



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Testimony to the 2025 Charter Revision Commission
Staten Island Public Input Session
June 23, 2025

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Grace Rauh, and I am the Executive Director of Citizens Union. This is your final hearing before the release of your report, and it comes just one day before Primary Election Day, during one of the most exciting and competitive municipal elections we've seen in decades.

I'm here to urge you to advance the two election reform proposals you're considering to the ballot – even year elections and open primaries.

Election reform may not be flashy, and its benefits often take time to be fully appreciated. When Early Voting was first implemented, critics focused on how few people used it. Now, more than 340,000 New Yorkers have voted early in this election — more than double the number from the last citywide election — giving people a more convenient option and helping them avoid the expected scorching temperatures on Tuesday.

When Ranked Choice Voting was adopted, some said it wouldn't matter. That it wouldn't change campaign dynamics or voter behavior. But now, six years later, New Yorkers are actively strategizing how to rank their ballots, campaigns are cross-endorsing, and voters will have a greater say in the outcome.

Even our widely respected public matching funds program took decades to become the backbone of our elections. Today, it enables candidates without ties to big money to break fundraising records through small donations from everyday New Yorkers.

The two reforms before you are similarly transformative.

First, opening up our closed primary system would enfranchise over a million voters currently shut out of the process, and likely more, given the rapid growth of unaffiliated

voters, especially among younger New Yorkers. Whether you adopt a top-two or top-four model-Citizens Union would support either-we should no longer exclude this many voters from meaningful participation.

Second, by moving away from the City's voter-depressing off-cycle election calendar onto the higher-turnout, even-year cycle, we'd ensure that the most important elections for city voters take place when turnout is highest. Instead of city politics being an insider's game, we'd draw in a younger, more diverse, and more representative electorate to think on - and vote on - local issues.

Both reforms will take time to implement and show results. And that's a good thing. Democracy takes time. Elections are serious business. That's why we have charter commissions like yours — thoughtful, independent bodies with robust public engagement, research capabilities, and a mandate to think long-term about what's best for New York City.

I urge you to move these two proposals forward. Thank you for your time.