
16 understand. On the issue of combining special  
17 elections with -- I guess it would be the next  
18 upcoming primary; right?

19 MS. SHARPS: Mm-hm.

20 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: So -- but  
21 because -- no one can predict when an elected official  
22 is going to leave office. Sometimes they leave  
23 voluntarily. Sometimes they move on to better things.  
24 Sometimes they move on to, you know, their next life.

25 So if you, you know -- and none of

1 us -- there's no way to predict that, but if you  
2 simply move the election forward to the next regularly  
3 scheduled election, you could potentially leave a  
4 district without representation during a very  
5 important part.

6 So if -- in Albany, if you are no  
7 longer in office after February, then your district  
8 doesn't have a voice in the budget process, which is  
9 the most important part of what happens in the  
10 legislative term.

11 So I mean, is there any concern about  
12 that? I mean, there's a reason why they do them  
13 sooner. Within a certain number of days, you have to  
14 declare a special election.

15 MS. SHARPS: Yep. Absolutely. Thank  
16 you for raising that. And, you know, at every level  
17 at city, state, and federal, the laws look different.  
18 There are a certain number of - 60 days, 90 days,  
19 whatever that looks like, and I think that that is  
20 very valid.

21 But I will also say, you know, looking  
22 at special election turnout, we see that over the past  
23 number of years, it's averaged between 2 and 8  
24 percent. That's incredibly low and there is concern  
25 around voter representation and voters actually not

1 turning up to choose who's representing them anyway.

2 So we believe that having a slightly  
3 longer period is really important to increase voter  
4 turnout and ultimately representation.

5 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: That might be  
6 possibly true, but when you look at the turnout in  
7 regularly scheduled elections, it's not much bigger  
8 than 10 percent anyway. So you get to 20 percent, 21  
9 percent.

10 I just think, you know, there is a  
11 concern about leaving a district without an elected  
12 representative to be their voice in an incredibly  
13 important time frame, whether it's in the state budget  
14 process, the city's budget process, or even the  
15 legislative term. Thank you for your testimony.

16 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you. Any other  
17 further questions?

18 Thank you so much for your testimony.

19 MS. SHARPS: Thank you.

20 CHAIR BUERY: Appreciate it.

21 Next, we'll hear from Candis Tall and  
22 Kyron Banks together as a panel. Just so that they're  
23 aware, they'll be followed by Jim Walden and Michael  
24 Piccirillo. But first, Candis Tall and Kyron Banks.  
25 And again, Jim Walden and Michael Piccirillo will be



1 next.

2 Hello. Welcome.

3 MS. TALL: Okay. Let me start. I  
4 don't want to run out of time. Hello. My name is  
5 Candis Tall. I'm Executive Vice President and  
6 Political Director of SEIU Local 32BJ. I'm here  
7 representing our union and the 90,000 strong we  
8 represent in New York City.

9 We are a member-driven union dedicated  
10 to ensuring that our workers share the prosperity of  
11 the industries that they contribute to. The  
12 foundation of our union is here in New York City where  
13 our workers have attained a middle-class wage standard  
14 of living and affordable, high-quality healthcare.

15 As a labor union, we know well that New  
16 York City faces a critical housing shortage. We  
17 believe our city can both build more affordable  
18 housing and create more middle-class residential  
19 service jobs. That is why we led the way fighting for  
20 the forward-thinking City of Yes framework and  
21 fighting for the much-needed 485-x tax abatement.

22 However, we do not believe the Charter  
23 Commission's land use recommendations accomplish these  
24 two intertwined goals. We have spoken before this  
25 commission previously about the importance of creating

1 more housing with all important democratic checks and  
2 opportunities for public engagement that we use to  
3 protect standards for workers.

4 Question one and two in their current  
5 form fail to do this. We are looking forward to  
6 working with this commission to learn more and  
7 amending these recommendations.

8 On question one, 32BJ does not support  
9 allowing affordable projects, regardless of size, to  
10 be approved by the Board of Standards and Appeals, nor  
11 do we support allowing large, predominantly market  
12 rate projects in districts designated under the fair  
13 housing framework to be approved by the city planning  
14 commission.

15 While we emphatically support the  
16 construction of more affordable housing, this should  
17 not come at the expense of the public's ability to  
18 weigh in on large projects which employ hundreds of  
19 New Yorkers and have significant impacts on the  
20 communities that -- where they're built.

21 Community board hearings, which would  
22 be retained under these proposals, are not relevant if  
23 the local council member, the democratically elected  
24 official who is accountable to that community board,  
25 has a say -- doesn't have a say in the final

1     approvals. Otherwise, these hearings are not real  
2     public consultation.

3                 As such, we do not support ultimate  
4     approval authority going to an unelected group such as  
5     the Board of Standards and Appeals and the City  
6     Planning Commission.

7                 On question two, we are supportive of  
8     an expedited process for low density R1 through R5  
9     districts and small- to medium-sized developments in  
10    transit dense areas.

11                However, awarding developers across the  
12    city a 30 percent bump in density, which, in some  
13    areas, could represent hundreds of units without any  
14    check by the local council member -- it is not  
15    workable in its current form.

16                We hope these proposals can be changed  
17    and amended by the Commission to help support working  
18    people of New York City.

19                CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.

20                MR. BANKS: Good evening. My name is  
21    Kyron Banks. I'm here representing SEIU Local 32BJ.  
22    I'm here to testify in opposition of the Charter's  
23    recommendation of open primaries. The current system  
24    that we have, rank choice voting, allows voters,  
25    including our members, to have real power in local

1 elections.

2 This system ensures that those who win  
3 the primary elections are elected with the majority of  
4 votes. We share the goal of increasing voter turnout  
5 in elections. However, there are some better ways  
6 that -- to increase engagement of the electorate.

7 Currently, the city invests in voter  
8 education, but the city can do more in investing in  
9 voter registration and voter education of voters  
10 across the city.

11 Within our union, we see that when we  
12 invest in voter education and voter registration, we  
13 see an increase in turnout of our members and  
14 engagement, and these investments citywide can also  
15 produce similar results for the voters.

16 During the election, we witnessed rank  
17 choice strategies that allowed for candidates to team  
18 up, cross endorse, and inform their supporters on how  
19 to complete the ballot using rank choice system.

20 This kind of partnership from various  
21 candidates is welcomed because it allows for a  
22 different kind of messaging and a different style of  
23 campaigning, one that encourages voter engagement.  
24 The recent election increased voter turnout compared  
25 to 2021, which I'm sure you'll hear about a few times

1 tonight.

2 According to the am article authored by  
3 Shea Vance, voter turnout in early voting was  
4 increased across all five boroughs. The data saw  
5 there was a high turnout amongst New Yorkers between  
6 the ages of 25 and 34, one that I note the report  
7 focuses on that particular demographic and being  
8 registered unaffiliated.

9 And this is all in the context of not  
10 ideal weather across the early voting and then  
11 consecutive 100-degree days for election. And so  
12 also, when we see when candidates actively engage the  
13 electorate, the electorate will turn out.

14 So in conclusion, the city can do a  
15 better job investing in voter education and voter  
16 registration if turnout is a goal, and that's it.

17 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you both so much  
18 for your testimony and for keeping to time. I  
19 appreciate it.

20 Any questions for the panel?

21 MS. TALL: Came in 40 seconds under.

22 VICE CHAIR GREENBERGER: We're  
23 impressed.

24 CHAIR BUERY: I have a quick question,  
25 and I appreciate the framing, including Ms. Tall sort

1 of starting by acknowledging the affordable housing  
2 crisis. Obviously, we are limited to the charter in  
3 terms of our ability to make changes, although there  
4 may be other things that would help the program.

5 I appreciate your objections to the  
6 current proposal, but I'm wondering are there specific  
7 changes to ULURP that you would support in an effort  
8 to address what you acknowledge is an affordable  
9 housing --

10 MS. TALL: I think -- possibly. We  
11 would love to see, you know, different options. I  
12 think the important thing for us and for most working  
13 people and most New Yorkers is ability to have a say  
14 in the process.

15 And when you have no elected person  
16 who's responsible to their voters making the decision,  
17 it takes away our voice and our ability to impact the  
18 decision that's ultimately made.

19 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you.

20 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: I do have --

21 CHAIR BUERY: Any other questions from  
22 the panel --

23 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: I do. I can't  
24 help myself.

25 So first of all, thank you, Candis.

1 It's good to see you.

2 Kyron, I just want to ask a question  
3 because I've heard from some of my colleagues in the  
4 labor movement. There's a concern about the idea of  
5 open primaries, nonpartisan, whatever we want to call  
6 it, that it would create a problem for labor  
7 organizations and their ability to educate voters and  
8 move them.

9 And I don't quite understand that  
10 because the best people in the city that do a good job  
11 of educating voters, motivating them, and running GOTV  
12 efforts are unions. You -- it's what you guys do. I  
13 mean, I used to do it myself.

14 So I don't -- let's assume we have  
15 a -- an open -- for better term, an "open primary" in  
16 June and there are seven candidates that are running.  
17 One's a Democrat, one's a Republican, a Working  
18 Families Party, an unaffiliated, whatever it happens  
19 to be.

20 The process by which you would  
21 determine who would be your selected candidate that  
22 represents the interests of 32BJ and your members  
23 wouldn't change. You would still advocate and, you  
24 know, run a campaign to get that person elected  
25 because they reflect the values of your organization.

1                   So I don't quite understand why unions  
2                   are so concerned about whether it's an open primary  
3                   where people -- where more than one individual is  
4                   allowed to run that's not just a Democrat or a  
5                   Republican or whatever.

6                   Your process wouldn't change. You'd  
7                   pick the candidate that best represents the interests  
8                   of your union. You would advocate for them. You'd  
9                   educate. You'd turn out the vote. So what -- maybe  
10                  I'm missing something, and if I am, please help me  
11                  understand this because I don't quite get it.

12                  MS. TALL: Yeah. Do you want to take  
13                  it, or you want me to?

14                  MR. BANKS: [No audible response.]

15                  MS. TALL: I think -- I mean, I think  
16                  there -- when you're talking about larger races,  
17                  citywide races, I think some of what you're saying has  
18                  some merit.

19                  But I think the smaller the district,  
20                  the -- and, you know, when we look at some districts  
21                  right now, if it's 60 percent registered Republicans,  
22                  are you actually giving a Democratic person a chance  
23                  to actually compete and have their voices be heard and  
24                  have them appeal to voters?

25                  If, you know -- if you're picking the



1 top two, they're probably going to both be Republicans  
2 and then there's not a chance for someone from a  
3 different ideology to actually be heard to those  
4 voters when they're still 40 percent of that district  
5 and maybe folks who would flip over and do something  
6 different if they were spoken to and heard a  
7 different, you know, ideology or opinion that they  
8 could resonate with.

9 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: But you could  
10 make the same argument in, you know, other districts  
11 that are overwhelmingly Democratic where there's no  
12 prayer in, you know, hell of anybody else who's not a  
13 registered Democrat from moving forward out of a  
14 Democratic primary, which sometimes produces maybe  
15 four or five thousand votes in total.

16 So I'm just -- again, I get the concern  
17 that unions have that this would change the way they  
18 approach politics, but I don't really think it harms  
19 your ability to deliver voters.

20 MS. TALL: Well, I don't actually know  
21 if that's true. Like a prime example is Council  
22 District 13; right? Where their seat -- if you look  
23 at the registered voters, it's over 60 percent  
24 registered Democrats. There's a Republican in that  
25 seat right now.

1                   Had their primary only allowed for, you  
2     know, the top two, which may -- probably would have  
3     ended up being two Democrats, would the Republican  
4     have had a chance to compete and actually win that  
5     seat? Probably not.

6                   COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Interestingly,  
7     that seat flipped that way because of a housing --

8                   MS. TALL: Well, we don't have to talk  
9     about those details, but you get my point.

10                  COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Thank you.

11                  CHAIR BUERY: Any other questions for  
12     the panel?

13                  UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 9: No.

14                  CHAIR BUERY: Okay. Thank you so much  
15     for your testimony. I appreciate it.

16                  MS. TALL: Thank you.

17                  CHAIR BUERY: Next up are Jim Walden  
18     and Michael Piccirillo. After this panel, just so  
19     you're ready, will be Jasmine Gripper and Kai  
20     Rosenthal.

21                  MR. WALDEN: Should I wait for  
22     Mr. Piccirillo or start?

23                  CHAIR BUERY: No, no, you can start.

24                  MR. WALDEN: Well, thank you very much  
25     for hearing my voice. And as some of you may know,

1 but maybe not everyone, I'm running for mayor as an  
2 Independent.

3 But I'm really not here tonight as a  
4 mayoral candidate, although I would be thrilled to  
5 talk to you in -- as a first-time candidate, having  
6 gone through the cycle that I've gone through now, the  
7 dramatic impact that our current system has on the  
8 voice of Independents.

9 I'm here as someone who, for 23 years,  
10 has fought for good government at every level, whether  
11 it's the federal level, the state level, or the local  
12 level. I've brought more cases than I can imagine.  
13 Many of them are about protecting our democracy.

14 And I've seen things that curl my toes:  
15 Voter manipulation, gerrymandering, all of the ways in  
16 which the two-party system, regardless of who the  
17 majority party is, seeks to stifle competition.

18 You have an opportunity that can be  
19 defined by inclusiveness, competitiveness, and  
20 engagement, and I hate to use an acronym that's not a  
21 good one, but it's ICE. So sorry about that. That  
22 was unintentional. And I'd ask you to think about the  
23 stakes here, and I do appreciate all the work that  
24 you've done.

25 On inclusiveness, you know that there

1 are now a million unaffiliated voters in the City of  
2 New York. Not one of them can vote in the primary. I  
3 just heard speakers talk about voices being heard and  
4 uplifting voices.

5 What about the million Independents,  
6 unaffiliated voters who cannot vote like me? I left  
7 my party in 2006. I have not been able to vote in a  
8 single primary. If we are a city that believes in  
9 inclusiveness, we have to talk the talk and walk the  
10 walk, and the only way that we can get there is with  
11 open primaries.

12 Competitiveness. I cannot tell you the  
13 number of times that I've been told, "You can't win in  
14 New York City as an Independent." Historical examples  
15 are ignored. It is present in every possible way in  
16 our system.

17 You can level the playing field so that  
18 it may very well be that in an open two system, only  
19 two Democrats emerge, but at least the Independents  
20 will have a meaningful chance to get the kind of  
21 support they need before the race is essentially  
22 declared over because of the primary system.

23 And finally, on engagement, who is  
24 being excluded in the roughly million Independents in  
25 this city? The very people that we need to build our

1 democracy: Young people, people of color, veterans,  
2 and most importantly, people who do not want  
3 "hyperpartisanship."

4 And we are at a crossroads in our  
5 country where the worst polling party is the two-party  
6 system. Whether you're in a red state or a blue  
7 state, a red city or a blue city, the polls show that  
8 people don't trust the system.

9 You can level set that by doing what I  
10 believe you intend to do and you know is the right  
11 thing to do for civic engagement and good government,  
12 and that's open the primary system. Thank you.

13 CHAIR BUERY: Is -- if we could -- is  
14 Mr. Piccirillo here? Is Mr. Piccirillo --

15 MR. WALDEN: He ceded his time to me.  
16 That was a joke.

17 CHAIR BUERY: Are there any questions  
18 for Mr. Walden?

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 10: There's no  
20 opinion on the housing --

21 CHAIR BUERY: No.

22 MR. WALDEN: Thank you for having me.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 11: Thank you.

24 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much for  
25 testifying. We appreciate it. Next up is Jasmine

1 Gripper and Kim -- and Kai Rosenthal. Sorry. They'll  
2 be followed by Annemarie Gray and Samir Lavingia, and  
3 I apologize if I'm mispronouncing your name.

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 12: Hey,  
5 you -- Michael, you should go now. You were supposed  
6 to be up --

7 CHAIR BUERY: Okay. Okay. I'm sorry.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 12: You can go  
9 now.

10 MR. PICCIRILLO: Members of the  
11 Commission, my name is Michael Piccirillo. I'm the  
12 Director of Area Standards for the New York City  
13 District Council of Carpenters. My focus is on  
14 creating more work hours for our members and  
15 protecting the rights of non-union workers.

16 While we generally support reforms that  
17 make building in New York City easier, we stand  
18 against this proposal. Proposal one and two, despite  
19 noble intentions, have potential for abuse. We fight  
20 bad actors daily and recognize loopholes.

21 The report claims these will help  
22 affordable housing, but the fine print shows they  
23 apply to MIH projects, the majority of residential  
24 projects, without worker protections.

25 These proposals cut council members out

1 of the process, favoring city hall and wealthy  
2 developers, sidelining unions. This won't create  
3 affordable housing but will incentivize bad actors.

4 Proposal three introduces unnecessary  
5 formal checks on the City Council, undermining council  
6 members. Speaker Adams has pushed for more housing,  
7 and this proposal undermines her efforts.

8 We strongly oppose both election  
9 reforms. Shifting elections to even numbered years  
10 will nationalize local races and marginalizing local  
11 issues. Open primaries favor well-funded candidates,  
12 narrowing democracy. These proposals take power from  
13 everyday New Yorkers. I urge the Commission to stand  
14 with our union against them. Thank you.

15 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you for your  
16 testimony.

17 Are there any questions for  
18 Mr. Piccirillo?

19 I have a quick -- well, we're going  
20 to -- I have a quick question. You spoke about the  
21 role of money in open primaries. Can you speak a  
22 little bit more about that and the difference between  
23 the current primary system in terms of the role of --

24 MR. PICCIRILLO: Say that again. I'm  
25 sorry.

1 CHAIR BUERY: You talked about the role  
2 of money in speaking about the electoral reforms. I  
3 think you mentioned that one of your concerns was that  
4 an open primary system would increase the role of  
5 money in elections. I was wondering if you could  
6 speak more to that and how that differs from the  
7 current system.

8 Maybe I misheard -- I may have  
9 misheard --

10 MR. PICCIRILLO: Oh, so it, you  
11 know -- it'll definitely give an advantage to  
12 more -- candidates who raise more money than ones that  
13 don't have the ability to raise as much money as the  
14 ones that do, you know?

15 CHAIR BUERY: Okay. Okay. Are there  
16 any questions for Mr. Piccirillo? All right.

17 Thank you so much for your testimony.

18 MR. PICCIRILLO: Thank you.

19 CHAIR BUERY: We appreciate it. Next  
20 up is Jasmine Gripper and Kai Rosenthal. Thank you.  
21 Sorry about that.

22 MS. GRIPPER: No worries.

23 CHAIR BUERY: Give them a second  
24 because the hearing's not -- the sound is a little  
25 rough.



1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 13: Carpenters  
2 are rolling out.

3 CHAIR BUERY: All right. Thank you.  
4 Please continue.

5 MS. GRIPPER: Good evening,  
6 commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to  
7 testify. I'm Jasmine Gripper, Co-Director of the New  
8 York State Working Families Party, and I'm here in  
9 opposition to the proposal that would eliminate  
10 partisan primaries in New York City --

11 CHAIR BUERY: One second. I'm going to  
12 ask folks -- and I appreciate supporting each other,  
13 but it makes it hard to get through the testimony. So  
14 if we can just let people speak. And I believe that  
15 you support her. Thank you.

16 MS. GRIPPER: I'm here in opposition to  
17 the proposal that would eliminate partisan primaries  
18 in New York City and would replace them with  
19 nonpartisan jungle primaries. Before we discuss what  
20 we'd change about the current system, let's first  
21 point out what is working.

22 We currently have the most diverse City  
23 Council in New York City history with racial, gender,  
24 age, and economic diversity. The number of elected  
25 female City Council members, and more specifically

1 women of color, is at record numbers.

2 We have more voter turnout increasing  
3 in the Democratic primary compared to the last two  
4 decades, especially with the implementation of early  
5 voting. And while you all were having hearings, many  
6 of us were out at the door increasing turnout, talking  
7 to voters, and making sure we were engaging in this  
8 current Democratic primary process.

9 This is the second time New Yorkers are  
10 using the rank choice voting system and  
11 overwhelmingly, it's a success. Fewer people had  
12 their ballots exhausted this year than four years ago  
13 and New Yorkers are learning increasingly how to use  
14 the new political -- the voting system of rank choice  
15 voting.

16 Jungle primaries, on the other hand,  
17 have no history of significantly increasing turnout,  
18 which has been the original reason the Commission gave  
19 to include this proposal.

20 Let me remind the commissioners and the  
21 public that jungle primaries were first proposed in  
22 New York City by Mayor Michael Bloomberg more than 20  
23 years ago as he was fighting to crush public sector  
24 unions in the city.

25 The organizations pushing for jungle

1 primaries across the country like Unite America are  
2 backed by billionaires, including Michael Bloomberg  
3 himself, who attempted to use their wealth to buy our  
4 democracy.

5 Because of organized workers and  
6 organized community members and Democrats and  
7 sometimes the Working Families Party, primaries in New  
8 York City are one things that are actually difficult  
9 for the billionaires to buy, and that's why they want  
10 to change the rules.

11 Instead of unionized nurses,  
12 construction workers picking their candidate, they  
13 want to open it up to their hedge fund billionaires  
14 and Republican and -- neighbors on Park Avenue.

15 Let's be honest: The proposal to  
16 implement jungle primaries is simply about limiting  
17 the power of everyday working-class people in New York  
18 City by crippling political parties, confusing voters,  
19 and making it easier for billionaires to elect their  
20 preferred candidates.

21 Parties play a vital role in our  
22 political process, and we will not hesitate to  
23 strongly oppose any effort to stack the deck for the  
24 billionaire class more than it already is. We also  
25 want to ensure that we protect New York State's fusion

1 voting laws, which allow candidates to run on more  
2 than one ballot line.

3 If the Commission goes forward with  
4 nonpartisan primaries on the ballot this November, the  
5 Working Families Party will be put in a position where  
6 we would be obligated to explore legal challenges in  
7 the courts and mobilize our members, affiliates, and  
8 labor unions in strong opposition to the proposal.

9 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.

10 Kai Rosenthal?

11 MS. ROSENTHAL: Good evening. I'm Kai  
12 Rosenthal, Co-President of the League of Women Voters  
13 of the City of New York.

14 And on behalf of the League's community  
15 of members, volunteers, and partner organizations, I  
16 appreciate the opportunity granted by Chair Buery and  
17 the other members of the Charter Revision Commission  
18 to submit testimony today on the subject of open  
19 primaries.

20 As a multi-issue, nonpartisan political  
21 organization of over a hundred years, the League of  
22 Women Voters encourages informed and active  
23 participation in government, works to increase  
24 understanding of policy issues, and impacts public  
25 policy through advocacy and education.

1                   We are in favor of the proposed ballot  
2 question that would establish open primaries for city  
3 elections. The league is a grassroots, member-led  
4 organization that engages in study and consensus-based  
5 processes to reach positions.

6                   We studied the question of opening up  
7 the primary system in New York State, including in New  
8 York City, and found broad-based consensus among our  
9 membership across the state with regard to this issue.  
10 Our position supports allowing all registered voters  
11 to participate in the primary regardless of party  
12 affiliation or lack thereof.

13                   Turnout is still limited by the  
14 inability of nonparty affiliated voters to participate  
15 in the primary system. The league encourages  
16 electoral methods that provide the broadest voter  
17 representation possible and are expressive of voter  
18 choices. Increasing numbers of voters decline to  
19 choose a party when they register to vote.

20                   This trend is particularly pronounced  
21 among younger voters who, in New York, often do not  
22 choose a party. Approximately 1 in 5 registered  
23 voters identify as unaffiliated in New York City and  
24 nearly half of those are under the age of 40.

25                   Excluding voters that are not

1 registered with a party from the primary may  
2 significantly limit such voter's choice of candidates  
3 in the general election. Additionally, closed  
4 partisan primaries give disproportionate power to the  
5 small number of voters who turn out to vote in  
6 primaries, which may be contributing to polarization.

7 For these reasons and more, we would  
8 strongly support the change currently being proposed  
9 by the Commission.

10 In addition, we applaud the Commission  
11 for ballot question number five on moving city  
12 elections to the same year as presidential elections.  
13 We were pleased to see that the interim report  
14 concurred with our testimony that the change is likely  
15 to lead to a more inclusive electorate.

16 As always, I want to thank the Charter  
17 Commission for your leadership for New York City.

18 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much, both  
19 of you, for your testimony. Are there any questions  
20 from members of the panel?

21 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Yes, I do. Thank  
22 you.

23 Thank you both, ladies. It's  
24 interesting to have two women sitting next to each  
25 other who are completely different

1 opinions -- represented them both very well. So I'm  
2 going to -- obviously I'm going to address Ms. Gripper  
3 from the Working Families Party.

4 So 27 years ago when we created the  
5 party, I was there. The vision of the party at the  
6 time was that we wanted to organize labor  
7 organizations, community-based organizations, and  
8 others who felt disenfranchised by the Democratic  
9 Party. That was the point. You know, you know the  
10 history as well as other people who do.

11 And we made a conscious decision that  
12 we were not going to go out and enroll voters in the  
13 Working Families Party because we wanted to be able to  
14 participate in the Democratic Party primary process,  
15 and that's still true to this day. As of the end of  
16 2024 in the City of New York, there were only 22,206  
17 registered Working Families Party members; right?

18 So the purpose of the party is really  
19 to be -- to move the Democratic party to the left. So  
20 you guys have already proven you're pretty successful  
21 at that. Two weeks ago, you managed to launch a  
22 campaign to influence Democratic voters in their  
23 primary process to vote for somebody different  
24 than -- actually, to reject a particular candidate.

25 So you've proven that you're able to

1 move voters. So how would this change to open  
2 primaries -- with the exception of the elimination of  
3 fusion voting. That, I understand. That, I get.

4 MS. GRIPPER: Eliminating fusion voting  
5 is a big deal. It's a state law that you would not  
6 actually have permission to do.

7 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: But --

8 MS. GRIPPER: But I will just  
9 say -- just even to speak to --

10 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: -- question  
11 before you jump to it. But even in the -- even when  
12 fusion voting is on the ballot, the number of people  
13 who vote on the WFP line when there's a Democrat that  
14 matches, somebody that you match, is really not that  
15 high.

16 So people are still voting on the  
17 Democratic line. They're not voting on the WFP line  
18 for those candidates that you guys support. I'm not  
19 saying that nothing is happening, but it's -- we're  
20 not shifting all of those Democratic voters from the  
21 primary into the WFP line in November.

22 MS. GRIPPER: So I think, one, you're  
23 proving that it's false that being enrolled as a  
24 Working Families Party member that I feel  
25 disenfranchised. I don't feel disenfranchised. I've



1     been a WFP registered voter for a number of years,  
2     long before I even worked for the party. It was a  
3     choice that I made.

4                 I still feel like I get to get involved  
5     in our elections. Participating in a Democratic  
6     primary or a primary election is just one way in which  
7     you can participate. I still can collect petitions  
8     for the Working Families Party, which I choose to do.  
9     I can still knock doors and talk to voters from any  
10    persuasion that I can.

11                And so I am a independent Working  
12    Families Party voter who is still engaged in this  
13    process and not disengaged and not overlooked. And so  
14    it's really important to say that. I speak for  
15    myself. The others who are registered Democrats who  
16    are speaking for me.

17                I feel empowered in my choice to be a  
18    Working Families Party member, and I still support  
19    that we should have closed primaries.

20                COMMISSIONER SAVINO: What would  
21    prevent the Working Families Party -- let's assume we  
22    have these -- this open primary process. Again, it's  
23    June. Candidates go out there and they put themselves  
24    forward for whatever the race happens to be.

25                They have their party affiliation on

1 the ballot because it's important that voters can  
2 identify because party labels do mean something to  
3 people. The Working Families Party could run their  
4 own candidates, and you might potentially be at the  
5 top two and wind up winning --

6 MS. GRIPPER: Yeah. And we do run our  
7 own candidate sometimes; right? Tish James' first  
8 election was as the WFP candidate only. We have the  
9 ability to either fuse our votes with another party or  
10 we have a opportunity to have our own candidate, but  
11 you can't change that we have that choice.

12 Fusion exists and we should be able to  
13 fuse votes and candidates are allowed to be on more  
14 than one ballot line.

15 I think the other thing I'll say is in  
16 terms of, like, reaching out to voters for our input  
17 is when we are looking at voters to talk to, you are  
18 vastly expanding how many doors we would have to knock  
19 in order to influence the process. That makes it more  
20 expensive and that makes it much harder to do  
21 targeting to get turnout.

22 We are -- when we are influencing a  
23 Democratic primary, we are only talking to people who  
24 are registered Democrats. When you now make that open  
25 to everyone, it makes it nearly impossible to do any

1     targeting and it costs a lot more to send out mailers,  
2     to do phones, and to do texts.

3                 COMMISSIONER SAVINO:   The party would  
4     grow under that.

5                 And the final question I'll ask -- and  
6     I don't mean to -- I'm not trying to be  
7     argumentative -- is -- maybe I am.   I don't know.  
8     It's part of my nature -- is how often -- when the WFP  
9     selects a candidate in the primary process that's also  
10    running in a Democratic primary and that candidate  
11    doesn't win, how often do you allow the candidate that  
12    you chose originally -- right?

13                John Smith, Democrat, also on the WFP  
14    line.   John Smith loses the Democratic primary.   How  
15    often does John Smith go on to the general election on  
16    the WFP line?

17                MS. GRIPPER:   Very rare.

18                COMMISSIONER SAVINO:   Exactly.   Thank  
19    you.   Thank you.

20                CHAIR BUERY:   If you can please, please  
21    disrespect the process.   Everyone will be able to sign  
22    up to testify --

23                MS. GRIPPER:   Candidates are allowed to  
24    decline the line after losing the Democratic primary  
25    after a change in state law in recent years.

1 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Thank you.

2 CHAIR BUERY: Any other questions for  
3 the panel? No? All right. Nope?

4 Thank you so much. Appreciate it.  
5 Thank you so much for your testimony.

6 Next up is Annemarie Gray and Samir  
7 Lavingia -- Lavingia. They'll be followed by  
8 Dr. Jessie Fields and Grace Rauh. And I'm sorry. I  
9 know -- can you -- how do you pronounce your name? I  
10 apologize.

11 MR. LAVINGIA: Samir Lavingia.

12 CHAIR BUERY: Lavingia. Thank you so  
13 much.

14 MS. GRAY: Great. Good evening,  
15 commissioners. My name is Annemarie Gray. I'm the  
16 executive director of Open New York, an independent,  
17 grassroots, pro-housing nonprofit with hundreds of  
18 volunteer members across the city of state, and I'm  
19 testifying on behalf of the organization.

20 The housing issues you are considering  
21 are so important that I am in front of you for the  
22 third time this year. As I've said previously, and as  
23 both of the preliminary and interim reports explain  
24 clearly, our housing affordability crisis is rooted in  
25 a dire shortage of homes, which is exacerbated by the

1 current design of our land use review process.

2 I am very excited to see questions one  
3 through four address the priorities I have highlighted  
4 in my previous testimony and years of work at Open New  
5 York.

6 Question number one is a type of fast  
7 track for fair housing proposal that has been our top  
8 priority, adding teeth to the speaker's fair housing  
9 framework and real accountability for low growth  
10 neighborhoods that have been allowed to opt out of  
11 being part of the solution for far too long.

12 Question two will help break down our  
13 current system where nearly every proposal is a toxic  
14 fight where only the largest and best resource  
15 developers can afford to go through the lengthy and  
16 costly public review process, where small climate  
17 resiliency projects hit unnecessary barriers, and  
18 where the type of modest incremental growth that has  
19 defined our city for generations can be an option  
20 again.

21 The proposed land use appeals board in  
22 question three is along the lines of reforms that  
23 other cities and states have adopted to balance the  
24 hyperlocal veto points that keep our neighborhoods  
25 segregated, exclusionary, and expensive.

1           It is essential for the final details  
2 of this proposal are designed to prevent bad faith  
3 rejections of new housing, not undermine pro-housing  
4 council members who are negotiating for better  
5 projects in good faith.

6           Question four. There are so many  
7 invisible and unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles that  
8 make it hard to improve our city. This is an easy low  
9 hanging fruit reform that can speed up building more  
10 homes.

11           We look forward to learning more about  
12 the details of the final questions, but I recommend  
13 these four advance to the final stage.

14           The additional questions being  
15 considered about elections are outside the scope of  
16 Open New York's focus. However, I strongly recommend  
17 you do not put additional controversial non-housing  
18 questions on the ballot that risk distracting from the  
19 success of the housing reforms.

20           Explaining complex and land use issues  
21 in plain language enough for the median voter to  
22 understand and building support for them will be hard  
23 enough.

24           The urgency of smart reforms to our  
25 land use process and the unique opportunity and

1 responsibility for the Commission to do everything in  
2 your power to help bring down the cost of housing for  
3 New Yorkers is too great to endanger.

4 We have a real chance to reform the  
5 city charter to address our housing crisis to ensure  
6 we remain a city not just for the privileged few. The  
7 stakes are very high. Thank you.

8 MR. LAVINGIA: All right. Hello. My  
9 name is Samir Lavingia. I am the Second Vice Chair of  
10 Community Board 5. I'm also the Vice Chair of our  
11 Transportation Committee -- Community Board 5  
12 Manhattan. I'm also a county committee member of  
13 Assembly District 75 Part B and I have a number --

14 CHAIR BUERY: It may just be me. Can  
15 you maybe move the mic a little bit closer --

16 MR. LAVINGIA: Sure. A little closer.  
17 Is that better?

18 CHAIR BUERY: I'm hoping that'll help.

19 MR. LAVINGIA: Great. Sorry. My name  
20 is Samir Lavingia. I'm on my community board,  
21 Manhattan Community Board 5. I'm the Second Vice  
22 Chair there, and the Vice Chair of the Transportation  
23 Committee, and I have a number of other affiliations,  
24 but I want to be clear that I'm purely speaking in a  
25 personal capacity.

1 I'm excited to see the proposals that  
2 the Commission has put forward. Land use is a  
3 critical issue in the city. I come from a family of  
4 renters. My family is all in New York City. I live  
5 in Midtown, my parents live in Midtown, my brother and  
6 his wife and my recently born nephew live in Dumbo,  
7 and we are constantly at risk of displacement.

8 I want to live in a city where I can be  
9 assured that I will be able to see my grandson -- or  
10 my -- no, sorry -- my nephew grow and my parents can  
11 see their grandson grow up. I'm a big fan of all the  
12 housing proposals, questions one through four.

13 The expedited land use review procedure  
14 is a great plan and City of Yes, especially in  
15 District 5, was a great start with -- City of Yes was  
16 a great start with the Universal Affordability  
17 Preference. And for housing to have this additional  
18 option to add a little bit more density is also a  
19 great thing that we should add.

20 I'm also a big fan of the appeals  
21 board. Our housing crisis does not end at the border  
22 of one district and start at the border of another.  
23 It is a citywide issue and it's important that we take  
24 a citywide lens. Polling has shown that voters  
25 clearly want land use reform.



1                   And I understand why elected officials  
2                   are cautious, but it's important that we take these  
3                   issues straight to the voters. The housing crisis is  
4                   very urgent as we are seeing record low vacancy rates,  
5                   and we should do anything we can to build more housing  
6                   in this city to ensure that New Yorkers can stay.  
7                   Thank you.

8                   CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.  
9                   Are there any questions for the panel?

10                  COMMISSIONER NIEVES: I actually want  
11                  to -- I have one quick -- I remember seeing you at a  
12                  few other hearings as well, too. I guess I just want  
13                  to pose the question when you're saying you don't want  
14                  to, in a sense, dilute the housing points.

15                  But you were at the other three  
16                  hearings and the other three hearings, we had more  
17                  than half the people testify in support of open  
18                  primaries, and I'm curious to know how you respond to  
19                  that.

20                  MS. GRAY: I -- so I have -- I've been  
21                  to some of the other hearings. I haven't been to all  
22                  of them. And I really respect the process that the  
23                  Commission is going through to really make sure you're  
24                  hearing from everybody.

25                  I focus on housing. I think that

1 housing is the biggest existential -- the cost of  
2 housing is the biggest existential threat that the  
3 city faces. I think the Commission has done a really  
4 exceptional job actually coming up and really  
5 wrestling with and listening to some proposals that  
6 are really, really going to make it better.

7 And I think clearly there is, you  
8 know -- I'm not weighing officially in on any of the  
9 other proposals outside housing, but I just think the  
10 Commission should think really hard about questions  
11 that are going to threaten the success of something  
12 that is so important that you've done a really  
13 exceptional job at creating some really thoughtful  
14 reforms.

15 CHAIR BUERY: All right. Thank you  
16 both so much. I appreciate it.

17 Next up is Dr. Jessie Fields and Grace  
18 Rauh. They will be followed by Trisha Thompson and  
19 Karen Wharton. Dr. Fields, please.

20 DR. FIELDS: Good evening.  
21 Should -- I'll begin?

22 CHAIR BUERY: Yes, please.

23 DR. FIELDS: Okay. Thank you for the  
24 chance to testify this evening. I'm Dr. Jessie  
25 Fields, Harlem community doctor and a board member of

1 Open Primaries, and I'm one of the Independent voters  
2 who is excluded from voting in primary elections.

3 I do not want to join a political  
4 party, and our city should not be forcing me to make a  
5 choice between joining a political party whose  
6 long-standing hierarchical policies and practices I do  
7 not agree with, that -- making a choice between my  
8 opinions and voting in our taxpayer-funded primary  
9 elections. It's not a fair choice.

10 Closed primaries are a form of  
11 political discrimination and Independent  
12 voters -- Independent New Yorkers who are registered  
13 to vote but don't want to -- but want to remain  
14 unaffiliated, we have waited long enough for equal  
15 voting rights. We should not have to wait any longer.

16 I particularly want to thank this  
17 Commission for focusing on top two nonpartisan  
18 primaries, nonpartisan elections. Eighty-five percent  
19 of cities use this model including Dallas, Houston,  
20 Boston, Chicago, LA, and many more, and these cities  
21 are functioning. They have active political parties.  
22 New York is an outlier.

23 Top two nonpartisan primaries put the  
24 voters in the driver's seat, not the parties and not  
25 the top-down special interests. The voters are

1 empowered by nonpartisan top two primary elections.

2 There's a lot of special interests here  
3 that you're hearing from that say it's a bad thing or  
4 it's not the right time, but there will never be a  
5 "right time" for them to give up their power. That's  
6 the appeal of top two nonpartisan elections. It  
7 empowers voters. It's voter centric.

8 As your own interim report so aptly  
9 demonstrates, top two primaries not only would empower  
10 1 million New York City Independents, they would  
11 increase electoral competitiveness and improve  
12 representation and turnout. All New Yorkers would  
13 benefit. So why wait?

14 We don't know exactly what some of the  
15 people such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Fannie  
16 Lou Hamer, some of the people who fought for voting  
17 rights in this country -- we don't know exactly what  
18 they would say if they were here to testify today, but  
19 we do know what they said and did when they walked on  
20 this earth.

21 Eleven days before the successful  
22 completion of the Selma to Montgomery march, Dr. King  
23 wrote:

24 "When the full power of the ballot is  
25 available to my people, it will not be exercised

1 merely to advance our cause alone. We have learned in  
2 the course of our freedom struggle that the needs of  
3 20 million Negroes are not truly separable from those  
4 of nearly 200 million in America."

5 I hope this Commission seizes the  
6 moment and advances an initiative to open the barriers  
7 of closed primaries to those voters who have been  
8 excluded for far too long. Thank you.

9 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.

10 MS. RAUH: Thank you, commissioners.  
11 My name is Grace Rauh, and I'm the Executive Director  
12 of Citizens Union. We are a nonpartisan, good  
13 government group that works to ensure honest and  
14 accountable government, fair and open elections, and a  
15 civically engaged public. I'm here to comment on the  
16 two proposed election reforms in your report.

17 First, we strongly support your  
18 proposal to move local elections to even numbered  
19 years. This change would be transformative, bringing  
20 more New Yorkers into the political process,  
21 increasing civic engagement, and helping create a city  
22 government that better reflects the people it serves.

23 Second, we urge you to advance a ballot  
24 question to open New York's closed primary system. It  
25 is time to move away from closed partisan primaries,

1 which exclude more than 1 million independent voters.

2 The open primary model under discussion  
3 would allow all registered voters to participate in a  
4 nonpartisan primary with the top two advancing to the  
5 general election. We want to address concerns that  
6 have been raised about this proposed reform.

7 Some have argued that it could reduce  
8 the power of minority voters, particularly black  
9 voters.

10 But a study by voting rights expert Dr.  
11 Lisa Handley and former U.S. Attorney General Loretta  
12 Lynch found that the open primary system would not  
13 diminish turnout among any protected class or make it  
14 harder for a black or Hispanic preferred candidate to  
15 win. In some cases, it may even help.

16 Others have said that open primaries  
17 would harm progressive candidates. Predictions about  
18 partisan outcomes are simply speculative. Open or  
19 nonpartisan primaries have helped elect mayors like  
20 Karen Bass in Los Angeles and Michelle Woo in Boston,  
21 just as New York's closed primaries have produced  
22 winners across the political spectrum.

23 In fact, Zohran Mamdani's victory in  
24 the Democratic primary was fueled by support from  
25 areas with high concentrations of unaffiliated voters,

1 neighborhoods like Elmhurst in Queens, Bay Ridge in  
2 Brooklyn, Westchester Square in the Bronx. His base  
3 included many young and Asian voters, the very groups  
4 most likely to be shut out under the current system.

5 Another concern is that this reform  
6 would confuse voters so soon after rank choice voting,  
7 but the voting experience would remain largely the  
8 same and passing this in 2025 would provide nearly  
9 four years for robust education before the next  
10 citywide election.

11 The question before you is whether we  
12 will continue to exclude one-fifth of our city's  
13 voters from the most decisive election of every  
14 municipal cycle. We believe all New Yorkers deserve a  
15 meaningful say in choosing their leaders. Thank you  
16 all for your time and the commitment to this process.

17 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you, both. Are  
18 there any questions for the panel?

19 COMMISSIONER BOZORG: Dr. Fields, can  
20 you talk a little bit more about your emphasis on top  
21 two over top four or even semi-open primaries?

22 DR. FIELDS: Well, I think the  
23 important thing clearly is that unaffiliated voters be  
24 included and empowered. The form nonpartisan top two  
25 elections I think I like a lot because it is

1 nonpartisan, and it allows the voters to decide who  
2 will go on to the general election. All the voters.

3 It gives an opportunity for voters to  
4 choose to vote for a Democrat, an Independent, Working  
5 Families Party, whatever. You know, you have a  
6 mixture of people to vote for.

7 And I think one of the things that I  
8 think is important about it also is it's an  
9 opportunity to build coalitions, dialogue, you know,  
10 collaboration across party and ideological lines,  
11 which I think is very important for our country and  
12 for our city right now. So it's truly nonpartisan.  
13 That is the parties are not in control.

14 It doesn't eliminate parties, but it  
15 gives you a way, you know -- people have -- people are  
16 very diverse, even within the Democratic party. I  
17 spent a lot of time on primary day speaking to people  
18 about the need -- the fact that I couldn't vote  
19 because I'm an Independent, and would they support  
20 changing the process and opening it up?

21 And a lot of people I spoke to said: "I  
22 know what you mean. I'm registered in the Democratic  
23 party so that I can vote in the primary, not because I  
24 agree with everything. In fact, I don't, but I want  
25 to be able to vote in the primary." I didn't -- I



1 wasn't registered in the primary and I went to vote,  
2 and I couldn't vote.

3 I learned my lesson. There were so  
4 many people who said that to me. I think we should  
5 free all the people, all the party members and the  
6 Independents to be able to vote the way that they want  
7 to, not because they're forced into a structure that  
8 doesn't represent them. Did I answer your question?  
9 I'm not sure.

10 COMMISSIONER NIEVES: Hi. This  
11 question is for Grace. Thank you for your testimony.

12 One thing you didn't mention -- and I  
13 often look at the material and data that you put  
14 forward -- is the impact on -- some people have been  
15 saying that there's -- this is going to have an  
16 impact, if we do open primaries, on being much  
17 more -- money will play a larger role in that. Can  
18 you speak to that?

19 MS. RAUH: We think that money will  
20 actually play less of a role in an open primary  
21 system. There are more voters that need to be reached  
22 and participate in the process. It's actually a  
23 closed party primary where big spending can have a  
24 much larger impact; right? There are fewer voters to  
25 reach.

1                   And so by opening this up, by ensuring  
2                   that all registered voters have a role, we are  
3                   creating circumstances by which the candidates  
4                   competing to win over New Yorkers need to speak to a  
5                   much broader swath of the electorate and the winners  
6                   that emerge will be much more representative of the  
7                   city as a whole.

8                   COMMISSIONER BOZORG: But wouldn't that  
9                   require more? I'm not understanding the connection to  
10                  how that would require less spending. That would  
11                  require significantly more to -- wouldn't it?

12                 MS. RAUH: I just --

13                 COMMISSIONER BOZORG: I'm asking  
14                 without judgment. I mean --

15                 MS. RAUH: Well, I think we can't  
16                 predict the future entirely, but I don't believe -- I  
17                 think that when you have a smaller electorate, that is  
18                 ripe for big money to come in and spend and sway  
19                 voters. We've seen that already.

20                 I think the results, though, of our  
21                 most recent closed primary have showed that the  
22                 current campaign finance system that we have is  
23                 incredibly robust, has gone a very long way to  
24                 empowering small dollar donors and that giving them a  
25                 bigger voice in the process through our strong

1 campaign finance system has been able to overcome big  
2 money efforts, super PAC spending that we've seen on a  
3 big scale.

4 COMMISSIONER BOZORG: Thank you.

5 CHAIR BUERY: Any other questions for  
6 the panelists? Thank you so much. Next up, we have  
7 Tricia Thompson and Karen Wharton. All right. So  
8 Tricia Thompson and Karen Wharton. Please no more  
9 than three minutes.

10 MS. THOMPSON: Yes. Good evening,  
11 commissioners. My name is Trisha Thompson, and I'm a  
12 member of the Communication Workers of America and a  
13 Verizon field technician here in New York City.

14 Myself and my co-workers were the ones  
15 who climb the telephone poles, go into the manholes,  
16 work out in the streets, go into people's homes to  
17 install the phone lines. We also represent public  
18 sector workers here in the city as well as graduate  
19 students, healthcare workers, and many others.

20 I'm here today because I'm worried  
21 about what changing to a jungle primary would mean for  
22 working people like me, my co-workers, and my  
23 community. Right now, unions like mine have a real  
24 way to fight for candidates who stand with working  
25 people. We talk to our members. We knock on doors.

1                   We have conversations about which  
2 candidates will fight for fair wages, safe working  
3 conditions, and good jobs in our city. We're able to  
4 focus that energy during the Democratic primary where  
5 our voices can actually make a difference.

6                   If you move to a jungle primary, that  
7 changes. Instead of one clear primary where working  
8 people can come together and have a say, we'd have a  
9 crowded, confusing ballot with everyone running at  
10 once. That makes it much harder for workers to cut  
11 through the noise and for candidates who come from our  
12 neighborhoods to have a fair shot.

13                  It puts the advantage back into the  
14 hands of people with big money and big-name  
15 recognition, not the candidates who are out there  
16 talking with working people. Unions have spent years  
17 helping regular New Yorkers have a voice in our  
18 elections.

19                  We've been able to win better wages,  
20 safer conditions, and policies that help working  
21 families because we've been able to organize and vote  
22 together. Taking away the primary process, which this  
23 essentially does, removes one of the most important  
24 tools that we have as workers to stand up for  
25 ourselves.

1                   Elections should be a place where  
2 workers still have a voice. I'm asking you to keep  
3 New York City elections fair for working people and  
4 reject the proposal to adopt jungle primaries. Thank  
5 you for your time.

6                   CHAIR BUERY: Thank you.

7                   MS. WHARTON: Good evening, everyone.  
8 Good evening, commissioners. Thank you so much for  
9 the opportunity to testify. I do have prepared  
10 testimony here, but I think I'm going to just go off  
11 script a little bit and answer some of the questions  
12 that I think were asked earlier but not answered.

13                   Firstly, I think the question was  
14 asked, well, how would money -- how would big money  
15 have a role in this? What role would big money have?  
16 Well, we can just look at this last closed election  
17 where there were, like, 15 -- 14, 15 candidates. How  
18 many of you remember the names of those people?

19                   But you do remember the ones who spent  
20 oodles and, you know, gazillion, billion money so that  
21 they can rise on top -- to the top. Perhaps there  
22 were some candidates who -- number seven, number ten  
23 who was really good, but because of the lack of money,  
24 we don't know that person's name.

25                   So now if we were to have 15 people on

1 an open ballot and, you know, open primary, jungle  
2 primary, I don't think -- I think that that's where  
3 money is going to come into play and we will find that  
4 only those with big money who is backed by money will  
5 rise to the top number. That's the first thing.

6 The second question -- I think a  
7 question was asked or a comment was made we've been  
8 here for -- we've had these hearings and so many  
9 people came out and testified in favor of open  
10 primaries. I agree. I saw some of those. Many of  
11 those people who testified did not look like me.

12 I'm really pleased to see today that  
13 there is a much more diverse audience here. And I  
14 think that it's a failure on your part -- I'm  
15 sorry -- that you did not and are not engaging  
16 communities; right? Grassroots communities,  
17 communities of color, my community.

18 You had a hearing the day before  
19 elections, primary elections the last time. You're  
20 having another hearing the day after a long weekend;  
21 right? Where were we? Where were people the day  
22 before elections? They were trying to get -- to GOTV.  
23 That's why they weren't here. And we saw the results  
24 of that.

25 We saw that without open primaries, we

1 were able to increase turnout, particularly amongst  
2 the young. So what does that tell me? It tells me  
3 that it's -- the problem is not the lack of open  
4 primaries. The problem is that we're not engaging  
5 people properly. We're not engaging citizens. So  
6 that's what we need to do.

7 You can have every -- open primaries.  
8 You can have top two, top four. California's system  
9 has shown negligible improvement. Negligible. I've  
10 been hearing people testify, oh, it's going to improve  
11 turnout. So I went on the California's website, and  
12 that is simply not true. Thank you so much --

13 CHAIR BUERY: Appreciate it. Any  
14 questions for the panel? No? All right. Thank you  
15 so much for your testimony.

16 Next up is Barika Williams and Jerrod  
17 Delaine. They'll be followed by Oscar Pocasangre and  
18 Nia Alvarez-Mapp. So first up, Barika Williams and  
19 Jerrod Delaine -- thank you so much.

20 MS. WILLIAMS: Hi, everybody. Good  
21 evening. My name is Barika Williams. I'm the  
22 executive director of the Association for Neighborhood  
23 and Housing Development, and thank you for having me  
24 here again to testify before -- now for the third time  
25 before you all on the recommended ballot proposals.

1           ANHD's mission is to build community  
2 power to win affordable housing and thriving equitable  
3 neighborhoods for all New Yorkers. I want to say  
4 upfront, thank you for the thoughtful research and  
5 deep examination that went into getting us to this  
6 point and this far. Also, I'm going to try to zoom  
7 through because I've got a lot.

8           But I want to uplift that some of what  
9 we've heard before has been around echoing concerns  
10 around community voices and that our members share  
11 many of those concerns as a priority.

12           And that we also have to understand  
13 those considerations with the reality of our current  
14 land use and planning process, which is deeply  
15 inequitable, and many of the outcomes of these  
16 decisions are rooted around your race, your wealth,  
17 and your power of your either elected official or your  
18 neighborhood. So we're not starting from an even  
19 place.

20           To just go through them, we support  
21 proposal one to create a fast track for affordable  
22 housing. Pleased to see it tied to the fair housing  
23 plan and including enforcement and moving us towards  
24 comprehensive and equity-based planning, something we  
25 fought for many years.



1                   Would recommend and suggest adding AMI  
2                   limits or weighted AMI averages to ensure that we're  
3                   getting the deeply affordable housing that community  
4                   neighborhoods would need. And we also have  
5                   recommended suggestions to the metrics for designating  
6                   those low MIH -- those low fast track neighborhoods  
7                   differently than what is currently proposed.

8                   We have concerns about proposal two,  
9                   but generally in support of the overarching proposal  
10                  two tied to affordable housing development with some  
11                  questions around the modest increases for lower  
12                  density districts and the mid to high density  
13                  districts, especially some questions around who would  
14                  determine MIH levels and the fact that the lower  
15                  density changes do not require any affordability.

16                  So we're getting new supply, but not  
17                  necessarily new affordable housing as a part of those.

18                  Lastly, we have concerns and questions  
19                  around proposal three, the land use appeals board.  
20                  Understanding that this is hard and difficult, but  
21                  echoing some of the questions and concerns have come  
22                  up around how to keep folks accountable, especially  
23                  given that it's a three-person appeals board.

24                  I think how we're trying to interrogate  
25                  this for us, ANHD, is that we want a process where a

1 board can review and say yes to projects that are  
2 being opposed and denied going forward given our  
3 current council process where we really -- where  
4 they're benefiting and adding to our overall city  
5 goals; right?

6 Be it -- also keeping in mind this is  
7 housing, economic development, transit, a combination  
8 of things. And we want to be mindful that it could  
9 specifically impact the way community boards and local  
10 stakeholders are engaging, and our key concern here is  
11 around the fact that this board could line item veto  
12 things.

13 So the idea that a community could  
14 negotiate a community benefits agreement, to come to  
15 consensus around something, to really thinking about  
16 things like Industry City and Innovation QNS and other  
17 projects and these re-zonings that we've gone through  
18 to recognize that there are times that communities are  
19 able to say: "This is a dealbreaker for me. This is a  
20 must-have for me."

21 And that the community council member  
22 could then say: "Okay. I'm making sure these happen."  
23 And that this veto -- this appeals board could  
24 potentially come back and take that out with a line  
25 item veto raises a huge concern for us overall. I'll

1 stop there and welcome any questions. Thank you.

2 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.

3 MR. DELAINE: Good evening. My name is  
4 Jerrod Delaine. I am CEO of The Delaine Companies, a  
5 development company focused on housing. I'm also a  
6 college professor at NYU, and I'm the incoming  
7 President for the Council for Urban Real Estate, which  
8 is an organization focused on supporting, empowering  
9 diverse developers.

10 So New York City today is facing a  
11 housing crisis. Not just an affordability crisis, but  
12 we do not have enough housing for the amount of people  
13 that want to be here. These charter amendments are a  
14 decisive step toward that direction of making New York  
15 a better place and a more inclusive place.

16 As you all know, the planning process  
17 is tough, it's hard, and it's largely an exclusive  
18 process. So I love the fact that you guys are working  
19 to create some solutions to work in the direction of  
20 building more housing.

21 I'm in support of the fast track  
22 affordable housing. We need more housing and it's  
23 hard to do it. It's very slow and truthfully, it's  
24 getting slower. So I do support this idea of creating  
25 some sort of fast lane for housing that is affordable.

1 I also support simplifying for modest  
2 projects or smaller projects, I think, New York  
3 citywide. And I'll tell you guys -- this is a true  
4 story. A young man came to me one time. He was  
5 representing a church in Flatbush Brooklyn. He said,  
6 "Jerrod, I'm working on a project." I said: "Great.  
7 That's awesome."

8 He said, "Yeah, but we just got to do a  
9 ULURP." And I said: "Stop. Go tell that church you  
10 can't do it"; right? He was like: "Oh, no, no, no.  
11 We're just going to do a re-zoning."

12 I said: "You're going to spend two  
13 years doing it. You're going to spend \$300,000 on  
14 land use attorneys. The community is going to hate  
15 you because you're going to community board four  
16 times" -- right -- "and you're not going to reach the  
17 end zone just to build an affordable housing project,"  
18 which is very tough to do financially.

19 So I like the idea of creating a fast  
20 track, especially for smaller projects, because  
21 there's churches all over New York  
22 City -- right -- that would love to build 50, 70, 80,  
23 90, 100 units.

24 So I love this idea of simplifying the  
25 process for us to build smaller projects, but there's

1 a lot of them, that we could create housing across New  
2 York City. So I am really excited about you guys  
3 putting some systems in place to assisting us to build  
4 more housing, so thank you.

5 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Any  
6 questions for the panel?

7 COMMISSIONER WHITE: I have two quick  
8 questions.

9 CHAIR BUERY: Okay.

10 COMMISSIONER WHITE: Hi, Barika and  
11 Jerrod. Good to see you both and thank you for your  
12 testimony. I'll start with my one question for Barika  
13 and that has to do with the oversight board. We heard  
14 testimony earlier from Public Advocate Williams  
15 suggesting three, you know -- moving from three to  
16 five and who might be the members.

17 What would you think would be a good  
18 composition to ensure fairness?

19 MS. WILLIAMS: So for once, I'm going  
20 to say, "We will get back to you." We're trying to  
21 really be thoughtful and get -- and your -- and our  
22 written comments have some proposed solutions.

23 I think the concern with it only being  
24 three is that, in a sense, we switch over from a  
25 council member deference veto to a one person -- like

1     anytime you can sway one to two of the three, you've  
2     basically gotten yourself back to a veto; right?

3                 And then we also are very thoughtful,  
4     mindful, and cognizant of the fact that we have  
5     diverse communities that look very different and not  
6     wanting local politics to be played out in the guise  
7     of development. A council member versus a BP,  
8     a -- right?

9                 And that -- we're -- what we're  
10    manifesting is, like, a local political battle in  
11    the -- on the platform of an overall fast track -- or  
12    overall ULURP appeal.

13                COMMISSIONER WHITE: Okay. Great.  
14    If -- it would be great if you can get us something,  
15    you know, quickly on that because I think --

16                MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. Yes. Yep. We  
17    got through all 200 pages in the first week, so that's  
18    our first accomplishment --

19                COMMISSIONER WHITE: Well, thank you.

20                And, Jerrod, just a quick question.  
21    You know, I know you as a developer and a lot of the  
22    work you have done. And you explained -- that story  
23    that you gave me is a scenario that many of us hear  
24    that doesn't allow nonprofits as well as, you know,  
25    some smaller for profits or faith-based institutions

1 to go forward with affordable housing.

2 Are there any particular items that you  
3 think we should be thinking about as we, you know,  
4 consider these questions or consider the proposal?  
5 Anything in the detail of what we're putting forth  
6 that you think we missed that would help elevate the  
7 ability to have these affordable housing units built?

8 MR. DELAINE: So I just mentioned the  
9 faith-based groups. So there's a lot of them.

10 COMMISSIONER WHITE: Right.

11 MR. DELAINE: I think they have a  
12 vested interest in these communities, that they aren't  
13 just about the last dollar, so that helps.

14 COMMISSIONER WHITE: Yes.

15 MR. DELAINE: And as a developer, they  
16 have a longer horizon. They have a lower land cost  
17 versus if you're buying it from a guy who has a  
18 parking lot. He wants top dollar to sell that parking  
19 lot to you. And isn't so much vested in the long-term  
20 health of the neighborhood.

21 So I think that would be a helpful  
22 carve-out that if faith-based groups could also be in  
23 a fast lane --

24 COMMISSIONER WHITE: They already have  
25 the land or the property --

1                   MR. DELAINE: Right. They already have  
2 the land, they're not paying taxes, and they have a  
3 longer horizon view of the neighborhood. Like they're  
4 not just selling it to you. They actually plan on  
5 being around versus the guy who sells you the parking  
6 lot. He's gone once he sells it to you.

7                   So I think that's one important piece  
8 that we could add to the pie.

9                   COMMISSIONER WHITE: Great. Thank you,  
10 both.

11                  MR. DELAINE: Thank you.

12                  CHAIR BUERY: Thank you. Any other  
13 questions? Shams, then Kathy.

14                  COMMISSIONER DABARON: Just good to see  
15 y'all, both of y'all. Valerie basically asked the  
16 question that I was going to ask in reference to the  
17 appeals board and how we might be better off  
18 considering what you were saying, but also what Public  
19 Advocate Jumaane Williams was suggesting as well in  
20 terms of the amount of people on that board.

21                  So anything that you can help to help  
22 us look into that would be great.

23                  COMMISSIONER WYLDE: Barika, I may have  
24 misunderstood, but are you saying that you don't think  
25 there should be a way that citywide interests



1 sometimes overcome local opposition to a housing  
2 project?

3 MS. WILLIAMS: Oh, no. We absolutely  
4 think that there are times where citywide interests  
5 should be overcoming local opposition. We  
6 completely -- we see that run -- play out so many  
7 times with our membership.

8 I think the question is one -- I guess  
9 one overarching piece is two notes which is, one,  
10 that, in many cases, the entity advancing these re-  
11 zonings is the city itself. I think sometimes you all  
12 are conceptually thinking of these re-zonings as being  
13 led by the developer and it's not necessarily Jerrod  
14 leading it. It's DCP; right?

15 It's a city-led re-zoning in which case  
16 there's a question about, like, one vote is already in  
17 the bag. So really you're just choosing between two  
18 votes to say yay or nay in the event that it was going  
19 to an appeals process; right? But kind of throughout  
20 the process recognizing that we have a large number of  
21 city-led re-zoning processes happening; right?

22 So let's think about what this could  
23 look like if there is re-zoning required around the  
24 proposal for the IBX; right? That's a very different  
25 thing than thinking about giving you an express for

1 one site. And so how do we sort of tangle with those  
2 pieces?

3 I think the other piece, which  
4 is -- this is why we thought about proposal one -- the  
5 fast tracking of proposal two when you're in -- you  
6 all have it framed as the community districts that are  
7 in the bottom 12 of the five-year housing plan going  
8 into fast tracking automatically.

9 We -- our recommendation is to make  
10 that if you have made your metric, then you don't get  
11 fast tracked. If you haven't, then you do. The  
12 number's not static. It's whether or not you hit your  
13 threshold; right?

14 Because then when we think about it, we  
15 can say, in this moment in time -- in the next 15  
16 years, it doesn't feel like Kingsbridge or South Bronx  
17 or Crown Heights or Jamaica are going to be up.

18 But there is a time, you know, 10, 15,  
19 20 years from now where they have done five times  
20 their share worth of development where they may step  
21 down their numbers, and that shouldn't put them in  
22 penalty; right? So what we want is, like, penalty  
23 being tied to you're not meeting our fair housing  
24 requirement, not that you're at the bottom.

25 There are times where people should be

1 at the bottom because in the -- as we think of it as,  
2 like, community framing and engagement, it's time for  
3 that community to take a step back and to be able to  
4 rest. That should not put them into a penalty of fast  
5 tracking. Is that --

6 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you.

7 COMMISSIONER RICHARDSON: Thank you  
8 both for your testimony. My question is for Jerrod.  
9 We've had developers come and talk to us about how the  
10 ULURP process and the time and the resources required  
11 have affected or influenced their decisions about  
12 where to develop in the city.

13 MR. DELAINE: Yes.

14 COMMISSIONER RICHARDSON: I believe  
15 that you do development in other cities as well.

16 MR. DELAINE: Yes.

17 COMMISSIONER RICHARDSON: Would it be  
18 fair to say it also influences whether you develop  
19 here versus another city?

20 MR. DELAINE: It does actually. Many  
21 cities have a much quicker process.

22 COMMISSIONER RICHARDSON: So it would  
23 be great if you -- since you develop in other places,  
24 if you could provide some more supporting information  
25 around that -- those type of decisions as well. So

1     that's all.

2                   MR. DELAINE:   Okay.   I can follow up  
3     with information for you guys.   That's not a problem.

4                   COMMISSIONER RICHARDSON:   Thanks.

5                   CHAIR BUERY:   All right.   Any other  
6     questions for the panel?   Thank you so much.  
7     Appreciate it so much.

8                   Next up is Oscar Pocasangre and Nia  
9     Alvarez-Mapp.   They'll be followed by Fabien Levy and  
10    John Ketcham.   Welcome.

11                  DR. POCASANGRE:   Hi.   Good evening and  
12    thanks for the opportunity to testify.   My name is  
13    Oscar Pocasangre.   I held a -- hold a PhD in political  
14    science from Columbia and currently work as a senior  
15    data analyst for the think tank New America where I  
16    research electoral systems and electoral reform.

17                  I'll discuss two questions related to  
18    open primaries, particularly with RCV and the top two  
19    general election, and one is whether they would  
20    increase turnout and, two, whether it would negatively  
21    impact underrepresented communities.

22                  First, to the best of my knowledge,  
23    there is no evidence that the alternative proposed, a  
24    jungle RCV primary followed by a top two general  
25    election, affects turnout because it's not a widely

1 used model. One of the main goals of RCV is to avoid  
2 a runoff altogether. That's why it's called "instant  
3 runoff."

4 So any evidence-based recommendation  
5 necessarily has to extrapolate from similar but not  
6 the same model. From research on open primaries with  
7 top two, the political science evidence is clear: Open  
8 primaries have very little impact in voter  
9 participation.

10 The data show, at best, marginal  
11 improvements in turnout in the first-round primary and  
12 mixed effects in second-round general elections.

13 The evidence shows that when top two  
14 results in co-partisan elections, when the two  
15 candidates are from the same party in the general,  
16 there is no associated change in overall turnout and  
17 there is a substantial increase in voter roll-off when  
18 voters vote for the top of the ticket but then don't  
19 vote for the down ballot races.

20 One study found that from 2012 to 2016,  
21 17 percent of general elections in California were  
22 co-partisan. Considering the partisan composition of  
23 New York City, co-partisan elections are likely to be  
24 common.

25 Turnout remains unchanged because there

1 are two effects working against each other: Partisans  
2 from excluded parties stay home and, while open  
3 primaries expand the electorate to unaffiliated  
4 voters, unaffiliated voters tend not to vote at the  
5 same rate as partisan voters.

6 This is part of why primary reforms  
7 have marginal effects despite the good intentions of  
8 reformers. Most people who would vote are, in fact,  
9 already voting.

10 Further, it's unclear that opening up  
11 primaries would encourage more people to vote.  
12 Consider the many voters registered with parties who  
13 do not vote even though they can. Why would that be  
14 different for voters not registered with a party? All  
15 this evidence suggests that opening up primaries will  
16 not have a transformative change.

17 The problem is that reforming primaries  
18 does not address the root problem that there is  
19 general party competition in the general election,  
20 which would motivate parties to do a better job at  
21 connecting with voters and offering something that  
22 might bring unaffiliated voters into the fold.

23 These findings also raise important  
24 questions regarding impacts on underrepresented  
25 communities. Which community is more likely to have

1 higher roll-off rates? What community will have lower  
2 turnout levels as a result of co-partisan elections?

3 It's alarming that there's no  
4 systematic research on these questions in the New York  
5 City context, especially if the main objective of the  
6 reform is to increase turnout and to do no harm among  
7 underrepresented communities.

8 Particularly because research on RCB in  
9 New York has shown that ballot exhaustion is higher in  
10 areas with higher concentration of racial minorities,  
11 it is worrisome that an additional reform could end up  
12 reducing the -- influence of minority groups.

13 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you -- I apologize.

14 DR. POCASANGRE: Thank you.

15 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.

16 MS. ALVAREZ-MAPP: Hi. I'm going to  
17 try to beat the clock here. My name is Nia  
18 Alvarez-Mapp. I am the lead organizer for Rank the  
19 Vote New York, soon to be NY, with the work we're  
20 doing with upstate with -- for RCV.

21 We are a coalition dedicated to  
22 ensuring all eligible New Yorkers can vote and  
23 understand the voting system they encounter. Our  
24 coalition began six years ago, funny enough, with this  
25 very much Charter Revision Commission here, and

1 advocating for the inclusion of RCV in the ballot.

2 Thanks to the collective advocacy,  
3 nearly 1 million New Yorkers voted this year's primary  
4 using RCV, a significant milestone considering -- I  
5 actually believe -- I believe it was double the amount  
6 since it was -- first came about in 2021. The success  
7 of New York's RCV is built on years of consistent  
8 community outreach and education and trust building.

9 RCV's adoption shows that New Yorkers  
10 are open to reforms and -- but only when they are  
11 clear, inclusive, and well explained. Any expansion  
12 such as closed primary -- closed or semi-open  
13 primaries or take two must remain simple and easy to  
14 communicate, especially to new or infrequent voters.

15 This results from looking -- the  
16 results of this past RCV primaries may have looked  
17 easy from June 24th to July 1st, but no one really  
18 ever considers the nine months of preparing for these  
19 results, such as regular planning meetings, community  
20 outreach, education for all five boroughs, quite  
21 frankly civic engagement 101, translation services and  
22 supplies, and navigating challenges like voter apathy,  
23 limited resources, and technical barriers.

24 These efforts ensure that voters feel  
25 empowered and heard and confident in their choices.



1                   When talking with the 50 plus people in  
2 my -- in the rank choice -- Rank the Vote coalition,  
3 there was concerns that they were not able to fully  
4 understand and comprehend what is happening here  
5 because they were also working on get the -- get out  
6 the vote efforts in the primaries.

7                   As you see now, there's a more open  
8 debate with -- because everyone's sort of even -- not  
9 rested, but still have a concern to be able to express  
10 their opinions. There is a real list of lack of  
11 preparation and timing when it comes to introducing  
12 new reforms with voter elections.

13                  As a matter of fact, when we  
14 look -- when we talked about RCV in the past, some of  
15 the critiques that we have -- were given was due to  
16 older and black residents and citizens -- that they  
17 did not understand it.

18                  I am curious to see if the Commission  
19 have ever -- has considered that, especially in  
20 considering that other organizations such as NAACP  
21 have also expressed those concerns when it came to  
22 that explanation of outreach and understanding.

23                  We really do support the concept of  
24 open primaries, but we just wanted to have a little  
25 bit more delay because we want to have a more open

1 debate.

2 We want to make sure that all people,  
3 especially in our written testimonies that you will be  
4 hearing soon from our various coalitions, will have a  
5 better say and insight and research to be able to give  
6 a full, informed opinion on it.

7 And again, the results really shows the  
8 consistent effort and community outreach. It takes  
9 all of us to be able to make sure people get out to  
10 vote. And again, thank you all so much.

11 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Any  
12 questions for the panel?

13 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Got a question  
14 for the professor from Columbia. So I'm just curious.  
15 You're an expert on this. I'm not, but I have run a  
16 few campaigns in my life. So when you run a primary,  
17 campaigns are very simple; right?

18 You want to only talk to voters that  
19 you can reasonably predict are going to come out to  
20 vote: Likely voters or, in a primary, they're triple  
21 prime voters. You build a campaign around that narrow  
22 slice of the electorate. And over the years, I've  
23 heard a million reasons why people don't vote. So  
24 first, it was money.

25 So we introduced campaign finance

1 reform in this city. It was a one-to-one match, a  
2 four-to-one match, now it's an eight-to-one match.  
3 With each successive election cycle, less people are  
4 voting. So it's not the money obviously; right?

5 We are -- let me see. We instituted  
6 rank choice voting. It has not increased  
7 participation. Although everyone told us it would  
8 increase voter participation, it hasn't.

9 So you don't think that opening up the  
10 opportunity for other voters and not just speaking to  
11 that narrow slice of the electorate, which is what  
12 campaigns do -- you don't think that might potentially  
13 increase voter participation?

14 CHAIR BUERY: Please don't speak --

15 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Yeah -- come up  
16 and testify. I'll ask you questions, too.

17 DR. POCASANGRE: The evidence we have  
18 is that the increases in turnout are marginal, and it  
19 speaks to your question of, you know, we have all  
20 these reforms and turnout doesn't seem to go up that  
21 much. I think that's more a structural problem of the  
22 parties are not offering much that the voters want.

23 That is not something that will be  
24 changed with primary reform. That's something that  
25 would be changed more with the electoral system

1 reform, so allowing more parties to participate  
2 actively and meaningfully in elections. Comparably  
3 from around the world, that's one thing that we know  
4 increases turnout.

5 So countries that switch to systems  
6 that allow for more parties, they see a substantial  
7 increase in turnout. But these are marginal changes.  
8 I think they're Band-Aids to the system. Yeah.

9 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: So then perhaps  
10 you can explain how do we get more people to  
11 participate?

12 We have all of these reforms that we  
13 put in place. We are spending boat loads of money.  
14 It's almost criminal the amount of money we're  
15 spending on these campaigns, and that's taxpayer  
16 money. Not to mention the independent expenditures  
17 that are done by other people.

18 And yet we're still only talking to a  
19 narrow slice of the Democratic Party in a Democratic  
20 primary. Same thing in a Republican primary. A very  
21 narrow slice of voters because we know they're the  
22 ones who are going to turn out to vote. How do we  
23 expand that so we take that money that we're spending  
24 and we're reaching more voters?

25 DR. POCASANGRE: Part of the problem is

1 to win an election, you just need one more vote than  
2 the other person, and that's part of the electoral  
3 system that we have in the United States. A different  
4 type of electoral system which are associated with  
5 higher levels of turnout would be things like  
6 proportional representation, for instance --

7 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: I didn't hear  
8 what he said. I'm sorry. Repeat that.

9 DR. POCASANGRE: Are used throughout  
10 the world. Those do engage more voters because even  
11 if you only get 10 percent of the vote, your party  
12 will still have some representation, so everyone has  
13 some incentive to participate as well.

14 You also get stronger and healthier  
15 parties and parties are organizations that have this  
16 mobilizing infrastructure and have connections and  
17 strong linkages with voters. That's what gets voters  
18 to participate and to feel represented in a party.  
19 Yeah.

20 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: In an ideal  
21 world. The problem is the parties themselves are  
22 structured in a way -- they protect their own  
23 interests, which is generally to re-elect their  
24 incumbents and to shut out other party members because  
25 they're not loyal to them. It's a challenge.

1                   And I -- we could do this all  
2     night -- interested in what you had to say as  
3     a -- someone who does this for a living from a  
4     different perspective.

5                   DR. POCASANGRE:   Yeah.   Yeah.  
6     But -- yeah.

7                   COMMISSIONER SAVINO:   Thank you.

8                   CHAIR BUERY:   Thank you so much.   Thank  
9     you for your testimony.

10                  COMMISSIONER WEISBROD:   Well, I do have  
11     a -- I didn't catch all of your data, particularly on  
12     California, and I just want to make sure that you are  
13     submitting it -- written form --

14                  DR. POCASANGRE:   I will.   Yeah, I'll  
15     submit it online.   Yeah --

16                  COMMISSIONER WEISBROD:   Because I'd  
17     like to see that because it does speak -- if I  
18     understand what you said about California, it does  
19     speak to the larger question that my colleague asked,  
20     which is that does speak to the larger electorate and  
21     yet has not increased participation, if I understand  
22     what you're saying.

23                  DR. POCASANGRE:   Yeah.   That's what the  
24     evidence shows from California and --

25                  COMMISSIONER WEISBROD:   And I'd also

1     like -- if you're submitting written testimony,  
2     please, I'd like to see them both. Thank you very  
3     much.

4                   DR. POCASANGRE: Thank you for your  
5     time.

6                   CHAIR BUERY: Next up is Fabien Levy  
7     and John Ketcham. They'll be followed by Council  
8     Member Gale Brewer.

9                   MR. O'DELL: Excuse me. My name's Gale  
10    O'Dell [ph]. I came in two hours ago.

11                  CHAIR BUERY: I'm sorry?

12                  MR. O'DELL: Excuse me. I'm sitting  
13    here. I'm talking to you. We got 13 people here.  
14    You got seven women. You women should be out here --

15                  CHAIR BUERY: I'm sorry. We have a  
16    line --

17                  MR. O'DELL: Excuse me. You women  
18    should be out here trying to get the vote out. That's  
19    how you get the vote out. My father, 70 years ago,  
20    talked to Nelson Rockefeller. Nelson Rockefeller was  
21    a Republican. My father's a Democrat. Nelson called  
22    my father, said: "Excuse me -- I need your help. I'm  
23    a Republican. You're a Democrat. I need your help."

24                  My father helped him organize --

25                  CHAIR BUERY: I'm sorry, sir. There's

1 a line to testify --

2 MR. O'DELL: Excuse me. Quiet. Just  
3 not in New York. So all these people here -- you 13  
4 should get up and do what you got to do to get the  
5 vote out. That's what you do. That's all. Don't be  
6 lazy, brother. Stop being lazy.

7 CHAIR BUERY: Thank -- Fabien Levy and  
8 John Ketcham --

9 MR. O'DELL: That's all you got to do.  
10 You're lazy -- talking about this and that. Get up --

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 14: Okay.

12 MR. LEVY: Good evening, Chair, Vice  
13 Chair, Secretary, and commissioners. My name is  
14 Fabien Levy, and I'm a resident of New York City. I  
15 know I know some of you in a professional capacity,  
16 but I want to be very clear. I am here tonight only  
17 in my personal capacity.

18 In fact, I have never had any  
19 conversation with my direct supervisor about my plan  
20 to testify here or about the subject for which I am  
21 advocating for in my personal capacity, so he has no  
22 idea I'm sitting before you tonight.

23 I signed up like every other citizen  
24 here and waited to discuss what I believe is an  
25 important issue to the future of our city.



1 I'm here to discuss the need to adopt  
2 open primary elections in city elections and  
3 send -- lend my personal voice to that cause as  
4 someone who has worked in multiple cities and multiple  
5 states across the nation on different political  
6 campaigns.

7 Specifically in three of the races I  
8 have worked on in Louisiana, in California, and in  
9 Florida, red, blue, and purple, my candidates have  
10 participated in open or what are sometimes called  
11 "jungle primaries" where the top two vote getters move  
12 on to a general election or a runoff.

13 These races ensured all the candidates  
14 were trying to speak to as large a swath of voters as  
15 possible, not just the consistent voters who often  
16 participate in closed primaries like me.

17 I also want to point out that I am not  
18 in support of open primaries because my past  
19 candidates did well in these races. In fact, in all  
20 three of the races I worked on with open or jungle  
21 primaries, my candidates either did not move on to the  
22 general election or lost in the runoff.

23 On the other hand, in all the local or  
24 statewide races that I've worked on that have had  
25 closed primaries, my candidates actually won those

1 elections. This, however, is not about winning  
2 elections, but about ensuring we do what is best for  
3 our city, and that is ensuring every voice is heard.

4 That is why so many major cities across  
5 the nation have adopted open primaries and why so many  
6 good government groups support it. Multiple people  
7 tonight have testified that young people are the ones  
8 who are disenfranchised with closed primaries, and  
9 they're right.

10 I know because I was once one of those  
11 young people a long, long time ago who thought I could  
12 vote in a primary but was told no because the deadline  
13 to change from an unaffiliated voter, which I  
14 registered as as an 18-year-old, was long before the  
15 voter registration deadline in that election.

16 I have been a registered Democrat since  
17 that time almost two decades ago. I've heard some  
18 also argue that putting something like open primaries  
19 on the ballot could hurt the housing reforms being  
20 proposed as well. I disagree. First, look at last  
21 year's ballots proposals, which had split results.

22 Additionally, if we are worried more  
23 about the results of voters voting for or against a  
24 specific proposal than we are about having voters  
25 actually vote, I feel like we have strayed from our

1 priorities as a republic.

2 Lastly, I want to clear -- I want to be  
3 clear that my testimony here tonight has nothing to do  
4 with the results of the Democratic primary that took  
5 place two weeks ago. I simply believe, like I would  
6 hope many of you, that every vote should count.

7 And if we do believe that every vote  
8 should count, then every potential voter should have  
9 the ability to vote, whatever party they belong to, or  
10 even if they do not belong to a party.

11 I encourage the Commission to put  
12 forward a ballot measure that supports open primaries  
13 this fall and give voters the ability to decide if  
14 their voices should be heard earlier in the cycle.

15 Some say country over party. I say  
16 city over party. Thank you.

17 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.

18 MR. KETCHAM: Thank you, Chair Buery  
19 and members of the Charter Revision Commission, for  
20 the opportunity to comment after the interim report's  
21 publication and for considering my prior testimonies.  
22 I'm John Ketcham, Director of Cities at the Manhattan  
23 Institute, but I'm testifying in my own personal  
24 capacity.

25 I commend the Commission's interim

1 report for its proposals to facilitate housing  
2 production, move local elections to even years, and  
3 potentially to establish top two fully open primaries  
4 that utilize rank choice voting. I respectfully urge  
5 you to put these reforms before city voters this  
6 November.

7           Tonight, I want to focus on two points  
8 related to electoral reform. On cycle even-year  
9 elections, I support the proposal, but I do note that  
10 local elections should coincide with gubernatorial  
11 years, not presidential years. Many pressing local  
12 issues, including housing and homelessness, depend on  
13 local collaboration with Albany.

14           Holding mayoral and gubernatorial  
15 elections at the same time would allow candidates for  
16 these offices to speak to each other and to voters  
17 about how they would work together to address these  
18 issues.

19           This timing would also avoid the noise  
20 of presidential campaigns and allow voters to focus  
21 more intently on state and local issues while still  
22 turning out in far higher numbers compared to today.  
23 We might call these New York, New York election years.

24           Second, the Commission should let  
25 voters decide whether to restructure local primaries

1 along the line suggested in the interim report. The  
2 recent Democratic primary for mayor shows why change  
3 is preferable to the status quo in many respects.

4           Though turnout improved to  
5 approximately 30.7 percent of registered Democrats by  
6 my count, about 1.78 million registered voters were  
7 excluded from that election, including more than 1  
8 million unaffiliated voters.

9           Assembly Member Mamdani now heads into  
10 November's general election as the frontrunner, having  
11 received the support of less than 11 percent of all  
12 registered voters, and the same would have been true,  
13 likely, if Governor Cuomo had won the primary. Now,  
14 we head into a general election scenario with up to  
15 five candidates.

16           The city risks electing a mayor with  
17 only a small and unrepresentative plurality. Moving  
18 to a top two primary that uses bottom-up rank choice  
19 voting would ameliorate many of these issues. All  
20 candidates would appear in the qualifying round  
21 primary open to all voters.

22           Candidates would thus have more  
23 incentive to appeal to a broader and more  
24 representative primary electorate. Bottoms up RCV  
25 would successively eliminate the lowest performing

1 candidate, redistributing that candidate's ballots to  
2 the next ranked choices until only two remain.

3 This approach would make fuller use of  
4 RCV to select the two candidates who proceed to the  
5 general election with broader support and importantly,  
6 it would not impact the way voters rank candidates.

7 And I commend the Commission for  
8 proposing to include party labels in a reform system.  
9 I again suggest that internal party preference  
10 processes determine which candidate bears the party's  
11 endorsement in the qualifying round and general  
12 election.

13 This would allow voters to understand  
14 that the party label implies institutional support,  
15 not mere registration. Thank you for considering my  
16 testimony and for your efforts in this vital civic  
17 matter.

18 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Any  
19 questions for the panel? Thank you both so much.  
20 Deeply appreciate it.

21 MR. KETCHAM: Thank you.

22 CHAIR BUERY: Next is Council Member  
23 Brewer. She'll be followed by Jeremy Joseph and Asher  
24 Ross.

25 MS. BREWER: Thank you. I'm Gale

1 Brewer. I'm going to talk about land use, but I just  
2 want to say about elections --

3 CHAIR BUERY: Hold on one second, Gale.  
4 If I could ask people who are testifying to use the  
5 other aisle. You --

6 MS. BREWER: I'm sorry.

7 CHAIR BUERY: No, it's okay. Just  
8 because I'm afraid somebody's going to trip on the  
9 wire -- use the other --

10 MS. BREWER: I'm -- I got through.

11 CHAIR BUERY: No, no, you can go around  
12 the other way, but Council Member Brewer is going to  
13 testify alone, followed by Jeremy Joseph and Asher  
14 Ross -- please --

15 MS. BREWER: Thank you very much. I am  
16 going to talk about land use, but I just want to say  
17 in terms of elections, the only problem is that when  
18 you have open primaries, the Republicans hide the fact  
19 that they're Republicans and they -- nobody ever  
20 knows. We had this on the east side for a while. I  
21 just want to make it clear.

22 And second, I don't target voters, and  
23 I've never lost an election. I just want to point  
24 that out.

25 So I am Gale Brewer, and I am District

1 6 in the City Council. I wanted to say that I am very  
2 much against these proposals, as you can imagine, that  
3 are under consideration regarding land use for the  
4 ballot.

5 The fast track and the expedited land  
6 use review procedures may appear to support housing  
7 production, but I think in reality, they do so by  
8 undermining public accountability, democratic checks  
9 and balances and the role of the communities we serve.  
10 We all want affordable housing. Let me just give you  
11 some of the challenges that I feel are very strong.

12 First of all, with the issue of -- I'll  
13 summarize this -- the issue of the appeal board  
14 consisting of the mayor, the speaker, and the borough  
15 presidents, it is absolutely true that it is not like  
16 in 1989, the decision that eliminated the board of  
17 estimate because of one person, one vote, and that's  
18 not applicable because you have a relevant borough  
19 president.

20 However, I strongly believe that the  
21 speaker cannot represent the entire council even  
22 though they were elected by his or her peers. If the  
23 speaker is the council member from Manhattan, for  
24 instance, they do not know the particulars of Staten  
25 Island, as Diane knows, for instance, and should not



1 be representing those constituents.

2 This panel, in my opinion, cuts away  
3 the voice of the community and true representation, as  
4 one example in your proposals.

5 Another one: The process of the 60-day  
6 opportunity for community board and borough president  
7 review does not make sense. The borough  
8 president -- I know. I was a borough  
9 president -- relies on the input from community board  
10 meetings.

11 You only have 30 days, and it is bad  
12 for public policy, and you need to have that input for  
13 the borough president.

14 Eliminating ULURPs on public land that  
15 are slated for 100 percent affordable housing -- it  
16 sounds great on paper. However, who speaks to the  
17 neighbors such as residents of NYCHA, which would be a  
18 public land proposal? Who decides -- and that's a  
19 situation right now that I have with Harborview. Who  
20 decides the AMI?

21 Who decides on any community benefit  
22 agreement? What are the infrastructure needs?  
23 Schools, libraries. Only a public process with  
24 hearings at the community board, city planning, and  
25 the council gets to the point that there's the right

1 mixture.

2 And I want to just say in terms of the  
3 12 community districts that you say do not provide  
4 affordable housing -- that pisses me off. The west  
5 side has a lot. We want more. We have a situation on  
6 West 59th Street that is now slated for a shelter,  
7 brand new building. We wanted it to be affordable  
8 housing.

9 And I could go through ten more  
10 examples like that. Plus, we have the single room  
11 occupancies. And I just want to say what to do  
12 quickly. Start earlier. Start with a  
13 pre-certification discussion, community board and city  
14 planning. These city agencies are slow.

15 Community Board 7 from Queens gave you  
16 an example. Very, very slow. Community Board 4, the  
17 best community board in the city. Got Joe Restuccia  
18 on it. Don't get better than that. And they have  
19 lot -- every single lot has been decided and  
20 determined where affordable housing could do. A  
21 glorified, fabulous 197A plan -- work on that.

22 And make the SEQR, which of course is  
23 the review process, more efficient, less expensive,  
24 and more useful. Hope Cohen testified at a hearing  
25 long ago. She lists the whole thing -- how to do it.

1                   I just think that you have to have this  
2                   input that is local. It is not true that one person  
3                   holds it up. You gave some examples, but most of the  
4                   time, particularly now, the person is not holding up  
5                   any particular project.

6                   That 145 -- it was messed up, but guess  
7                   what? They had a lot of time to figure out what to do  
8                   right, and now the council member is making a proposal  
9                   that I think people are in agreement with. Thank you  
10                  very much. That's how a lot of people feel, but there  
11                  was a lot of time to get it into a discussion phase.

12                  CHAIR BUERY: Thank you.

13                  MS. BREWER: Also, re-digitize the damn  
14                  map so I don't want to hear that they all have to  
15                  be -- haven't been digitized. Manhattan map is  
16                  digitized. Thank you very much. I did it. Thank you  
17                  very much.

18                  CHAIR BUERY: Thank you. Any questions  
19                  for Gale Brewer?

20                  COMMISSIONER SAVINO: No, I'm afraid.

21                  MS. BREWER: You agree. Thank you,  
22                  Diane Savino. I appreciate that. All right. Thank  
23                  you.

24                  CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. I  
25                  appreciate it.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 15: Don't we all.

2 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Gale,  
3 can you -- I'm -- all right -- next up is Jeremy  
4 Joseph and Asher Ross. They'll be followed by Leon  
5 Bell and Emily Skydel.

6 MR. JOSEPH: Hey, Asher.

7 CHAIR BUERY: Oh, please continue --

8 MR. JOSEPH: My name is Jeremy Joseph.  
9 I'm the Data Director at the New York Civic Engagement  
10 Table. We're an organization made up of about 70  
11 partners across the state focused on building power  
12 with communities of color, immigrants, poor, and  
13 working people to tackle racial and economic  
14 inequality in New York.

15 A core aspect of our work is  
16 nonpartisan voter engagement. In New York City alone,  
17 our partners collectively attempt to contact over 1  
18 million voters each year because we believe that our  
19 elections should reflect all the many communities of  
20 our city.

21 The Charter Revision Commission report  
22 identifies a very real issue. Voter turnout in New  
23 York City historically has been disappointingly low.  
24 The report correctly identifies that youth and black  
25 and brown communities are especially underrepresented

1 in our voting population.

2 However, it is our belief that the  
3 proposed reform to establish jungle primaries is not  
4 the solution to this problem. In the accompanying  
5 Lynch report, the preclearance analysis asserts that  
6 jungle primaries would give more voice to protected  
7 classes.

8 It cites that a majority of  
9 unaffiliated voters, 54.5 percent, are minority  
10 voters, with more than a third, 35.3 percent,  
11 consisting of black and Hispanic voters.

12 If unaffiliated voters had a higher  
13 percentage of people of color than those registered  
14 with a party, then this might be a good argument for  
15 instituting jungle primaries, but this is not the  
16 case. In fact, those numbers I just cited from the  
17 report are lower percentages than that of all  
18 registered voters.

19 This demonstrates that jungle primaries  
20 would actually significantly dilute the voices of  
21 black and brown voters in New York City.

22 As for youth turnout, this is a real  
23 challenge not just in New York City, but nationwide.  
24 But as this most recent primary election has shown us,  
25 those numbers are no longer in decline. This is our

1     only second mayoral race with rank choice voting.

2                 We're seeing informed participation and  
3     increased turnout amongst voters and yet, we're  
4     already discussing more changes. At a time where we  
5     are seeing renewed interest in city elections,  
6     especially from young people, a change of this  
7     magnitude at this time would likely undermine that.

8                 The best way to increase voter turnout  
9     is a solution the Charter Revision Commission has  
10    already identified: Even year elections. In the most  
11    recent report, the CRC recommended moving municipal  
12    elections to align with presidential election years.

13                While we support moving municipal  
14    elections to even years, we urge the Commission to  
15    consider moving the election to align with the  
16    gubernatorial cycle instead.

17                In a presidential election, national  
18    issues will overshadow local ones. Gubernatorial  
19    elections are much more aligned to ensure voters are  
20    engaging at all levels of government.

21                Finally, while the Commission  
22    acknowledges the political climate in which this  
23    change is being proposed and hopes that this proposal,  
24    open primaries or jungle primaries specifically, can  
25    be viewed on its own merits, these changes cannot be

1 viewed in a vacuum.

2 This is a mayor trying to change the  
3 format of an election he declined to participate in.  
4 No matter the good faith intentions of the Commission  
5 and the thoughtful research that went into this  
6 proposal, this is inherently political and that cannot  
7 be avoided.

8 To continue in good faith, I hope the  
9 Commission will recommit to its original mission and  
10 the near universally accepted proposal for even year  
11 elections. Thank you.

12 MR. ROSS: Good evening. Thank you for  
13 the opportunity to testify. My name is Asher Ross and  
14 I'm here representing the New York Immigration  
15 Coalition and I'm here to express our strong  
16 opposition to the proposed adoption of a so-called  
17 "jungle primary" system in New York City elections.

18 We are opposed to jungle primaries  
19 because they would diminish the power of member  
20 organizations and grassroots groups, including labor  
21 unions and community organizations.

22 These groups have worked long and hard  
23 to organize, educate, and mobilize working class and  
24 immigrant voters so that they have a voice in our  
25 political system and importantly, they act as a

1 counterweight to big money in politics. These groups  
2 have spent years organizing within the Democratic  
3 Party to win representation for their communities.

4 Jungle primaries would nullify their  
5 work and their role in our elections, and it would  
6 allow big donors and corporate interests to gain the  
7 advantage and have a dominant role.

8 As others have noted, we've just had an  
9 election in a closed primary with exceptional voter  
10 engagement and turnout, including by young voters and  
11 traditionally low turnout groups.

12 We've just had an election in which the  
13 playing field was leveled by our public matching fund  
14 system, allowing candidates that weren't funded by big  
15 donors and corporations to compete and get their  
16 message out to working-class voters.

17 And we've just had an election in which  
18 voters could rank candidates in their preferred order,  
19 leading to coalition strategies that allowed voters to  
20 rank their preferences while not wasting their vote.

21 These reforms have only been in place  
22 for four years, and they're clearly working to help  
23 engage and grow the electorate. We should let them  
24 continue to produce positive results and not tamper  
25 with our current election system.



1 CHAIR BUERY: Are there any questions  
2 for the panel? No? All right. Thank you so much. I  
3 appreciate it.

4 Next up is Leon Bell and Emily Skydel.  
5 They'll be -- Leon Bell and Emily Skydel will be  
6 followed by Zakiyah Ansari and Susan Lerner.

7 MR. LEON: -- first?

8 MS. SKYDEL: I think you were called  
9 first, so you go first.

10 MR. LEON: Good evening. My name is  
11 Leon Bell, and I'm the Public Policy Director with the  
12 New York State Nurses Association. NYSNA represents  
13 42,000 frontline nurses across the city for collective  
14 bargaining and we're a leading advocate for universal  
15 health coverage, safe patient care and workplace  
16 rights of nurses and other healthcare workers.

17 We're here today to express our  
18 opposition to the proposal to adopt an open primary  
19 process in New York City elections. NYSNA members  
20 actively work in the primary and the general elections  
21 to promote candidates that are aligned with our  
22 legislative and political priorities.

23 While we understand that voter  
24 participation rates in local primaries are lower than  
25 in general elections, we do not agree that this is

1 largely or solely attributable to the current  
2 party-based primary system. Voter participation in  
3 local elections has always been lower than in federal  
4 and state races.

5 We also note that participation rates  
6 generally have been declining at all levels. There  
7 are many factors contributing to this phenomenon, but  
8 the current party-based primary system is not the  
9 major contributing cause.

10 And we would note closed  
11 primary -- primaries were also in effect during  
12 earlier historical periods when participation rates  
13 were much higher.

14 We believe that a major cause of  
15 declining voter participation, and one that you have  
16 not adequately addressed in your proposals around open  
17 primaries, lies in the vast expansion of unregulated  
18 super PAC funding and the role of corporations and the  
19 ultra-wealthy in flooding our elections with dark  
20 money.

21 The impact of Citizens United and other  
22 Supreme Court decisions ruling that corporations are  
23 people and that money is a form of speech have tilted  
24 our elections in an undemocratic direction, making  
25 voters less willing to engage in political activity,

1 raising voter perceptions that the system is rigged  
2 and posing a threat to democracy itself.

3 This money inundates voters with false  
4 or misleading advertising and messaging and turns  
5 people off to the electoral process.

6 Changing the current party-based  
7 primary system, whatever its shortcomings, will only  
8 accelerate the growing power and influence of the  
9 wealthy and corporate business interests in our  
10 elections, and make it more difficult for nurses,  
11 unions, political parties, and other opponents of  
12 policies that favor big business interests to  
13 effectively fight back.

14 The Commission also fails to recognize  
15 the importance of political parties in a democratic  
16 system. Opening primaries would essentially result in  
17 the candidates of parties being chosen by members who  
18 are not members of those parties or are even members  
19 of opposing parties.

20 Party organizations are a means for  
21 people without access to money to fight back against  
22 more powerful interests by disseminating their ideas  
23 and generating mass support. Moving to an open  
24 primary system will undermine or eliminate this  
25 important pillar of our democracy.

1                   Billionaires and corporate dark money  
2 pools already have too much influence and outright  
3 control over the economy and our government.

4                   And given the current political,  
5 economic, and social context -- if I may finish my  
6 sentence -- we should not be making it easier for  
7 these anti-democratic interests to buy control of  
8 local political offices. We urge you to reject that  
9 proposal.

10                  CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. You  
11 can move the mic over. Thank you.

12                  MS. SKYDEL: Thank you. Good evening,  
13 commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to  
14 testify today. My name is Emily Skydel, and I  
15 represent Food & Water Watch. At Food & Water Watch,  
16 I'm here to -- sorry.

17                  And I'm here to express my strong  
18 opposition to the proposed adoption of a so-called  
19 "jungle primary system" for New York City elections.  
20 I come to this conversation as someone who has worked  
21 closely with grassroots organizations that knock  
22 doors, hold community forums, and build political  
23 power from the ground up.

24                  These groups are the lifeblood of our  
25 city's civic fabric, and a jungle primary system would

1 severely undermine their ability to influence  
2 elections and lift up the voices of working-class New  
3 Yorkers.

4 First, jungle primaries erase the  
5 strategic foundation grassroots groups rely on: Party  
6 primaries. Grassroots groups spend years organizing  
7 within the Democratic Party to win representation for  
8 their communities. They build coalitions, recruit  
9 candidates, and develop long-term strategies to shift  
10 power from political machines to the people.

11 A jungle primary blows that up. In a  
12 top two or top four system, there is no party primary.  
13 Every candidate, regardless of party or values,  
14 appears on one crowded ballot. That forces grassroots  
15 candidates to compete in massive, often expensive  
16 fields, splitting the vote and making it far harder  
17 for community-backed candidates to break through.

18 Second, jungle primaries amplify the  
19 power of money over organizing. In a high candidate,  
20 low information race without party cues, the winners  
21 are usually those with the biggest war chests, the  
22 most name recognition, or the backing of wealthy  
23 interests. Grassroots groups can't compete with that  
24 kind of money.

25 Their strength is people-powered

1 campaigns that build trust over time, not six figure  
2 media buys and insider endorsements. Jungle primaries  
3 put movement candidates at a severe disadvantage and  
4 tilt the playing field back toward the very  
5 institutions grassroots organizing seeks to challenge.

6 Third, this system would discourage  
7 long-term community organizing. One of the most  
8 powerful aspects of our current system is that it  
9 gives communities clear political targets: Party  
10 primaries where their votes and their organizing can  
11 make a real difference. That's how working-class  
12 tenants have elected champions.

13 It's how immigrant neighborhoods have  
14 shifted city policy. Jungle primaries scramble those  
15 lines, make electoral pathways murky, and they take  
16 power away from communities that have only recently  
17 begun to claim it.

18 Let's be clear. This proposal is not  
19 about empowering voters. It's about disempowering the  
20 people who have learned how to organize within the  
21 existing system to demand more for their neighbors.

22 If we want a more inclusive democracy,  
23 the answer is not to blow up the tools that  
24 marginalized communities have just started to master.  
25 The answer is to make those tools more accessible.

1 For these reasons, I urge you to reject any attempts  
2 to implement a jungle primary system in New York City.  
3 Thank you.

4 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Any  
5 questions for the panel? Thank you so much for your  
6 testimony.

7 Next, we have Zakiyah Ansari and Susan  
8 Lerner. They will be followed by Elias and Saul  
9 Earlez [ph].

10 MS. LERNER: Go for it.

11 MS. SHAAKIR-ANSARI: All right. Let me  
12 put on my spectacles. Hang in there, y'all. We're  
13 almost done. I feel y'all -- hi, all. Good evening,  
14 commissioners. My name is Zakiyah Shaakir-Ansari.  
15 I'm the Co-Executive Director of the Alliance for  
16 Quality Education. I am here tonight to oppose the  
17 proposed shift to a jungle primary.

18 As someone who works alongside parent  
19 leaders and other grassroots organizations, I see  
20 firsthand the power of community-led organizing to  
21 make change, especially in the fight for educational  
22 equity in black, brown, and low-income communities  
23 across New York City.

24 The proposed jungle primary system  
25 would severely diminish the influence of grassroots

1 organizations and would undermine our ability to elect  
2 leaders who represent and are accountable to our  
3 communities.

4 Jungle primaries claim to promote  
5 fairness, but the truth is they amplify the influence  
6 of wealthy candidates and special interests while  
7 silencing the voices of those who have been  
8 historically shut out of political power. Under this  
9 system, the top vote getters, regardless of party,  
10 advance to the general election.

11 Every candidate, regardless of party or  
12 values, appears on one crowded ballot. In a high  
13 candidate, low information race without party cues,  
14 the winners are usually those with the biggest war  
15 chests, the most name recognition, or the backing of  
16 wealthy interests.

17 Organizations like AQE build power by  
18 organizing parents, students, and educators to elect  
19 leaders who prioritize fully funded, equitable public  
20 schools. Almost never are these candidates the ones  
21 with the biggest war chests or highest name  
22 recognition, but they are rooted in their communities.

23 Jungle primaries would push these  
24 candidates out early and deny voters meaningful choice  
25 in the general election. And party primaries are



1 where our votes are and organizing can make a real  
2 difference because it makes it clear who our political  
3 friends and foes are.

4 We are just coming off of the  
5 ultra-wealthy flexing their 30 plus billion dollar  
6 attempt to buy our mayoral election, and we saw that  
7 the people of New York City voted the candidate they  
8 wanted in. We don't get to take that from New  
9 Yorkers.

10 The black, brown, immigrant, and  
11 working-class New Yorkers, communities we organize in,  
12 are already facing underfunded schools, over policing  
13 in classrooms, and systemic neglect. Now, they're  
14 being told their hard-fought electoral power might be  
15 weakened by a confusing, unnecessary voting system  
16 that will make it harder to get our champions into  
17 office.

18 In a time when the federal government  
19 seems to want to make democracy a thing of the past,  
20 when the ultra-wealthy have shown that they don't even  
21 respect the current process we have, as reported today  
22 that they are scheming to offer another alternative  
23 because they don't like the outcome, we should be  
24 making it easier for community rooted candidates to  
25 run and win, not harder.

1                   Candidates should put in the work to  
2                   gain our vote because they value it, not lazily depend  
3                   on name recognition and their wealth. They should  
4                   offer us a vision and then sell that vision to the  
5                   people. Knock on doors, visit every borough, and talk  
6                   to the people. Show up for debates, and guess what?  
7                   The people show up.

8                   I urge the Commission to reject this  
9                   proposal, protect the voice of grassroots movements,  
10                  protect our community's right to choose leaders who  
11                  reflect our values. Thank you.

12                  MS. LERNER: Hi. Thank you. I wasn't  
13                  planning to testify, but a couple of things have come  
14                  up that I wanted to speak about.

15                  The first is the question of cost. Of  
16                  course it will be more expensive to run a campaign  
17                  with a larger electorate even though we know that  
18                  candidates will still be able to focus on the most  
19                  likely voters because when you are looking at the  
20                  unaffiliated voters, you're able to tell whether they  
21                  are high propensity or not.

22                  But with a larger number, you will have  
23                  more costs in order to campaign.

24                  And because, with a larger number of  
25                  candidates, the academic research shows with a jungle

1 primary that voters are grasping for some source of  
2 information because the usual labels aren't going to  
3 work in a primary where you have Democrats running  
4 against Democrats or you have a lot of candidates who  
5 are making up party names that are unfamiliar to the  
6 voters.

7                   So the voters then will be much more  
8 susceptible to the independent expenditures that we  
9 see overtaking our elections. One of my concerns and  
10 one of my frustrations about this process is that  
11 there now is, in the minds of most individuals, a  
12 congruence between the concept of open primaries and  
13 the jungle primary.

14                   And as we have seen, it is the concept  
15 of the jungle primary which has really brought people  
16 out to say: "Wait a second. This is undercutting the  
17 ability of everyday New Yorkers to organize." A  
18 jungle primary is about hostility to organized people.  
19 It is to leave each voter on their own.

20                   And for those of us who want to have a  
21 broader, community-based discussion about open  
22 primaries, this congruence makes it that much harder.  
23 We have talked to our partners, groups like the  
24 Chinese-American Planning Council, MinKwon Council,  
25 the MinKwon Community Center, and the APA voice that

1     they represent.

2                     And countless number of groups, that I  
3     believe will -- if they don't get to testify by Zoom  
4     tonight because we're running out of time, will be  
5     adding their voice through written comments, have said  
6     to us: "We need more time. We want to build a  
7     consensus around the unaffiliated voters."

8                     But I would like to point out that if  
9     we are really, again, I will say, concerned about the  
10    unaffiliated voters, we could go to a semi-open  
11    primary. We could allow organizing to continue around  
12    the primaries, and the unaffiliated voters would be  
13    able to be heard, but that is not what is being  
14    discussed.

15                    And therefore, this is extremely  
16    polarizing and it makes the work of those of us who  
17    seek to build a community-based consensus that much  
18    harder. And we ask you not to place this on the  
19    ballot so that we can undo some of the negativity and  
20    build truly broad-based support.

21                    I would also point out that you've not  
22    heard from the academics who have told me personally  
23    that their research shows that an open primary system  
24    does not make much difference.

25                    CHAIR BUERY: Thank you --

1 MS. LERNER: So Seth Muscat [ph] and  
2 Gregory Huber at Yale have important things to say on  
3 this topic.

4 CHAIR BUERY: We're at time -- and  
5 certainly anyone should submit testimony who's  
6 interested. We -- we'll read all written testimony,  
7 as you know. Any questions from the panel?

8 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Just would like  
9 to make a point that -- Susan, thank you. But I think  
10 it's important for people to hear: The Commission  
11 never referred to the concept of changing our voting  
12 process to an open primary. We never used the term  
13 "jungle primary." Other people have tried to  
14 categorize --

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 16: That's right.  
16 That's right.

17 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: We have not done  
18 that. So --

19 MS. LERNER: That's how it's called in  
20 California by most activists.

21 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Again, Susan, I  
22 have tremendous respect for you, but please --

23 CHAIR BUERY: If people -- can we just  
24 have one conversation?

25 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: But it's

1 important -- you've been at every one of these  
2 hearings. We have discussed this. You've  
3 been -- you've testified on this issue in prior  
4 Charter Revision Commissions advocating for this type  
5 of change.

6 MS. LERNER: Yes.

7 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: I just wanted to  
8 get it on the record. We here never said we wanted to  
9 adopt the jungle primary. We're exploring a process  
10 that may improve voter participation in our city.

11 MS. LERNER: And again, unfortunately,  
12 the actual research and experience does not show that.  
13 If what you are concerned about is giving a voice to  
14 the unaffiliated voters, I don't understand why you're  
15 hostile to semi-open primaries.

16 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: I'm not hostile  
17 to anything, but you said we should stop this process  
18 because we don't want it to turn into a jungle primary  
19 and -- but we never suggested that. Other people are  
20 suggesting --

21 MS. LERNER: The open primary proposal  
22 that you are considering is, you must admit, very  
23 divisive. Just listen to this room. You're making it  
24 that much harder for us to build a consensus. And 20  
25 years ago, a similar proposal went down with

1 broad-based opposition, and you are hearing  
2 broad-based opposition.

3 The nonpartisan groups we work with  
4 are -- do not want to be forced into telling their  
5 people no. They want more time to research types of  
6 open primaries and build a consensus. Thank you.

7 CHAIR BUERY: I'm sorry. Are there any  
8 questions for the panel? All right. Thank you so  
9 much.

10 MS. LERNER: Thank you.

11 CHAIR BUERY: Appreciate it. Next up  
12 to testify is Elias and Saul Earlez [ph], followed by  
13 Jessie Fields and Johana Pulgarin.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 17: Dr. Jessie  
15 Fields?

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 18: What's the  
17 last name of that Elias --

18 CHAIR BUERY: I'm sorry. Hold on a  
19 second. There's no last name on the list.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 18: Okay.  
21 That's --

22 CHAIR BUERY: Okay. I'm -- I don't  
23 know. One thing I will ask people -- I'm getting a  
24 lot of push back when I'm trying to hold people to  
25 time. I'm trying to hold people to time so that as

1 many people have a chance to speak as possible. So  
2 I'm asking all of you to please work with us. I don't  
3 know that we can hear from everybody.

4 We have a lot of people signed up. If  
5 you can keep to three minutes or under, it maximizes  
6 ability for your friends and neighbors to have a  
7 chance to speak. Similarly, the applause is not  
8 helpful because then we can't hear, actually, when  
9 you're applauding. It slows us down. It's not  
10 productive to us taking in information.

11 Okay. All right. Please --

12 MR. ELIAS: Yes. Hi. This is my first  
13 time actually attending these, so I'm slightly  
14 nervous, but I'm going to be just extremely brief  
15 about this. One minute max. I'm sure you've heard  
16 many, many things, so I'm not going to repeat a lot of  
17 the facts that are running here.

18 I will just say the most democratic  
19 thing we'd do is simply put it in the ballot. Let's  
20 see what the people -- how they vote. Just let it  
21 happen. That's all I can say about that. Then I'll  
22 respect the will of the people. Me, I'm for the open  
23 primary process, but if the people reject it, so be  
24 it. That's all I have to say.

25 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you. Appreciate



1 it.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 19: Short and  
3 sweet.

4 CHAIR BUERY: Any questions for Elias?  
5 Elias, you are my favorite testifier of the -- okay.  
6 So Johana Pulgarin and Catherine Du.

7 MS. PULGARIN: Good evening. Sorry.

8 CHAIR BUERY: Good evening. Please  
9 continue. Welcome.

10 MS. PULGARIN: Good evening. Thank you  
11 for having me here. I'm Johana Pulgarin. I'm a  
12 District Manager for Community Board 1 in Brooklyn and  
13 I'm testifying on behalf of the community board.

14 Of all the voting bodies involved in  
15 the land use matters, community boards are in the  
16 unique position to have intimate, hands-on involvement  
17 and relationships with the land, neighborhood, and  
18 residents and landowners actually involved in the  
19 various applications.

20 Although their recommendations are only  
21 advisory, those recommendations are vital to an  
22 objective and meaningful evaluation regarding the  
23 effects each application will have on the community  
24 and what concerns or conditions, if any, should be  
25 considered by the city in its ultimate decision on

1 land use items.

2 Although other voting bodies have  
3 hearings at which interest parties are permitted to  
4 give testimony, none afford the all-encompassing,  
5 hands-on objective and democratic exchanges among all  
6 residents, elective officials, city agencies, and land  
7 use applicants that community board committee meetings  
8 and public hearings provide.

9 To diminish in any way the role of time  
10 allotted to community boards for meetings with those  
11 involved in land use applications would be a terrible  
12 disservice to our communities and will inform urban  
13 planning.

14 In sums, community boards play a vital  
15 role in informing local land use plans, providing a  
16 democratic and direct voice for local communities to  
17 provide input in planning their neighborhoods.

18 Eliminating or reducing this role could  
19 result in the consolidation of planning power with a  
20 handful of people, making the land use process less  
21 democratic, less informed, and poorly planned and more  
22 susceptible to corruption. This is why the Board of  
23 Estimates was eliminated in the first. Shutting out  
24 local voices this way would be a huge step backwards.

25 We would like to suggest that an area

1 of exploration to help reduce the time and cost for  
2 land use applicants would be to leverage AI technology  
3 to perform environmental reviews and draft impact  
4 assessments and statements. This technology is  
5 helping with so many areas.

6 Land use seems like it would be an  
7 excellent fit for this advancement. Thank you so much  
8 for your time.

9 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you.

10 MS. DU: Good evening. My name is  
11 Catherine, and I volunteer with Fridays for Future New  
12 York City and the Sunrise Movement. I'm a rising  
13 freshman at Hunter College High School in the Upper  
14 East Side and I reside in Queens.

15 I'm extremely grateful to have the  
16 opportunity to testify at 8 p.m. at night in  
17 opposition to the proposed jungle primaries. Jungle  
18 primaries are a betrayal to the youth of New York  
19 City, the future of New York. Youth can no longer  
20 vote for their candidate of choice if the rest of  
21 their district overwhelmingly supports one party.

