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July 22nd Testimony Before the New York City Charter Revision Commission

Good evening Chair Scissura and members of the Charter Revision Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony at today's hearing.

My name is Shekar Krishnan. I proudly represent District 25, which includes the neighborhoods of Jackson Heights, Elmhurst and Woodside in Queens. I am proud to be the first Indian-American elected to the New York City Council and everyday I strive to ensure that the diverse communities of my district are heard and represented when reviewing legislation or negotiating the budget. That is why I am troubled by the commission's efforts to undermine the will of the communities I represent by using its power to hastily submit ballot proposals and delay voters from deciding whether they want to expand the advice and consent process for commissioners of mayoral agencies.

I initially became troubled after learning that the commission's preliminary proposals are premised upon a misunderstanding of the council's legislative process. The council provides robust opportunities for public input, typically taking over 280 days to consider legislation before adopting it. This time allows for the public to organize and turnout to weigh in on legislation. Before I was elected to the council, I came to Council hearings numerous times and testified on bills that would impact the low-income tenants I represented as a housing lawyer, often bringing my clients with me as they spoke to the realities of predatory landlords and illegal harassment happening in our city. This experience has led me to prioritize public testimony in my role as Chair of the Committee on Parks and Recreation, allowing a panel of the public to testify before the Parks department so the highest levels of the department are aware of the realities faced by those who frequent our city's parks, pools and beaches.

In stark contrast, it has been my experience that agencies often do not hear and consider public voices when making impactful policy decisions. As an advocate, I have had to file lawsuits when agencies make decisions that leave community voices out, including on land use matters. As a

Council Member, I have had to hastily make calls and organize community members when agencies make impactful decisions behind closed doors that are not in line with the needs of my community. Based on my experiences, there is no need to question the level of transparency in the council's legislative process.

Our city should instead expand accountability measures for agency heads by providing an opportunity for democratically elected council members and our constituents to ensure that their needs are met in the highest levels of government. The council passed this legislation to ensure this fundamental measure of representative democracy is enacted in New York City. Our city has lagged behind states and other municipalities who have had this measure in place for years.

Instead the commission is rushing to develop proposals to be adopted on the ballot in this year's general election which would delay a vote on expanded advice and consent. And as previously mentioned, the preliminary proposals were based on a misunderstanding of the council's processes. The Commission should not stand in the way of this measure being presented to the voters. The commission should instead take its time to develop and introduce well-constructed and thoughtful charter amendments to be considered by voters in 2025, as allowed by the Charter.

As we see democratic backsliding and attempts to undermine the will of the public throughout our country, it is my sincere hope that the Charter Revision Commission will instead decide to do right by New Yorkers. Our city deserves nothing less. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony.