

NYC Council Majority Whip Selvena N. Brooks-Powers' Testimony to the Charter Revision Commission

*July 22, 2024*

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

The Mayor's Commission should not rush a serious process to develop new proposals that change our city's constitution in such a short period of time. It is unnecessary for the Commission to develop proposals for 2024 because it has until Election Day 2025, by law, and can offer proposals for that year's ballot. Rushing would undermine the ability to conduct proper review and thorough public engagement of constitutional changes that can have a lasting impact on the health of our city government.

This Commission should avoid such an outcome that will negatively affect New York City for years to come, as a result of it rushing through a critical process. Instead, it should utilize its full term and continue the work of Charter review, meaningful public engagement, and thorough consideration of the issues and proposals. Historically, such commissions have taken several months, even years, to ensure meaningful public involvement and expert consideration. However, the Mayor's Commission has been tasked with revising the City Charter in less than two months, an unprecedented and undemocratic move that has dangerous consequences for our city.

In addition to advancing proposals without a full review and public participation, rushing this process would block voters from weighing in on an existing proposal that is set to appear on the General Election ballot this year: the expansion of advice-and-consent to more city agency commissioner appointments. Circumventing voters' right to decide on the Council's proposal to expand advice-and-consent is undemocratic, and I urge the Commission to refrain from blocking New Yorkers' rights and allow this proposal to move forward for consideration this November.

Additionally, the Mayor's Commission has inaccurately characterized the Council's legislative process and public engagement efforts, including for legislation that impacts the public safety of New Yorkers. The City Council has long-established policies and procedures for city legislation that include multiple formal pathways for public engagement and input. New Yorkers and all stakeholders are always encouraged to provide testimony on legislation during hearings because this public feedback informs the Council's lawmaking and policy decisions.

In fact, an independent analysis from Citizens Union, a good government group, validated the Council's engagement approach and disputed proposals from the Mayor's Commission to adjust how public safety bills are handled with regard to public review. The analysis found that the Council typically spends 280 days reviewing a bill between introduction and the final vote, with even more time allotted for high-profile bills. For instance, the How Many Stops Act was considered for 552 days, providing ample opportunities and time for the public to testify or submit comments for consideration.

This robust process ensures that public feedback is thoroughly considered. As lawmakers, we understand that engaging with New Yorkers on critical policy issues is not always easy. It is imperative that our legislative processes provide the space, time, and opportunity for the public to weigh in on crucial legislation. It's the core foundation of our democratic governance, and that's exactly what the Council's process provides. The Mayor's Commission has fallen short of these basic expectations.

I urge the Mayor's Commission to uphold the democratic process and allow New Yorkers to vote on the existing advice-and-consent proposal that voters are set to decide in the 2024 General Election. Let us ensure that any proposed changes to the City Charter are well-considered and beneficial for the future governance of New York City by utilizing the full term for thorough and meaningful review. The Mayor's Commission should focus on producing thoughtful proposals for consideration in the 2025 General Election, and let voters decide on the existing advice-and-consent proposal this year.

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