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THE COUNCIL  
OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

**JAMES F. GENNARO**

COUNCIL MEMBER  
TWENTY-FOURTH DISTRICT, QUEENS

Chair  
Committee on Environmental  
Protection, Resiliency & Waterfronts

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**Council Member James F. Gennaro**  
**Testimony – Charter Revision Commission**  
July 12, 2024

Thank you Chair Carlo Scissura and members of the Charter Revision Commission for the opportunity to provide testimony.

The Mayor's Charter Revision Commission is an important tool for good governance. It gives us the opportunity to streamline conventions that have become outdated and to do so with public input. But Mayor Eric Adams' use of this Charter Revision Commission threatens to bar New Yorkers from voting on advice and consent powers passed by the City Council. The Mayor is deliberately shutting down the democratic process by having the commission put forward rushed questions on the ballot, thereby knocking the advice and consent question off the ballot.

State law mandates that a Charter Commission's proposal takes priority over those proposed by the City Council. This means that if this Commission chooses to rush its process of reviewing the entirety of the Charter, engaging with the public, and making a submission of one or more questions to the voters by submitting such question(s) for this year's General Election ballot, it will deny New Yorkers the opportunity to have their voices heard on the subject of advice and consent for the foreseeable future.

The Council has already demonstrated its ability to navigate the advice and consent process. Currently the process includes over a dozen positions, including Department of Investigation Commissioner, Corporation Counsel, members of the Taxi & Limousine Commission, and many other appointees of the mayor to commissions and boards. This process ensures qualified commissioners are being appointed. It also gives commissioners the crucial opportunity to hear about the wide range of issues they should expect to address before their appointment.

Strengthening advice and consent makes city agencies more transparent and responsive to the needs of constituents. It is designed to safeguard the integrity of city government and protect the public interest of New Yorkers. As a former professor of American State and Government at Queens College for eight years, and having been in City government service for decades (I am currently the longest serving active Member of the Council), I can attest there is a need for a process that would grant more oversight and allow for more transparency in the selection of the commissioners covered in the Council's law.

Furthermore, as it pertains to the questions under consideration by the Charter Commission, providing the public with ample opportunities to provide feedback and input is critical, which is why the Council accepts written testimony for legislation up to three days after a hearing is held. The Mayor's Charter Revision Commission, however, is only accepting written testimony until July 12th, despite having more public hearings until July 25th. This discrepancy highlights not only how rushed this process is, but reveals a lack of proper due diligence in engaging with the public.

The Mayor's Charter Revision Commission should undertake a serious and thorough review of the entire City Charter and adequately engage the public – not rush through the process in less than two months just to meet the August 5 deadline to submit questions for this year's General Election. Recent Charter Revision Commissions have taken their time over several months to promote reform by meaningfully engaging the public in the process, but Mayor Adams' Commission has rushed to alter the City's Charter in less than two months. The effect of the latter would be to block voters from deciding on an existing proposal to expand advice and consent.

Commissioner appointments have significant implications for New Yorkers. From veterans' services to mental health services and so much more, New Yorkers rely on our city's agencies to perform at optimum efficiency.