22 Independents are at risk of being  
23 flooded out of the chance at having office. Youth may  
24 have a lower rate of being registered with a party and  
25 jungle primaries would eliminate choices of voters

1 rather than giving all voters an opportunity to vote.  
2 If you want to vote in a primary, register with a  
3 party. There is no barrier to that.

4 There are -- is a clear important  
5 balance between the final election and the primary  
6 election. The final election is more important  
7 because it is the deciding factor. Right now, youth  
8 voter turnout is already low at 47 percent in 2024 for  
9 Tufts University. It cannot afford to go any lower.

10 Lower voter turnout means that our  
11 elected officials do not truly represent the views of  
12 more and more people, especially young people. Jungle  
13 primaries seek to dismantle the party-by-party power  
14 built by grassroots power and through race and class.  
15 Jungle primaries are rejected across the country and  
16 New York City. Political parties are --

17 CHAIR BUERY: I'm sorry. I'm sorry.  
18 If you could just slow down. We're trying to  
19 transcribe, so it's hard. If you could try to slow  
20 down a little bit, I'd appreciate it. I'm not -- I'm  
21 so serious because I want to make sure that we're  
22 actually hearing the testimony, and I really  
23 appreciate you being here and sharing with us.

24 So it means a lot to us, but I want to  
25 make sure we can actually follow. So thank you.

1 Appreciate it.

2 MS. DU: Okay. I'll start from jungle  
3 primaries seek to dismantle the party-by-party power  
4 built by grassroots power and through race and class.  
5 Jungle primaries are rejected by the popular vote.

6 Political parties are important  
7 signifiers of values and stances and eliminating that  
8 eliminates -- would eliminate -- and limiting  
9 that -- sorry -- would favor money over organization.  
10 What does -- what drives voter turnout? People power,  
11 unions, grassroot organizations, and communities.

12 This is what jungle primaries seek to  
13 oppress when they dismantle all the historical power  
14 built up by people within political parties.  
15 Elections are the central tenet of democracy. What  
16 have I been taught in school in a curriculum funded  
17 and curated by New York City? What was America  
18 founded on?

19 Why did our founding fathers decide to  
20 massacre the indigenous peoples of America? Why did  
21 they fight a war with Great Britain? America is meant  
22 to be committed to individual liberty and  
23 self-governance, not to billionaires, not to  
24 oligarchy, not to authoritarianism, not dictatorship,  
25 and not monarchy. Look in the Constitution.

1           In America, the elected representatives  
2       represent and act on behalf of the people. New York  
3       has always been on the forefront at forward thinking  
4       and solution-oriented revolution. This position is at  
5       stake with jungle primaries being posed. Democracy is  
6       in danger.

7           Just read the headlines of what Trump  
8       and billionaires are doing and revisit the  
9       authoritarianism handbook. Messing around with our  
10      primaries undermines the Charter Commission's goals  
11      and marks many steps back.

12          Low to no voter turnout, billionaire  
13      buyouts, elected officials that do not represent the  
14      sentiment of most people, constitutional destruction,  
15      and racial injustice are what is on the line. These  
16      may be good in theory but have failed in all six  
17      states where they have been tested.

18               UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 20: Wow.

19               CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much for  
20      your testimony. Are there any questions for the  
21      panel? Thank you so much for being here. I really  
22      appreciate it.

23               Next up is Heather Beers-Dimitriadis,  
24      and Susan Stetzer. They'll be followed by Alan Cox  
25      and Victor Edwards. And might I suggest when I say

1 the second panel, if you can, if you can move closer  
2 to the front, it'll make it go a little bit  
3 quickly -- more quickly. I want to try to get as many  
4 people in as possible.

5 So Heather Beers-Dimitriadis and Susan  
6 Stetzer. They'll be followed by Alan Cox and Victor  
7 Edwards. So if Alan and Victor can move to the front  
8 so that they can come to the panel immediately  
9 afterwards. Thank you so much.

10 And if you -- remember that someone is  
11 trying to keep transcription, particularly for people  
12 who are hearing impaired and participating, so it is  
13 important. I know I'm keeping you to time, but if you  
14 could try to make sure that we can follow, I'd  
15 appreciate it. Thank you.

16 MS. BEERS-DIMITRIADIS: I think you're  
17 first.

18 MS. STETZER: Okay. My name is Susan  
19 Stetzer. I'm District Manager for Manhattan Community  
20 Board 3 and I'm representing the board. Our board  
21 voted on a lengthy resolution which I will submit  
22 along with the written copy of the summary.

23 CB3 takes its ULURP responsibilities  
24 very seriously in hearing from the community at a  
25 public hearing and in our deliberations on the overall

1 benefit to the community. Our number one priority for  
2 years has been affordable housing, not just housing in  
3 general.

4 Therefore, there are times when the  
5 city or developer might want a ULURP rushed through,  
6 but CB3 has successfully negotiated with the city or  
7 developer, often with support from the council member,  
8 for more deeply affordable units or increase in the  
9 number of units.

10 It is not only CB3. I've heard of  
11 other community boards being labeled as "nibby" for  
12 not rubber stamping approval when they are trying to  
13 get the developer or city to invest in more affordable  
14 housing. Let's not throw out the hard work of  
15 community boards for a few.

16 We have voted very clearly to not limit  
17 the community board voice in our already limited input  
18 for planning for our community. We agree the timeline  
19 can be improved for ULURPs, but the great length of  
20 time is required before it comes to the community  
21 board.

22 There should be an effort from the city  
23 to consider how the requirements pre-ULURP, which can  
24 take over a year, can be streamlined. Our district  
25 need statements say unnecessary administrative and



1     bureaucratic roadblocks in the approval process are  
2     some of the largest financial costs in building new  
3     affordable housing.

4                 This also applies to the timeline and  
5     was reported to us by one of our affordable housing  
6     developers.

7                 We also do not approve of the  
8     concurrent review by community boards and borough  
9     presidents. The point of the community board is to  
10    hear from the community through the board regarding  
11    the ULURP before the borough president makes a  
12    decision. This would further limit CB -- community  
13    voice.

14                Member deference is not part of the  
15    charter. It's a tradition that is not set in stone.  
16    We believe that it gives added weight to our very  
17    limited voice. Council members know their  
18    communities.

19                We have access to the council members  
20    for ULURP and we had found our advisory role has added  
21    weight because of member deference, which gives them  
22    power in negotiating.

23                An example is the permanently  
24    affordable housing we have at Essex Crossing instead  
25    of a limited number of years, which was a dealbreaker

1 for our council member, Margaret Chin, at the time.  
2 Please don't throw out our dedication work for our  
3 community because of some problems that do not  
4 outweigh the benefit to our communities.

5 We support efforts to streamline  
6 contractor payment process and we support efforts to  
7 increase voter participation, but we do not take a  
8 position on them at this time. Thank you.

9 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you.

10 MS. STETZER: I'm going to move --

11 MS. BEERS-DIMITRIADIS: Kind of tricky.  
12 Good evening, commissioners. My name is Heather  
13 Beers-Dimitriadis. I am the Chair of Queens Community  
14 Board 6 serving Rego Park and Forest Hills. We are  
15 witnessing a decline in confidence in government, both  
16 federal and local.

17 Community boards, despite a very small  
18 operating budget, work hard to earn and keep the trust  
19 of their community, and no issue is more important to  
20 a community than how land is utilized.

21 It is my opinion that marginalizing the  
22 advisory role of community boards by creating a fast  
23 track will only succeed at eroding public competence  
24 in its most local form of city government and will not  
25 result in more affordable housing.

1                   In 2022, Queens Community Board 6  
2     received a presentation for 98-81 Queens Boulevard.  
3     The initial proposal included a variety of affordable  
4     units at various levels of AMI. However, the board  
5     voted against the proposal, requesting deeper  
6     affordability along with a variety of other  
7     conditions.

8                   As the proposal moved through ULURP,  
9     the project improved greatly, deepening affordability  
10    and meeting various conditions that we had initially  
11    requested. In volleyball, there is a play called  
12    bounce set or volley bounce.

13                  This is how I see ULURP: Player A sets  
14    up the ball, the community board. We set the ball by  
15    providing the necessary recommendations that make this  
16    project a best fit for the community. Player B, the  
17    borough president, bounces that ball by taking those  
18    recommendations and working with the developers to get  
19    the concerns addressed.

20                  Then he bounces that ball over to the  
21    council member who the goal for her or -- she or he or  
22    they is to spike that ball and get a much more  
23    improved and at each level improving and making that  
24    process better, that proposal stronger. This is why  
25    98-81 Queens Boulevard was successful and is now

1 bringing in tenants for these affordable units.

2 Simultaneous community board and  
3 borough president review will remove the opportunity  
4 to collaborate and get a better project for the  
5 community and the borough. Your proposal would allow  
6 borough presidents to decide on a project prior to the  
7 board's decision.

8 Whereas I believe Borough President  
9 Richards would wait for the community board's  
10 decision, we can't assume that the next BP will.

11 As certain districts in our city  
12 continually say no to affordable housing projects, it  
13 would be quite tempting for the borough president to  
14 approve or to give his deliberation on a project prior  
15 to the community board's vote in an attempt to try to  
16 sway their opinion.

17 In conclusion, meaningful community  
18 engagement is not an obstacle to progress. It is the  
19 very foundation of sustainable, equitable development.  
20 When community boards are given the respect and time  
21 they need to do their job, we see better projects and  
22 stronger public trust.

23 The volleyball metaphor illustrates  
24 what collaborative government looks like, each player  
25 fulfilling a vital role to achieve a common goal.

1 Stripping away this sequence by marginalizing  
2 community boards or disrupting the order of review  
3 risks not only procedural confusion but also a  
4 dangerous erosion of public faith in city government.

5 We urge the Commission to recognize  
6 that true progress requires partnership, not  
7 shortcuts, keeps the community --

8 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. We  
9 are at time --

10 MS. BEERS-DIMITRIADIS: I just have one  
11 line. Please? I worked on this. Keep the community  
12 in the process and you will keep the public in your  
13 corner.

14 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you --

15 MS. BEERS-DIMITRIADIS: You've got to  
16 have the conversations. They're hard. They're  
17 brutal. You've got to have them --

18 CHAIR BUERY: So next up, we have Alan  
19 Cox and Victor Edwards. They'll be followed by Angelo  
20 Pis-Dudot and Torsha Childs. One thing I want  
21 to -- just to level set. We have well over 40 people  
22 signed up to testify in the room, more than that on  
23 Zoom. We are not going to get to everybody.

24 So one thing I do want to remind folks  
25 is that we will read all written testimony. You can

1 submit testimony online or you can email testimony to  
2 chartertestimony@citycharter.nyc.gov. We will not be  
3 able to get to everyone who's still signed up to  
4 testify.

5 Please -- you're making -- please, sir.  
6 You're making it difficult for everybody to testify.

7 Alan Cox, please continue.

8 MR. COX: Thank you.

9 CHAIR BUERY: Please. We're trying to  
10 hear people who signed up to testify. Please. Well,  
11 you're making it harder for everybody to testify by  
12 engaging in conversation.

13 MR. COX: Good evening, commissioners.  
14 I -- looking up at y'all, y'all seem like a heavenly  
15 body. I want to welcome you to Harlem where I was  
16 born right across the street there.

17 My name is Alan Cox, and I wanted to  
18 come today and say thank you for listening to so many  
19 Independent voters like me who have come before you  
20 and asked for full voting rights, to be given access  
21 to the primaries that we help pay for.

22 I know that you are now considering  
23 whether to put a top two open primary on the ballot  
24 this November, and I wanted to offer my full  
25 endorsement. From LA to Boston, most cities in -- and

1 most cities in between -- top two primaries are the  
2 norm in 85 percent of U.S. cities. So why must we  
3 debate this as if it's a radical experiment?

4 Top two primaries are the norm because  
5 they are far more fair than our current closed  
6 primaries which not only shut out Independents but  
7 also silo party voters as well. Top two primaries  
8 treat all candidates and all voters equally, ensuring  
9 every voter has the opportunity to vote for every  
10 candidate.

11 I'd be thrilled to have this system  
12 here in New York City. You may know this, but  
13 Independents like me are much more likely to be ticket  
14 splitters than any other group of voters. That's why  
15 every New York should be able -- every New Yorker  
16 should be able to consider all the candidates for an  
17 office.

18 Top two primaries would make our  
19 elections more representative and our elected  
20 officials more accountable. I think this top two open  
21 primary system is a good fit for New York City. I  
22 hope that you put it on the ballot this November.

23 As an Independent, I've waited a very  
24 long time to have an opportunity for fair and full  
25 voting rights. Please don't make me wait any longer.

1 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Any  
2 questions for Mr. Cox? Thank you so much and thanks  
3 for your kind welcome to Harlem. Next up is Angelo  
4 Pis-Dudot and Torsha Childs. They'll be followed by  
5 Howard Edelbaum and Gia Lowe.

6 MR. PIS-DUDOT: Okay. Good evening,  
7 members of the Commission. I recognize that  
8 everyone's tired here, so I'm going to try to cut my  
9 testimony short and only address points that my group  
10 feels haven't been addressed yet. My name is Angelo  
11 Pis-Dudot. I'm a Brooklyn resident, lawyer, and local  
12 government policy analyst.

13 I speak on behalf of the New York City  
14 Democratic Socialists of America. New York City DSA  
15 opposes the Commission's open primaries proposal and  
16 urges the Commission to table it. New York City DSA  
17 is a democratically run organization of nearly 10,000  
18 New Yorkers.

19 Our chapter powered the recent victory  
20 of Zohran Mamdani in the Democratic primary  
21 party -- party primary for mayor, a campaign that I  
22 should note inspired historic new party registrations  
23 and turnout from under engaged constituencies  
24 throughout the city.

25 A point that underscores what fixes



1 turnout problems is not quick fixes to party primary  
2 systems, but rather parties allowing candidates to  
3 emerge that put the needs of voters first. As  
4 Democratic Socialists, we are committed to advancing  
5 democracy in all aspects of our society.

6 Because of that commitment, I want to  
7 say we share the Commission's concerns about weak  
8 voter empowerment, low turnout, and the  
9 unrepresentativeness of the electorate. These are  
10 symptoms of a sick democracy in New York, but the  
11 Commission's open primaries proposal will not cure  
12 these symptoms.

13 In fact, it may make some of them  
14 worse. First, as we've heard, open primaries do not  
15 build a stronger democracy or lead to more voter  
16 choice and power. That's because in the general  
17 election, under the Commission's proposal, we'll only  
18 get two choices, which will, in a city like New York,  
19 almost overwhelmingly be Democrat versus Democrat.

20 A bunch of Democrat versus Democrat  
21 elections will not give voters more choice during the  
22 general election when most voters vote and also, that  
23 is the election that ultimately decides who holds  
24 office.

25 The 1.1 million unaffiliated voters in

1 New York City and the increasing number of voters  
2 hungry for new parties around the country and in New  
3 York City show that voters are hungry for new options  
4 and not more of the same.

5 The Commission's analysis has so far  
6 failed to acknowledge these serious problems and  
7 analyze other options such as top four systems like  
8 Alaska's and proportional representation systems that  
9 would actually fix the problem of not having options  
10 among Independent voters.

11 Second, as we've heard, open primaries  
12 are an unreliable way to increase turnout and  
13 representativeness. They have not been shown to do  
14 either of those things that you all have said are top  
15 concerns of yours. Why waste taxpayer money on a  
16 ballot question that will not achieve your goals?

17 Finally, the proposal would waste  
18 taxpayer dollars because of bad election design. When  
19 all eligible voters have already voted in a rank  
20 choice primary featuring all eligible candidates, why  
21 run another costly election featuring the candidate  
22 who already won in an instant runoff election and the  
23 runner up? It's wasteful and redundant.

24 NYC DSA thus urges the Commission to  
25 table the proposal. Thank you.

1 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.

2 MS. CHILDS: Good evening,  
3 commissioners. My name is Torsha Childs, and I am  
4 here just as a mother. I've been an Independent ever  
5 since I was 18 years old. I won't tell you how old I  
6 am. That's not important. But I've been an  
7 Independent for so long. And I -- my -- I have four  
8 children and they're all Independents as well.

9 When I first moved back to New  
10 York -- because I went to Georgia, went to school, all  
11 that other stuff. But I moved back home and I -- when  
12 I came back here, the first thing I did was register  
13 to vote. And when it was time to vote, I went to go  
14 vote and I was told that I could not vote. And so I  
15 wanted to know why.

16 And she told me because I was an  
17 Independent that I could not vote right then, that I  
18 could vote in the general election. And that really  
19 agitated me. It agitated me to the point where  
20 I -- my -- like I said, my children are Independent  
21 and I don't know if I really wanted them to be an  
22 Independent anymore because of that.

23 But I, you know -- I -- we all kept our  
24 affiliation as being Independent. I don't feel the  
25 need to go back and change my affiliation just so that

1 I can vote. If anything, we should change it so that  
2 we don't have to do that. Everybody should be given  
3 the opportunity to vote. It's past time. We all need  
4 to come together and let everybody vote.

5 I pay taxes like everybody else. I  
6 want to vote like everybody else. Why shouldn't I be  
7 able to vote? So it's not fair. And I think that  
8 right now, everybody looks at New York like it's the  
9 city. And if we show everybody that it can be done,  
10 well, other states might be able to do the same thing.

11 And we keep saying what, you  
12 know -- what is not being done or how it can't be  
13 done. We don't know that because we haven't  
14 implemented it yet. We have to actually put it into  
15 play in order for us to know if it'll work or not.

16 And we're also talking about big money  
17 in politics. If we want to take big money out of  
18 politics, that's something we should work on and not  
19 worry about right now whether or not it's going to be  
20 the focus of the next election if we open the  
21 primaries. That's important, and we need to do that.  
22 Thank you.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 21: Thank you.

24 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Any  
25 questions for the panelists?

1                   COMMISSIONER SAVINO: One. One. I  
2 promised only one. To the young man from the DSA. So  
3 if I heard you correctly, you're not opposed to the  
4 concept of reforming the primary process. You don't  
5 like the top two. Because you referenced the Alaska  
6 system, which is top four. So is that accurate, or  
7 did I not understand you?

8                   MR. PIS-DUDOT: We are not coming to  
9 testify today in support of a particular proposal.  
10 And I should note that the New York City Democratic  
11 Socialists of America does not defend closed primary  
12 systems. It's only that the top two system that the  
13 Commission has so far evaluated in depth and not  
14 evaluated in depth.

15                   Other worthwhile meritorious electoral  
16 systems that are used around the world, proportional  
17 representation, have not received the same amount of  
18 study. The top two system is particularly bad. If  
19 we're going to do electoral reform, we should do it  
20 right.

21                   COMMISSIONER SAVINO: Okay. Thank you.  
22 I'm glad -- I'm happy I asked that question because I  
23 wanted to make sure I understood.

24                   And then finally, because the DSA is a  
25 growing subsidiary, if you wanted to call it, of the

1 Democratic Party, even though you guys aren't, do you  
2 ever reach out to unaffiliated voters to try and  
3 encourage them to join the DSA or enroll in a party or  
4 be able to participate?

5 MR. PIS-DUDOT: Absolutely. Tons of  
6 New York City Democratic Socialists of America members  
7 are Independent voters because they do not identify  
8 with the Democratic Party. We, as a chapter, have  
9 chosen to strategically align ourselves with the  
10 Democratic party because we think it's best for our  
11 interests in New York City's two-party system.

12 What I think myself and a lot of  
13 Independent voters do not appreciate about our  
14 politics is that we are forced to choose between two  
15 options with the other options not really being  
16 viable. We want other viable options, not a rigged  
17 two-party system that keeps giving people the same  
18 again and again and again.

19 COMMISSIONER SAVINO: I agree with the  
20 DSA. I never thought I'd say that. Thank you.

21 CHAIR BUERY: Next, we have Howard  
22 Edelbaum and Gia Love. They will be -- I'm sorry.  
23 Howard Edelbaum and Gia Lowe. They will be followed  
24 by Vicky Hausman and Carolyn Martinez-Class.

25 MR. EDELBAUM: Good evening. My name

1 is Howard Edelbaum. I'm an accountant and a visual  
2 artist from Ditmas Park. I am here speaking in  
3 support of open primaries. I was a registered  
4 Democrat for many years but got tired of being told to  
5 vote for the lesser of two evils.

6 I want to vote for candidates I  
7 actually believe in, not just against ones I don't.  
8 So I became an Independent decades ago, but in New  
9 York City, that means I'm shut out of the primaries,  
10 the elections that often decide who ends up leading  
11 our city.

12 This year, as a Jewish progressive New  
13 Yorker, I am proud to support Zohran Mamdani. Our  
14 city needs new leadership. I have been deeply  
15 troubled by the way antisemitism, an issue I've dealt  
16 with my whole life, is being weaponized to drive a  
17 wedge between Jews and Muslims.

18 As a Jew, I wanted to support Mamdani's  
19 leadership, but because I'm an Independent, I had to  
20 rejoin the Democratic Party just to vote. That's not  
21 how democracy should work. You might say, well,  
22 what's the problem? As many people said tonight,  
23 everyone can -- who wants to vote could just  
24 re-register. But it's a profound problem.

25 We are not Democrats or Republicans.

1 I'm not a Democrat.

2 And I'm deeply troubled with being  
3 forced to join an organization that I don't believe  
4 in, one that is undemocratic in many ways, a party  
5 that voted for the war in Iraq, that refused to hold a  
6 presidential primary in 2024, and a party that has  
7 been -- that has a deep distrust of ordinary people  
8 like me.

9 I don't want to be a member of such a  
10 party, or any party. I want to be able to freely vote  
11 for whom can lead us forward and bring us together.  
12 To me, there's a relationship between being an  
13 Independent and the work I do to foster conversation  
14 between Jews and Muslims. I don't want to sacrifice  
15 that in order to vote.

16 I am thrilled that you are considering  
17 a nonpartisan, top two primary system for our city.  
18 It is time to give all New York City voters a fair and  
19 just primary system. Please give us a chance to vote  
20 on this in November. Thank you.

21 CHAIR BUERY: Please continue.

22 MR. EDELBAUM: Oh, sorry.

23 MS. LOWE: Good evening. My name is  
24 Gia Lowe. I'm a proud Bronx native, an entrepreneur,  
25 a community advocate, and a New Yorker who believes in



1 the power of justice, transparency, and  
2 accountability, especially when it comes to public  
3 safety.

4 When I first learned that the Civilian  
5 Complaint Review Board does not have final authority  
6 to discipline officers, I was honestly shocked. Like  
7 so many New Yorkers, I assumed that if an independent  
8 body investigates police misconduct and substantiates  
9 a claim, that would lead to real enforceable  
10 consequences.

11 But instead, the police commissioner  
12 can overrule those findings, silencing the very  
13 accountability our communities demand and deserve.  
14 Let's be clear. This is not a minor loophole. It's a  
15 fundamental flaw. It means that even in cases of  
16 excessive force, abuse, or racial bias, the system can  
17 protect officers over the people.

18 And as we all know, it's black and  
19 brown New Yorkers like my neighbors, your neighbors,  
20 my family, and my community who bear the brunt of that  
21 broken system. This isn't theoretical. It's deeply  
22 personal.

23 When misconduct goes unpunished, it  
24 sends a painful message that our voices don't count,  
25 that our trauma is negotiable, and that trust between

1 the NYPD and our communities will remain fractured.  
2 But it doesn't have to stay that way.

3 The Charter Revision Commission now has  
4 the opportunity to put real reform in the hands of the  
5 people. By adopting a ballot measure that gives the  
6 CCRB final disciplinary authority and direct access to  
7 the NYPD's misconduct database, you'll be giving New  
8 Yorkers the chance to vote for a system that is truly  
9 fair, independent, and accountable.

10 This is how we close the gap between  
11 harm and justice. This is how we restore trust and  
12 improve public safety not just in theory but in  
13 practice. You've been placed here in this position  
14 for such a time as this. So I ask you: What legacy  
15 will you leave, and what side of impact will you  
16 choose to be on? Thank you.

17 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Thank  
18 you both for your testimony. Any questions? I  
19 appreciate it.

20 MS. LOWE: Thank you.

21 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you. Next up is  
22 Vicky Hausman and Carolyn Martinez-Class. They'll be  
23 followed by Rafael Moure-Punnett and Sean Campbell  
24 [ph]. Our -- okay. Next up is Rafael Moure-Punnett  
25 and Sean Campbell [ph]. They'll be followed by Alion

1 [ph] and Danny Battista here.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 22: Sean [ph]  
3 isn't here.

4 CHAIR BUERY: All right. Rafael -- is  
5 Alion [ph] here? No last name? Alionu [ph]? Is  
6 Danny Battista here? Why don't you join the panel,  
7 please? Thank you.

8 MR. MOURE-PUNNETT: Good evening,  
9 commissioners. Thank you so much for staying here so  
10 late at night. My name is Rafael Moure-Punnett. I'm  
11 the District Manager for Bronx Community Board 6, and  
12 I'm here representing the community board. First, I  
13 wanted to say that we are a -- we're not an  
14 anti-development community board.

15 We're not voting down projects and our  
16 role, as we see it, is to really bring out the best of  
17 each project and work with the power that we have to  
18 bring positive change to the neighborhood through land  
19 use actions. The way that we do that is not by having  
20 yes or no power, as you're aware of; right?

21 Our -- the community board's role is a  
22 soft power. It's an influence.

23 Things that come up at the community  
24 board hearing where the community is present, the  
25 board members are deliberating, and the City Council

1 rep and the borough president rep are in attendance is  
2 where we get to influence them on decision making on  
3 land use items to make them more affordable, to hold  
4 the entities accountable that are trying to, you know,  
5 get a public good, which is changes in the zoning  
6 code.

7 My concern is, and my board's position  
8 is, that the proposals cut the community board's soft  
9 power out.

10 By eliminating council member  
11 deference, by overlapping the borough president  
12 timeline with the board timeline, we will no longer be  
13 able to influence a borough president's vote in any  
14 way because they will likely have already made a  
15 decision before it comes to the board.

16 And that without having a City Council  
17 role in ULURP, there won't be a way for us to  
18 influence the council. And really you risk creating  
19 this fast-track system and this ULURP system where,  
20 you know, housing gets built without local input.  
21 There's a community board review process.

22 You have the process in your timeline,  
23 but there's no actual influence the community board  
24 can exert in that process. And so it's just -- it's a  
25 facsimile of a community board process that we're used

1 to having where at least we have some soft power, but  
2 now that there's this process where we have actual no  
3 influence.

4 And the board members, I can tell you,  
5 are going to be irate that we are being required to  
6 hold hearings and not actually being able to influence  
7 the process because I can tell you the working-class  
8 members of my board are going to be very resistant in  
9 going to the CPC to testify the position of the board;  
10 right?

11 They're -- what I think is a reasonable  
12 expectation is that if a development project wants to  
13 happen in Community Board 6, they come to Community  
14 Board 6.

15 Community Board 6 has influence and my  
16 board members putting it to a vote that night in front  
17 of the council member have influence on the process to  
18 require them to then choose as individuals, to testify  
19 before the CPC, which doesn't know the neighborhood,  
20 doesn't know the developer.

21 And that's the big one is we have  
22 developers that will bring land use actions and there  
23 won't be anyone that has contextual knowledge on how  
24 that developer is in the neighborhood and in the  
25 borough.

1                   To expect us to have the same influence  
2   of the CPC is just not -- it's not realistic and it's  
3   really cutting local input out of land use actions for  
4   the sake of fast tracking projects that are going to  
5   be at 120 AMI and are not going to be for this  
6   community and are going to get built in this community  
7   without local input.

8                   I encourage you all to look at 197A as  
9   a way to build local influence.

10                  CHAIR BUERY:   Sorry.   You're at time.

11                  MR. MOURE-PUNNETT:   Thank you.

12                  CHAIR BUERY:   Sorry.   Thank you so  
13   much.

14                  MR. BATTISTA:   Thank you for this time.  
15   My name is Danny Battista.   I'm a lifelong New Yorker  
16   and I've called the city home for 20 years now.   I had  
17   the opportunity to address you at a hearing in Staten  
18   Island in April and I've watched and listened very  
19   carefully to these proceedings both before and since.

20                  I'm an unaffiliated Independent voter.  
21   I'm here to fully affirm my desire and support for  
22   this commission to advance a proposal to New York City  
23   voters to move to a nonpartisan primary system with  
24   top two result, as you have described in your recent  
25   report.

1 I can appreciate the Commission's  
2 expressed concerns about it possibly being an  
3 inhospitable environment for a debate about primary  
4 reform given hotly contested races this year.  
5 However, I feel compelled to simply say there is no  
6 time like the present. This matter need not wait any  
7 longer.

8 And I don't believe there'll soon be  
9 some well illuminated and unobstructed runway to avoid  
10 an unduly polarized debate on this issue. It is our  
11 democratic process of self-governance that has been  
12 unduly polarized by, among other things, the closed  
13 partisan primary system experiment.

14 As a gay man, I've had my rights, my  
15 morality, my very humanity debated publicly, often  
16 viciously, my entire life, legislated, subject to the  
17 rulings of courts.

18 Through this ongoing process, I've  
19 experienced both defeat and deep heartbreak at times  
20 and the overwhelming joy and triumph as progress leaps  
21 forward, often in an instant, after years and decades  
22 of work. Warnings that my having equality somehow  
23 diminishes or threatens other people's rights or lives  
24 or will cause harm or havoc are familiar to me.

25 Calls for delay, more studied analysis,

1 or time for people to get more comfortable with the  
2 prospect of adopting something perceived as new or  
3 different, however just or right, are familiar to me.  
4 It's not the right time. People just aren't ready.  
5 Maybe better to wait and see. Don't go there.

6 There are all these other issues that  
7 people are more consumed with to really care or to be  
8 moved to earnestly consider. Wait. One day. For  
9 those of us who dare to dream of a more fair and  
10 equitable world, for a better way of doing things, to  
11 borrow and bend a legal maxim, equality delayed is  
12 equality denied.

13 I have great faith in my fair-minded  
14 fellow New Yorkers of all political stripes and no  
15 political stripe to understand what is at stake here  
16 and to consider this proposition fairly and sincerely.  
17 Thank you.

18 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.  
19 Appreciate it. Any questions for this panel? Thank  
20 you so much. We'll next hear from Cheryl Williams and  
21 Simeon Bankoff. They'll be followed by Neferkara  
22 Aaron and Yvonne Lee. So Cheryl Williams and Simeon  
23 Bankoff, followed by Neferkara Aaron and Yvonne Lee.

24 MS. WILLIAMS: Hello. Good evening.  
25 My name is Cheryl Williams, and I'm speaking as a



1 concerned American citizen and patriot. I want to see  
2 America live up to the full measure of its promise:  
3 Liberty and justice for all.

4 Now, I'll quote James Baldwin. "I love  
5 America more than any other country in the world, and  
6 exactly for this reason, I must insist on the right to  
7 criticize her. This country is both more beautiful  
8 and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said  
9 about it." Thank you, Uncle Jimmy.

10 So let's sit with the uncomfortable  
11 truths of our shared history rather than to whitewash  
12 it. That James Baldwin quote speaks to me not because  
13 of bitterness, but with a deep belief in what America  
14 promises.

15 My mom passed away last year. Tomorrow  
16 would have been her 92nd birthday. She grew up under  
17 Jim Crow in the South where the signs read "White  
18 Only," "Colored." I believe she died hoping that her  
19 children and all children of every background, race,  
20 or belief would never again have to live under that  
21 kind of tyranny, but here we are.

22 Under Jim Crow, it was poll taxes and  
23 literacy tests. Today, it's party affiliation laws.  
24 As a registered Independent, I help fund elections  
25 that I'm barred from participating in. Closed

1 primaries exclude millions of voters. If you believe  
2 in democracy, and I think this commission does, then  
3 you must act accordingly.

4 It's time for every voter, regardless  
5 of party, to have a voice in shaping the ballot. Let  
6 Independents in. Let the voices of the many be heard.  
7 Put -- please put top two primaries on the ballot in  
8 November. Thank you.

9 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you. Any  
10 questions? Any questions for Ms. Williams? Thank you  
11 so much for your testimony. Next, we'll hear from  
12 Neferkara Aaron and Yvonne Lee. They'll be followed  
13 by Richard Fox and Jeffrey Aron.

14 MS. AARON: My name is Neferkara Aaron.  
15 I'm a native New Yorker from Brooklyn. I -- I'm  
16 currently a student at the CUNY School of Public  
17 Health concentrating in health communication for  
18 social change. I care deeply about making our city  
19 safer, more just, and more accountable.

20 In my neighborhood, I've witnessed  
21 police officers abuse their power, engaging with  
22 community members in overly aggressive ways. Some of  
23 these officers have damaged personal property in the  
24 name of pursuit without consequence. Sadly, this  
25 behavior has become normalized and is no longer

1 surprising to many of my neighbors.

2 Reading reports and hearing firsthand  
3 accounts like these made me realize that misconduct  
4 often thrives in climate ignorance not on the part of  
5 officers, but among community members who don't know  
6 where or how to voice their fears, concerns, and  
7 complaints.

8 How can the Civilian Complaint Review  
9 Board provide independent oversight without true  
10 independence? Despite its efforts, the CCRB lacks the  
11 authority to enforce discipline and accountability.  
12 Too often, its recommendations are ignored by the  
13 NYPD. From a public health perspective, this is  
14 deeply concerning.

15 Policing is a public health issue. The  
16 way the NYPD interacts with communities impacts not  
17 only safety, but mental, emotional, and physical  
18 well-being.

19 Over 20 years ago, I attended the Youth  
20 Police Academy and left with a strong sense of  
21 community respect and respect for law enforcement.  
22 However, my experiences since then have been  
23 inconsistent and at times dangerous. I can't ignore  
24 those experiences, nor should I, but I can use them to  
25 advocate for meaningful change.

1 I urge the city to openly and  
2 consistently promote the work of the CCRB across all  
3 communities in New York City. Residents deserve to  
4 know that their voices matter and that they can  
5 influence the relationship between the NYPD and the  
6 people that they serve.

7 I urge the Commission to consider  
8 revisions to the city's charter. These revisions must  
9 ensure that the CCRB has binding disciplinary  
10 authority. New Yorkers deserve real accountability  
11 regardless of what side of the badge someone stands  
12 on.

13 Direct access to NYPD misconduct  
14 records -- the investigators must be thorough and  
15 unbiased, which cannot happen if those being  
16 investigated control the evidence. New Yorkers  
17 deserve to live with pride knowing that their voices  
18 are heard and that change is not only possible but on  
19 the horizon.

20 VICE CHAIR GREENBERGER: Thank you so  
21 much. Any questions? Thank you.

22 MS. AARON: Thank you.

23 VICE CHAIR GREENBERGER: I want to  
24 confirm that Yvonne Lee is not here? Oh, you're here.  
25 Please come join us. Come sit at the table. And next

1 up is Richard Fox and Jeffrey Aron [ph].

2 MS. LEE: Good evening. My name is  
3 Yvonne Lee. When I first arrived here today, I looked  
4 across the street. My mother was born in Harlem  
5 Hospital in 1919. Seven generations of my family born  
6 and raised in Harlem. We're still here. Okay. So  
7 it's great, well, living here in Harlem, my own  
8 community, and I have an opportunity to testify.

9 I'm here tonight speaking for myself  
10 and for my son, Robert, who's an Independent. My  
11 grandchildren are Independents.

12 And thank you for listening to so many  
13 Independents and independent-minded New Yorkers  
14 like -- who, like us, are excited for the opportunity  
15 to finally talk in the open about what we have  
16 suffered for so many years in private: A closed  
17 primary system that we pay for but we're not allowed  
18 to participate in.

19 That shuts us out while our neighbors  
20 pick politicians that will determine our future.  
21 That's not fair. I would fully support a top two  
22 primary for our city. I think it is a great choice,  
23 and I wouldn't offer any stronger arguments than your  
24 own report make in simple terms.

25 Top two would give 1.1 million

1 Independents like my son, Robert, my granddaughter,  
2 Denise, my grandson, Eddie -- they're all in their  
3 30s, so that's how long we've been here. They're  
4 Independents who would love to vote in the primaries.

5 We need to level the playing field for  
6 candidates. It's lopsided. Being excluded from the  
7 primary doesn't feel like a true democracy for all  
8 people to be included. So again, I would like to be  
9 able to have a ballot with all the candidates for an  
10 office on one ballot.

11 I think that would be a good thing and  
12 it would allow the whole city to shape the elections  
13 from the beginning. We live here from the beginning.  
14 Why can't we vote in the beginning? Do you understand  
15 what I'm saying? And --

16 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much,  
17 Ms. Lee. I appreciate your testimony.

18 MS. LEE: Good. Very good.

19 CHAIR BUERY: Any questions --

20 MS. LEE: We just want Democracy.

21 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. I  
22 appreciate your time. Richard Fox and Jeffrey Aron  
23 [ph]. They'll be followed by Edward Brady and David  
24 Green.

25 MR. GREEN: David Green. Richard Fox

1 asked me to testify in his spot because --

2 CHAIR BUERY: Perfect. Thank you so  
3 much.

4 MR. GREEN: So he's submitting  
5 testify -- testimony.

6 MR. ARON: Go ahead.

7 MR. GREEN: Yeah. Thank you so much  
8 for being here this late. I drove four and a half  
9 hours to be here. I'm so glad to be able to testify.  
10 This is awesome. So my name is David Green, and I'm  
11 the statewide organizing director at Unite New York,  
12 which is an organization I'm proud to represent here  
13 today.

14 My past related experience all had to  
15 do with rank choice voting. I volunteered for the  
16 2020 ballot initiative in Massachusetts, where I used  
17 to live, then for three years as a national organizer  
18 at Rank the Vote.

19 I'm here today because I believe in a  
20 democracy that distills the needs and wants and  
21 desires of the public into the avatar of our  
22 representatives. They're called "representatives,"  
23 you know, for a reason.

24 Unite New York, a nonpartisan  
25 grassroots organization, is building a movement for a

1 better democracy by educating voters about five key  
2 reforms: Rank choice voting, term limits for statewide  
3 offices, allowing ballot initiatives at the statewide  
4 level, better ballot access for non-major party  
5 candidates, and, of course, open primaries.

6 The thousands who support our work and  
7 our polling both prove that these aren't just  
8 necessary reforms. They are popular, supported by  
9 upwards of 77 percent of New Yorkers statewide. As  
10 you know, New York is one of only ten states with  
11 fully closed primaries, which means that 40 other  
12 states are ahead of us on this issue.

13 Back in Massachusetts, as an  
14 unaffiliated voter, I would walk in on primary day and  
15 choose whether I wanted the Democrat or Republican  
16 ballot. It was fine.

17 Coming to live in New York, a  
18 self-proclaimed pro-democracy state, I was hit with a  
19 culture shock of 3.5 million registered voters across  
20 the state, 1 in 4 voters, being entirely shut out of  
21 the primary process, over 1 million of those here in  
22 New York City, including over half a million people of  
23 color.

24 So many people I've met on the street  
25 while canvassing here in New York City have felt



1 coerced to register as a Democrat, even if they were  
2 more progressive or more conservative, just so they  
3 could have a say in the most important elections.

4 The Commission's recommendation to add  
5 open primaries to the existing rank choice system  
6 would go -- will go a long way towards creating a  
7 truly representative democracy.

8 Both the primary and the general  
9 election would be actually competitive and  
10 representative as candidates are incentivized to  
11 inspire the public at large with a policy vision for  
12 all instead of skipping over vast swaths of the  
13 population and catering to a small base for fear of  
14 being primaried.

15 Open primaries will help ensure that  
16 politicians are working for the people.

17 I want to note that the Commission's  
18 top two proposal is a big improvement to the system  
19 used in California and Washington state, which has had  
20 mixed results. Incorporating rank choice voting into  
21 the all-candidate primary ensures the two candidates  
22 advancing to the general election actually represent  
23 as many voters as possible.

24 We can also preserve the major benefits  
25 of representation for women and for people of color as

1 well as cross endorsements from the current rank  
2 choice system. Any candidate can join the race  
3 without splitting the vote or being told to wait their  
4 turn.

5 And as you noted in your report, this  
6 method of RCV combining the top two was recently  
7 passed by referendum in Seattle, another major  
8 progressive city. What's more, nationwide, the number  
9 of unaffiliated voters is growing quickly, especially  
10 among young voters.

11 Fifty-two percent of Millennials and  
12 Gen Z voters and 55 percent of post-9/11 veterans do  
13 not identify with a major party. Without open  
14 primaries, these voters are more likely to disengage  
15 from politics, lose their voice, and lessen the  
16 validity of our democracy.

17 In closing, on behalf of Unite New  
18 York's 15,000 members, I want to thank the Commission  
19 for their practical and common-sense proposal for open  
20 primaries, and I just would encourage it to make our  
21 system work better. Thank you.

22 MR. ARON: Hello, my name is --

23 CHAIR BUERY: Could you give me one  
24 second, please? I'm sorry. Good? Good? Continue.  
25 Thank you so much.

1 MR. ARON: Hello. My name is Jeff Aron  
2 [ph].

3 I'm very proud and pleased to be here  
4 and I want to thank you all so much for the hard work  
5 you've been doing on behalf of our democracy, which is  
6 something that I believe deeply in and since I was a  
7 child campaigning for civil rights, campaigning  
8 against the war in Vietnam, campaigning for various  
9 progressive causes.

10 I've always had faith in the capacity  
11 of the people of this country to make decisions about  
12 what's best for them. I've never voted for a Democrat  
13 or a Republican in my life. I'm not a Democrat. I'm  
14 not a Republican.

15 And during this current election, there  
16 was -- I've received so many calls where people would  
17 call me up and say: "Well, this is such an important  
18 election. All you need to do is switch your  
19 vote -- switch your registration so you can vote, and  
20 then you can switch back to being an Independent."

21 And I just found that so immoral. That  
22 wasn't the Democratic Party organizing its  
23 constituency. That was attempting to wrangle  
24 Independent voters to become Democrats. It's kind of  
25 immoral and creepy, and I just really resented that.

1 As a progressive, as a progressive Jew, I wanted to  
2 vote for Mamdani. I really did.

3 And every time they would pass me by  
4 and say, "Can you vote for Mamdani," I'd say: "I'd  
5 love to, but I'm an Independent. I can't." As I  
6 believe in bringing people together, Jews and Muslims  
7 and all people, I was just -- I felt helpless to  
8 actually direct, you know -- offer my support for  
9 causes that I believed in.

10 I don't like the fact that I'm being  
11 cut out of the decision-making process here in New  
12 York and that people, wherever there is closed  
13 primaries, are cut out of and that we, you  
14 know -- the -- Fiorello La Guardia said, "There isn't  
15 a Republican or a Democratic way to collect the  
16 garbage."

17 It's not exactly clear to me why you  
18 need a Democratic or a Republican primary in order to  
19 determine the fate of our city. Let all people vote  
20 regardless of their party affiliation.

21 As a progressive person, as a  
22 progressive Jew, who wants to build connections with  
23 people around the city, I don't appreciate the fact  
24 that the parties, parties that I don't believe in, are  
25 trying to manipulate and organize my vote. I'd like

1 to be able to vote.

2 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Thank  
3 you both for your testimony. Any questions?

4 Next -- Edward Brady and Richard Ronner [ph]. Edward  
5 Brady and Richard Ronner [ph]. They'll be followed by  
6 Nan Fessler and Maria Danzilo.

7 MR. BRADY: Madame vice -- never mind.  
8 Commissioners -- it's late. Thank you for your time  
9 and for your effort. I want to say up top, my name is  
10 Ed Brady, by the way. I live on the Upper East Side.  
11 You know, there's an old saying, "A lie can travel  
12 halfway around the world before the truth is putting  
13 on its shoes."

14 And I want to say for the  
15 record -- okay -- as an Independent, I am not, and  
16 neither are any of my other Independents here,  
17 supporting jungle primaries. We are here to represent  
18 inclusive primaries. We are here to represent open  
19 primaries.

20 As I said, my name is Ed Brady. I'm a  
21 military veteran. I served in the Navy from 1975 to  
22 1979, nearly all of it stationed on an aircraft  
23 carrier. Like so many of my fellow military veterans,  
24 I am a lifelong Independent. I have followed your  
25 process very closely and read your reports. They're

1 superb.

2 But one thing they miss is my  
3 community, my community of veterans. Half of American  
4 veterans are Independents. Half. We travel abroad to  
5 uphold democracy far from our shores only to come home  
6 and find ourselves excluded in our own communities.

7 When we lowered the age to vote from 21  
8 to 18 back in 1971, it was because we believed as a  
9 country that if we can be sent to fight, you should be  
10 able to vote for the elected representatives making  
11 those decisions.

12 On primary day, I was out in Bay Ridge,  
13 Brooklyn, with this -- with fellow Independents  
14 protesting our exclusion from voting. This is one of  
15 the signs we carried. And we were joined by folks in  
16 four other cities and right here in Harlem.

