



February 16, 2018

The Honorable Bill de Blasio  
Mayor  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

Citizens Union applauds the DemocracyNYC agenda announced at your recent State of the City address and is looking forward to the implementation of this ambitious program. Many of the features of your agenda align closely with Citizens Union's advocacy efforts, particularly our Voter Turnout Initiative, which pursues the common goals of civic engagement and education, comprehensive public campaign financing, and a litany of provisions to make voting easier. We look forward to opportunities to advance these measures in partnership with your office.

Citizens Union is troubled, however, by the manner in which you are approaching the creation of a Charter Revision Commission, "mandate[d]" to reform the city's campaign finance and elections systems. We believe your direction to examine particular areas of the New York City Charter and your direction to the Commission to pursue particular reforms, are in conflict with the responsibilities of a Charter Revision Commission.

Subsection 36(5)(a) of the state's Municipal Home Rule Law states that a Charter Commission "shall review the entire charter of such city and prepare a draft of a proposed new or revised charter of such city. The remainder of this section clearly sets forth that once a Commission is appointed, all decisions regarding what charter revisions are placed before the voters are solely those of the Commission. There is no authority for any appointed official to "charge" that a specific recommendation be adopted.

Given the immense responsibility of a Charter Commission to review the entire charter, and even the requirement that the Commission explain why it did not revise a particular part, it is important to assure the commission's independence. We urge you to consider the possible appointees to the Commission proposed by the City Council, Public Advocate, Comptroller and the Borough Presidents. We also urge that you respect the importance of the Commission's functioning independently of any appointing official.

Citizens Union has conducted an extensive review of the city charter and welcomes the opportunity to offer our recommendations to the Charter Revision Commission, and to work with your office on the implementation of DemocracyNYC.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Betsy Gotbaum". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Betsy Gotbaum  
Executive Director, Citizens Union

Executive Director

CC:

Eric Adams , Brooklyn Borough President  
Gale Brewer , Manhattan Borough President  
Ruben Diaz, Jr., Bronx Borough President  
Melinda Katz, Queens Borough President  
Letitia James, Public Advocate  
Corey Johnson, Speaker of the New York City Council  
New York City Council  
James Oddo, Staten Island Borough President  
Scott Stringer, Comptroller  
Emma Wolfe, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor