



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Testimony before the 2025 City Charter Revision Commission
Staten Island Public Input Session on Government Reform
April 9, 2025

Dear Members of the 2025 Charter Revision Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. My name is Ben Weinberg, and I serve as the Director of Public Policy for Citizens Union. I apologize for not being able to attend in person.

This evening, I will address two key areas of government reform, both expanding on our February testimony: (1) moving city elections to even-numbered years, and (2) establishing a mechanism for the removal of the Mayor for misconduct.

Moving City Elections to Even-Numbered Years

At your previous hearing, I spoke about the benefits of moving city elections to even-numbered years: increased voter participation, reduced turnout disparities, and lower administrative costs. As you consider potential ballot proposals, we'd like to emphasize the public support for this reform.

Consolidating elections reduces voter fatigue by limiting the number of times people are asked to vote, as well as the barrage of ads, mailers, and the need to learn about candidates and races twice a year. Surveys and referenda nationwide confirm that voters support this change.

In June 2023, after the State Legislature passed a bill moving county and town elections to even-numbered years, a Siena College poll found this was the most popular policy passed at the end of that legislative session.¹ According to the statewide survey, New Yorkers found this measure was "good for New York" by a 2-to-1 margin, including a majority of Democrats and a plurality of Republicans and independents. Support was strongest in New York City, with 60% in favor and only 16% opposed.

In 2024, a survey focused solely on New York City voters found nearly 3-to-1 support regardless of age, race and ethnicity, education, or party affiliation. The highest net support was among young voters, with

¹ NYers Oppose Using SUNY Dorms to Temporarily House New Migrants to New York, 54-33%. *Siena College Research Institute*, 28 June 2023, <https://scri.siena.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/SNY-June-2023-Poll-Release-FINAL.pdf>

70% in favor and only 14% opposed. There was no substantial difference in support between Democrats, Republicans, and independents.²

These findings mirror national trends. A nationally representative poll about election timing found that nearly 70 percent of Americans favored holding local elections at the same time as national elections.³

Unsurprisingly, when this issue appears on ballots, it passes overwhelmingly. A UC San Diego review⁴ found that 36 of 37 municipal ballot measures to consolidate elections in the last decade were approved—many by large margins: Los Angeles (2015) with 72% approval, Phoenix (2018) with 72% approval, and Austin (2012 & 2021) with 76% and 66% approval, respectively.⁵ Indeed, this reform have been adopted by legislatures across blue, red, and purple states.

Creating a Mechanism for Mayoral Removal Over Misconduct

The main topic we would like to raise today is our proposal for establishing Mechanism for Removing the New York City Mayor for Misconduct. In the February hearing, we noted the lack of such process presents a critical gap in the City Charter, and makes New York City an outlier among large cities in the U.S.

Citizens Union believes that an honest government requires strong, effective mechanisms to hold elected officials accountable for misconduct, corruption, and abuse of power. History shows that cities and states plagued by corruption reform their laws to prevent future abuse—we believe it's time for New York City to do the same.

We promised to come back to the Commission with a more detailed proposal for a process that would ensure public integrity, avoid partisanship, and prevent prolonged leadership crises.

Today, we released a proposal for a hybrid, locally controlled removal process, which we urge the Commission to consider. The full report on this topic is attached after this testimony, and can be found on the Citizens Union website.

We recommend a locally-controlled, hybrid mechanism for removal that begins with the City Council and ends with voters. First, a supermajority of the City Council would need to vote to recommend charges for removal on grounds related to misconduct. The Council would then hold a 30-day hearing, where the Mayor would have the right to counsel and would be able to present evidence and witnesses. Next, the charges would need to be approved by another supermajority of the Council, and the question would then be sent to voters for final approval in a Special Removal Election. If voters approve the removal, regular succession and special election procedures outlined in the charter would take effect.

² Polling NYC Survey Analysis of 2025 Likely Mayoral Voters on Politics, Crime, Migrants, and Electoral Reform. *Manhattan Institute*, Jesse Arm, 18 April 2024, <https://manhattan.institute/article/polling-nyc-survey-analysis-of-2025-likely-mayoral-voters>

³ Sarah Anzia. 2014. Timing and Turnout: How Off-Cycle Elections Favor Organized Groups. University of Chicago Press (Page 88)

⁴ Big Cities – Tiny Votes? America's Urban Voter Turnout, Zoltan Hajnal and Avi Green (UC San Diego) 2024
<https://yankelovichcenter.ucsd.edu/files/reports/Big-Cities-Tiny-Votes.pdf>

⁵ Citizens Union. December 2022. Policy Report: Moving Municipal Elections to Even-Numbered Years.
https://citizensunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Moving-Municipal-Elections-to-Even-Numbered-Years-Citizens-Union-report_FINAL.pdf

Key elements of the proposed process include:

- **Grounds for removal:** The removal of the Mayor must be based solely on misconduct, not political differences. Therefore, the legal grounds should be well-tailored to preclude abuse; the Mayor could only be removed for either malfeasance, neglect of duty, violation of the oath of office, or a conviction of a felony regarding conduct in office.
- **Voting thresholds:** A mayoral removal process should be deliberately difficult to achieve and be used extremely rarely. And in New York City, with its overwhelmingly Democratic lean, multiple majority thresholds should be required for removal. Under the proposed process, removal would require 70% of the City Council to issue charges, 80% of the Council to recommend removal, and a simple majority of New York City voters to confirm the removal.
- **Due process, transparency, and timeline:** Proceedings would be made public, and the mayor would have robust legal rights, including a right to counsel and the ability to present evidence and call witnesses. The overall removal process would be conducted within a reasonable timeframe to avoid disruption to government, with the entire process, from charges of removal to Special Removal Election, taking no more than 67 days.

This proposal is based on analysis of removal systems across dozens of cities and states, examining their compatibility with New York City's political system. We've laid out why we think other common methods for removing an elected executive—like impeachment and recall—are not suitable for New York City. This hybrid model is intentionally structured to avoid the pitfalls of other removal systems, like petition-driven elections, often exploited by high-spending special interests.

We acknowledge the proposal we are putting forward today is a starting point in a conversation, and we encourage the Charter Revision Commission to consider this issue as you move forward in this process.

Reforming Governor's authority to remove a mayor: Although this is not under the Commission's jurisdiction, we also believe state law should be amended to limit the governor's broad removal powers over mayors. Currently, the governor holds absolute power to remove a mayor for any reason, provided the mayor receives "a copy of the charges and an opportunity to be heard in his defense," This unilateral authority is so ill-defined that it has never been exercised, and even the mere threat of its use raises concerns about undermining the will of voters. We believe reforms to this process should require clear charges related to misconduct, a public hearing, and a chance for the mayor to defend themselves, and time limits. Our report includes more details on this topic.

Support for Open Primaries

Finally, we also want to reiterate our support for opening up the City's closed primary system. The volume of public testimony submitted to the Commission in favor of this reform has been significant - and we thank the commission for its transparency with incoming public input. We believe every New Yorker should have a say in local elections, regardless of party registration.

We thank the Commission of your work and dedication to improving our city charter, and would be happy to answer any questions.