17 We're tired of being shut out of the  
18 primaries where most decisions are made and certainly  
19 key decisions are made about who will represent our  
20 city. I came today to share two things quickly.

21 I strongly believe in a top two  
22 nonpartisan primary. Using RCV is an excellent  
23 choice. It gives all Independents the opportunity to  
24 participate, and it creates a ballot where all  
25 candidates appear for a given office. It is fair and

1 it is well tested. We know this already because it  
2 works in most cities across the country.

3 Independent voters are the fastest  
4 growing community of voters. It is where our young  
5 people are not registering into the two major parties.  
6 We need to upgrade our primaries so they work for all  
7 voters, not just the party regulars.

8 And finally, in closing, please take  
9 this opportunity to give all New Yorkers a chance to  
10 vote on bringing our primary system up to date this  
11 November.

12 Many Independents like me have not had  
13 a meaningful vote in decades. Please don't make us  
14 wait any longer. Then I can look at each one of you  
15 in the eye and say, "Thank you for your service."  
16 Thank you very much.

17 MR. RONNER [PH]: Thank you very much,  
18 commissioners, for your service. It's been a long  
19 slog. My name is Richard Ronner [ph]. I'm -- I've  
20 been a registered Independent -- I think I was a  
21 Democrat maybe for a few years at the beginning of my  
22 voting career, but this year, I did the -- something I  
23 haven't yet done.

24 I switched my registration back to the  
25 Democratic party. I really wanted to be able to

1 participate in this mayoral race. I think it's very  
2 important. There's a lot at stake. I was -- I'm -- I  
3 don't know. I'm not ashamed of that, I'm not proud of  
4 it, but I didn't like having to do it.

5 I have a lot of disagreements with the  
6 Democratic Party, definitely with the Republican  
7 Party, but with both parties. They don't represent  
8 me.

9 They don't -- I don't agree with their  
10 behavior, with what they do, how they -- and I don't  
11 appreciate -- just like Jeff said here, they really  
12 manipulated me, coerced me to change my registration  
13 so that I could vote. I don't appreciate it. I don't  
14 like that.

15 These are public elections that we all  
16 pay for with our tax dollars. I say to people who are  
17 nostalgic about the parties, the Democratic -- go  
18 ahead and run their own private primary if they want.  
19 They can do that, too. You know, it's not only that  
20 we can adjust our registration. They can adjust their  
21 primaries.

22 So anyway, I like the proposals. I've  
23 been amazed at the -- at how controversial these  
24 things are. I think one thing to -- that I've seen is  
25 that people who have learned to work with a -- an



1 unfair and coercive system, as it stands, would prefer  
2 to keep that unfair and coercive system so they  
3 maintain their status quo, their influence.

4 I think we need to move forward and I  
5 think we need many changes to improve our democracy  
6 here. We need more choices, more parties, or  
7 something. The stranglehold of the two major parties  
8 is not allowing us to move forward.

9 So I thank you for your work and for  
10 listening to -- for these many months, all this  
11 testimony. And I hope you proceed and put it on the  
12 ballot. Let us all vote on it. Thanks a lot.

13 CHAIR BUERY: Okay. Thank you so much.  
14 Can you hold on for a second?

15 You have a question?

16 COMMISSIONER DABARON: Yeah. How you  
17 doing? Is that process of changing from one party to  
18 the next -- is it a lengthy process, or what is that  
19 process? I don't know, so ...

20 MR. RONNER [PH]: Actually -- well, you  
21 can do it online now, which -- it's fairly innocuous.  
22 It's not, you know -- largely it's the principle;  
23 right? And that I shouldn't have to join a party that  
24 I don't like in particular to be able to vote.

25 I just today thought to -- that I

1 wanted to change my registration back, and I'm not 100  
2 percent sure that I'll be -- that I'm allowed to that,  
3 that they may tell me, "No, you have to wait a year,"  
4 or something or other. But --

5 COMMISSIONER DABARON: Thank you.  
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIR BUERY: So we -- thank you so  
8 much for your testimony and thank you for your service  
9 truly. Thank you.

10 MR. BRADY: I hope I can say the same  
11 thing for you in a couple of weeks.

12 CHAIR BUERY: I suppose I invited that.  
13 So I just want to apologize to the room. So we have  
14 actually a hard stop in this room at 9:30 for a couple  
15 of reasons. We have four -- so I think that means we  
16 have four people who can testify. I'm going to say  
17 who they are. Nan Fessler, Maria Danzilo, Thomas  
18 Posgay [ph], and Rebecca Selton [ph].

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 23: Nan isn't  
20 here.

21 CHAIR BUERY: I'm sorry? Okay. All  
22 right. So --

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 23: Nan isn't  
24 here.

25 CHAIR BUERY: Nan's not here. And so I

1 want to remind -- and that means that we're not going  
2 to get to the Zoom testimony at all, but I want to  
3 remind people to please submit your testimony to  
4 chartertestimony@citycharter.nyc.gov.

5 I regret -- I know it means a lot to  
6 come out here and wait, and I do regret that we can't  
7 get to everybody. And so I do apologize. Maria  
8 Danzilo and Thomas Posgay [ph].

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 23: Those are the  
10 only people who are going to be able to testify --

11 CHAIR BUERY: Well, now -- so after  
12 Maria Danzilo and Thomas Posgay [ph], we will hear  
13 from Rebecca Selton [ph] and Paradise Kelly [ph], but  
14 those are the only people who will be able to testify  
15 because we do have to clear the room. And I really am  
16 sorry. I apologize.

17 MS. DANZILO: Good --

18 CHAIR BUERY: Yeah, please.

19 MS. DANZILO: Okay. Good evening and  
20 thank you to the Chair and the Commission for the  
21 opportunity to be heard. My name is Maria Danzilo,  
22 and I'm Executive Director of the good government  
23 group One City Rising. We're a bipartisan group of  
24 thousands of members across the five boroughs,  
25 Democrats, Republicans, and unaffiliated voters.

1           This is my third time testifying on the  
2           need for open primaries. We're talking about a ballot  
3           initiative to give voters the right to decide whether  
4           to franchise the million-plus Independent voters,  
5           including 700,000 veterans.

6           I'm disappointed in so much of the  
7           testimony earlier tonight against this good government  
8           reform that has been years in the making. I fully  
9           support, without reservation, your proposal to  
10          franchise these million-plus freethinkers in New York  
11          City.

12          My strong support for open primaries  
13          comes out of my experience two times as a candidate  
14          running in a party primary and by running a good  
15          government group these past five years. In both  
16          elections, I spent months actually talking to voters  
17          on the ground.

18          I came out of my first campaign in 2021  
19          clear about one thing: We must have open primaries. I  
20          was in the trenches running for office and saw with my  
21          own eyes how the system was unfair and not inclusive.  
22          I met many people who could not vote even though they  
23          really wanted to only because they were not registered  
24          in a party.

25          This included many people of diverse

1 backgrounds, reflecting the districts where I ran.  
2 And their reasons for not wanting to vote -- or to  
3 register in a party were very personal to them and I  
4 didn't feel it was my business to tell them that they  
5 should, you know, register in a party just to be able  
6 to vote.

7 In a closed primary, as someone not  
8 supported by one of the big parties, I really didn't  
9 have a chance in the party primary system against an  
10 entrenched incumbent supported by large special  
11 interests.

12 I am concerned about some of the  
13 earlier testimony from elected officials in particular  
14 that somehow this open primaries movement is  
15 politically motivated by recent events. This is a  
16 false narrative about the good government open  
17 primaries movement.

18 We cannot keep these 1 million plus  
19 Independent, freethinking, disenfranchised voters,  
20 including over 700,000 veterans, out of our system. I  
21 find it concerning that any elected leader would  
22 defend a system that is not inclusive of every voter  
23 in New York City.

24 Why would anyone try to stop this  
25 commission's work of letting the voters decide whether

1 we should franchise every voter in New York City at  
2 this particular moment?

3 In the recent election, the candidate  
4 who won the Democratic primary was by less than 11  
5 percent of registered voters. I don't think that's  
6 democracy. Independents are the fastest growing  
7 segment of voters, especially young voters, and they  
8 really should not be out of the voting system, and  
9 they should not be forced to join a party.

10 Freedom of association is a  
11 constitutional right and that includes the right not  
12 to be forced to associate with any particular party.  
13 Thank you very much.

14 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Are  
15 there any questions for Ms. Danzilo? Next, we'll hear  
16 from Thomas Posgay [ph] and Rebecca Selton [ph],  
17 followed by Paradise Kelly [ph]. Are Thomas or  
18 Rebecca here? Paradise Kelly is not here? Jessica  
19 Marta? Sidharth Ghoshal? Come on down.

20 All right. Sidharth Ghoshal, followed  
21 by Celso Garcia [ph], if you're here. Celso [ph]  
22 here? No? Is Keanu Arpels-Josiah here? Can you come  
23 down? Let's see how we do after that. All right.  
24 Continue. Welcome.

25 MR. GHOSHAL: Hello. Wow, that's

1 really loud. This is my first time testifying like  
2 this. My name is Sid. I'm a resident of Queens. I  
3 don't have a fancy title to give you guys, so yeah.

4 You have an enormous, enormous  
5 privilege in front of you, Commission, the type of  
6 thing that people write textbooks after, the things  
7 that end up as a section where they're like, "On 2025,  
8 that was the year when New York reached a different  
9 level of freedom, a different level of prosperity."

10 The simple fact of the matter is that  
11 if you don't put this vote up for open primaries right  
12 now, we don't know when it's going to happen next.  
13 Independents like myself have never had a chance to  
14 vote in these kinds of primaries. We've never had a  
15 chance to be able to raise our voices, and it's truly  
16 a political disaster, if anything.

17 I'd like to take some time to address a  
18 couple points I've heard. I think it's a little sad  
19 that a bunch of very, very powerful people have been  
20 able to say a lot of just generally untrue things.

21 I mean, the first thing I want to start  
22 with, very early in the afternoon, the following  
23 quote, "What is the point of political parties if we  
24 have open primaries?" Do you as a commission truly  
25 believe that political parties will cease to exist if

1 open primaries come about? I don't think so. I think  
2 you all know the answer to that as well.

3 People say that "oh, you shouldn't have  
4 open primaries because it's only going to be a  
5 marginal improvement." Well, I don't know. Maybe  
6 this is too humble, but I think having a dollar in my  
7 pocket's better than having an empty pocket. I think  
8 the simple fact of the matter is that if you can get  
9 even one more person to vote with an open primary, it  
10 is absolutely worth it.

11 I want to be able to look at my kids  
12 and I want to be able to tell them with great pride  
13 that I saw Richard Buery, I saw Diane Savino, I saw  
14 Sharon Greenberger -- I want to say all your names,  
15 but I don't have that much time -- that I saw all of  
16 you and I saw you today and you did something truly  
17 remarkable, something people make movies about,  
18 something people write in textbooks, that you allowed  
19 New Yorkers the right to vote for open primaries.

20 You didn't even give a decision. You  
21 just gave them permission to make a decision. You  
22 gave them permission to vote on it. Please, please,  
23 please. I'm begging you. I want a better world for  
24 my kids. Please, at least let this go to the ballot.  
25 It is the least I can ask. Thank you.



1 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you. Please.  
2 Thank you.

3 MR. ARPELS-JOSIAH: Good evening,  
4 commissioners. Thank you. My name is Keanu  
5 Arpels-Josiah, and I represent today Fridays for  
6 Future New York City, a grassroots organization of  
7 high school students and young people across dozens of  
8 schools dedicated to fighting for climate action.

9 And I'm here to express our strong  
10 opposition to the proposed adoption of a jungle  
11 primary system for New York City elections. You heard  
12 earlier from one of our passionate middle school  
13 organizers speaking in her personal capacity,  
14 Catherine Du.

15 Let's be clear. This top two or top  
16 four proposal is distinct from true open political  
17 primaries. That isn't the debate here. This is  
18 disastrous for our generation. Last cycle, our  
19 members knocked on doors, held forums, and we've done  
20 the work to build political power from the ground up.

21 Members like ours are the lifeblood of  
22 our city's civic fabric and how many young people,  
23 including those who may not be able to vote yet,  
24 engage in our electoral process. And yet, a jungle  
25 primary system would severely undermine grassroots

1 voters' abilities to engage in elections and in the  
2 process.

3 First, in a rank choice voting top two  
4 or top four system, there is no party primary.  
5 Ultimately, it undermines the very logic for primaries  
6 at all. Every candidate, regardless of party or  
7 values, appears on one crowded ballot.

8 That forces grassroots candidates to  
9 compete in massive, often expansive fields, splitting  
10 the vote and making it harder for community-backed  
11 candidates to break through.

12 Second, jungle primaries amplify the  
13 power of money over organizing. In a high candidate,  
14 low information race, as you've heard, without party  
15 cues, the winners are often those with the biggest war  
16 chests, the most name recognition, or wealthy  
17 interests. Our generation can't compete with that  
18 kind of money.

19 Our strength is people-powered  
20 campaigns that build trust over time, not six-figure  
21 media buys and insider endorsements. Jungle primaries  
22 put movement candidates at a severe disadvantage,  
23 tilting the playing field toward the very institutions  
24 organizing seeking -- seeks to challenge.

25 Third, this comes after historic youth

1 turnout in the most recent primary, specifically among  
2 those aged 18 to 29, where 25 percent of voters were  
3 zero prime voters, and on the hottest day in 15 years.  
4 This system changes a system to favor billionaires,  
5 not youth.

6 One of the most powerful aspects of our  
7 current system is that it gives our generation clear  
8 political targets, party primaries where our voters  
9 and community organizers can make a real difference.  
10 That's how coalitions of youth have shifted city  
11 policy.

12 Jungle primaries scramble those lines,  
13 making electoral pathways murky and take power away  
14 from a generation that has only recently begun to  
15 claim it.

16 Let's be clear. This proposal is not  
17 about empowering young voters. It's about  
18 disempowering the people who have learned to organize.  
19 It's about disempowering young voters who have showed  
20 up in historic numbers in the most recent primary.

21 For these reasons, I urge you to join  
22 with our generation, with labor and grassroots groups  
23 from the carpenters to DSA, and reject any attempt to  
24 implement a jungle primary system in New York City.  
25 It's a step back for grassroots power for our

1 generation and for democracy. Thank you.

2 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much. Any  
3 further -- any questions for this panel? No? Can  
4 we -- is Shane Moynihan --

5 MR. GHOSHAL: I'm part of the same  
6 generation and that does not speak for me.

7 MR. ARPELS-JOSIAH: Well, we  
8 can -- we're a diverse generation.

9 CHAIR BUERY: Mr. -- thank you so much.  
10 Is Shane Moynihan or Lisa Downing [ph] here? Thank  
11 you. Lisa Downing [ph] or Allison Downing [ph] here?  
12 Mr. Yeldell [ph]? Janet Wooden [ph]? Julien Segura?  
13 Yeah? Okay. Please continue. Please begin. Thank  
14 you.

15 MR. MOYNIHAN: Thank you for having me  
16 here. Thank you for everything. I'm tired. I'm  
17 sorry. I'm not going to be super eloquent. I did  
18 prepare a speech this time, sort of, but it's going to  
19 be a little bit all over the place.

20 I was born in Washington  
21 Heights -- born and raised in Washington Heights.  
22 Live in Queens now with my wife and two daughters. I  
23 am the Co-Founder of the New Leaf Democrats. I'm a  
24 Co-Lead at Forward Party New York Chapter.

25 I don't want to be petty or rude. I've

1 heard so many hollow arguments tonight that grassroots  
2 power is going to be destroyed if we just let more  
3 people vote. That sounds to me like people -- just  
4 like Richard noted, people have gotten comfortable  
5 working in this system, and they've gained power and  
6 now, they don't want to give it up.

7 What about the 43 -- whatever it is.  
8 It's close to half of the city. They don't -- they  
9 shouldn't have any power? That's a little absurd.  
10 These people haven't been giving explanations about  
11 how it would decrease power. Maybe one or two did out  
12 of ten.

13 They haven't explained how it's going  
14 to make money interests more powerful, either, and I'm  
15 sure that you guys have all noticed that.

16 I really want to voice that we need top  
17 four over top two. I think that everybody who has  
18 testified for the top two -- if you put them all in a  
19 room and you ask them if they would approve of top  
20 four, they would probably say yes. I would think 90,  
21 95 percent or more.

22 I'm not sure what the advantage of top  
23 two is over top four. I haven't heard anybody say a  
24 reason why. The whole point is to get more options,  
25 more competition, so we can hold candidates

1 accountable and our officials accountable. Top two  
2 does the reverse. You're trimming it down.

3 You're leaving -- you're making it so  
4 Independents -- you're making it harder for  
5 Independents, you're making it harder for third-party  
6 candidates to break through. Why? Again, like I  
7 asked in Queens, just why?

8 And I agree with Richard also when he  
9 was refuting Brad Lander's point. Yeah. Why not just  
10 go register as a Democrat? What's the problem?  
11 That's not fair. It's not right. There's no reason  
12 to do that. I won't -- I'm going to move on.

13 Top four -- please do top four. Don't  
14 do top two. Nobody's going to be mad at you. You  
15 won't -- and you won't make me and many other  
16 people -- many advocates are going to come out for  
17 this movement and they're going to be against top two.  
18 I will come out full force against it because you're  
19 reducing the options.

20 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much.

21 MR. MOYNIHAN: Please. Thank you.

22 MR. SEGURA: All right. Thanks,  
23 everybody, for being very patient. My name is Julien  
24 Segura. I am a political activist, political  
25 strategist from Sugar Hill in Harlem, a little bit

1 north of here.

2 So firstly, I'm going to talk about the  
3 housing proposals. The first three, fast tracking  
4 affordable housing, expedited review, new ULURP  
5 appeals board.

6 I feel like they're all dangerous forms  
7 of consolidation of power away from the City Council  
8 and community boards, which can fuel gentrification,  
9 which happened in my neighborhood and all of the  
10 surrounding ones, by cutting out ULURP, going against  
11 member deference, and drowning out community voices  
12 whose proposed developments would directly impact.

13 Digitized city map, that's long  
14 overdue. I mean, you know, one county has it. We  
15 should do it for the rest.

16 Even year elections. My God. As a  
17 civic activist, political consultant, and strategist  
18 and former down ballot candidate last year, I can tell  
19 you right now I strongly believe that even year  
20 elections will have the opposite of the intended  
21 effect, working against voter turnout and making more  
22 barriers for down ballot candidates to campaign.

23 This year already talking to candidates  
24 about public advocate, comptroller, and what I was  
25 dealing with, a City Council open seat that I was

1 managing this year, it was incredibly difficult. Of  
2 the 14,000 people who showed up in District 30 to  
3 vote, the open seat that I was managing someone in,  
4 2,000 didn't vote for anything but mayor.

5 And so it led to a result where because  
6 there were five different groups to look at, five  
7 different things on the ballot to deal with, five  
8 different positions, people only cared about the first  
9 one. And there was so much messaging about the first  
10 one and five people there. People already struggle to  
11 remember two or three names.

12 They were pushed to remember five  
13 walking into the mayor's race. How the hell are they  
14 going to remember 20 people? I mean, even me as a guy  
15 who pays attention to elections and is a massive nerd,  
16 you know, I'm not going to remember every damn name on  
17 the ballot. It's impossible to ask.

18 Now, beyond that, open primaries,  
19 finally. I've been a major advocate for open  
20 primaries for many years. I was the only candidate  
21 for state legislature last year that pushed for open  
22 primaries, and I'm excited to see the city Charter  
23 Commission consider this for a ballot proposal.

24 However, the top two system is not one  
25 that I advocate for because it would be the least



1 democratic form of open primary and one that would  
2 arguably -- and I agree with the centers that it would  
3 favor large donors and PACs and independent  
4 expenditures that have bought many seats this year and  
5 since the Citizens United decision was made.

6 So I would push for -- if, as the  
7 report suggested, it's only between top two and top  
8 four, I would suggest that we look at top four as a  
9 ballot proposal instead of top two. Unfortunately,  
10 many of the people who came in here didn't read the  
11 piece of paper and didn't realize that you guys wanted  
12 input on which form you'd like.

13 Finally, I would like you to consider a  
14 true open primary system that maintains partisan  
15 primaries but allows Independent voters to decide  
16 which primary they want to participate in so that we  
17 can enfranchise Independent voters without creating a  
18 worse election system which I would unfortunately have  
19 to advocate against.

20 CHAIR BUERY: Thank you so much for  
21 your testimony.

22 MR. SEGURA: Thank you, all.

23 CHAIR BUERY: I want to thank everyone  
24 for their testimony and participation this evening.  
25 I'm sorry we couldn't get to everyone who signed up to

1     testify. This is the last public hearing scheduled  
2     for the Commission, the last that we're taking  
3     testimony, but I want to remind everyone you can still  
4     submit written testimony till July 15th.

5             I want to promise that we will review  
6     your written testimony if you submit it. It can be  
7     submitted at [nyc.gov/charter](https://nyc.gov/charter) or you can email it at  
8     [chartertestimony@citycharter.nyc.gov](mailto:chartertestimony@citycharter.nyc.gov).

9             Although this is the last hearing where  
10    we'll take -- this is the last public meeting we will  
11    take public testimony, we will have a final public  
12    meeting on Monday, July 21st at 1 p.m. at Landmarks  
13    Preservation in the public hearing room located at 253  
14    Broadway on the second floor.

15            I will take a motion to adjourn.

16            MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: So moved.

17            CHAIR BUERY: Is there a second?

18            MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Second.

19            CHAIR BUERY: Any discussion? All in  
20    favor?

21            MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Aye.

22            CHAIR BUERY: We are adjourned. Thank  
23    you.

24            (Whereupon, the meeting concluded at  
25    9:31 p.m.)

CERTIFICATE

I, KIYZIAH VAUGHN, the officer before whom the foregoing proceedings were taken, do hereby certify that any witness(es) in the foregoing proceedings, prior to testifying, were duly sworn; that the proceedings were recorded by me and thereafter reduced to typewriting by a qualified transcriptionist; that said digital audio recording of said proceedings are a true and accurate record to the best of my knowledge, skills, and ability; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which this was taken; and, further, that I am not a relative or employee of any counsel or attorney employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.



KIYZIAH VAUGHN

Notary Public in and for the  
State of New York

CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIBER

I, KEARA CONTARTESI, do hereby certify that this transcript was prepared from the digital audio recording of the foregoing proceeding, that said transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings to the best of my knowledge, skills, and ability; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which this was taken; and, further, that I am not a relative or employee of any counsel or attorney employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.



KEARA CONTARTESI

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