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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

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

2 List of Attendees (Cont'd):

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

5 Kyron Banks, Deputy Political Director, SEIU Local
6 32BJ

7 Jim Walden, NYC Mayoral Candidate

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

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

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

14 Annemarie Gray, Executive Director, Open New York

15 Samir Lavingia, Second Vice Chair, Community Board 5

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

17 Grace Rauh, Executive Director, Citizens Union

18 Tricia Thompson, Member, Communication Workers of
19 America

20 Karen Wharton, Political Organizer

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

23 Jerrod Delaine, CEO, The Delaine Companies

24 Oscar Pocasangre, Senior Data Analyst, New America

25 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

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

2 List of Attendees (Cont'd):

3 Heather Beers-Dimitriadis, Chair, Queens Community
4 Board 6

5 Alan Cox, Member of the Public

6 Angelo Pis-Dudot, Legal Fellow, Local Progress

7 Torsha Childs, Member of the Public

8 Howard Edelbaum, Member of the Public

9 Gia Lowe, Member of the Public

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

12 Danny Battista, Member of the Public

13 Cheryl Williams, Member of the Public

14 Neferkara Aaron, Member of the Public

15 Yvonne Lee, Member of the Public

16 David Green, Statewide Organizing Director, Unite NY

17 Jeffrey Aron, Member of the Public

18 Edward Brady, Member of the Public

19 Richard Ronner, Member of the Public

20 Maria Danzilo, Executive Director, One City Rising

21 Sidharth Ghoshal, Member of the Public

22 Keanu Arpels-Josiah, Organizer, Fridays for Future NYC

23 Shane Moynihan, Co-Founder, New Leaf Democrats

24 Julien Segura, Political Activist/Political Strategist

25

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. 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 or you can email it at
8 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.)

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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

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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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