



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

**Testimony before the City Council Committee on Governmental Operations,
State & Federal Legislation
250 Broadway – January 30, 2026**

Preconsidered T2026-0123 (Williams)

**Establishing a one-time commission to review the salaries of elected officials in
New York City and make recommendations regarding those salaries**

Dear Members of the City Council Committee on Governmental Operations,

My name is Ben Weinberg, and I am the Director of Public Policy at Citizens Union. First, I would like to congratulate Council Member Brewer on her appointment as chair of this important committee, as well as the committee members on the first meeting of this term. We look forward to working together to advance an open, honest, and accountable city government that improves the lives of all New Yorkers.

We testified before you a month ago to ask that you pause legislation providing for an immediate increase in elected officials' compensation, and we presented several alternative legislative actions that would allow salary adjustments to proceed through the traditional commission-based review process, given the previous mayor's refusal to appoint one. One of those options was to pass a new law requiring Mayor Zohran Mamdani to convene a one-time compensation commission in 2026.

We thank Council Member Nantasha Williams and Speaker Julie Menin for heeding our request and bringing forward the bill before us today. We were also pleased to see last week's joint statement from the Mayor and the Speaker announcing that a commission will indeed be created.

We support the proposed legislation. Preconsidered T123 requires the mayor to establish a "Commission to Advise on the Compensation Levels of Elected Officials" within 15 days of the law's effective date. The commission's composition, powers, and criteria for salary evaluation mirror those already set forth in Administrative Code § 3-601(a), meaning it would function like the regular Quadrennial Advisory Commission.

We believe this is a wise approach that maintains the integrity of the salary-setting process, increases public confidence, and preserves a half-century of precedent that has served New York City well.

The bill diverges from current law regulating compensation commissions in three respects:

1. Timeline for completion

This bill provides the commission with 60 days to complete its work, rather than the 120-day timeframe currently set in law. This is a reasonable proposed timeframe that is consistent with the timelines allotted to prior advisory commissions. At the recommendation of the most recent commission - the 2015 Quadrennial Advisory Commission - the Council amended the law to extend commission timeframes to 120 days to allow more time for analysis, feedback, and deliberation. That extended timeline remains in effect for future, regular quadrennial advisory commissions.

2. Submission of the final report

The bill requires the commission to submit its final report to both the Council and the mayor, rather than solely to the mayor, as is in current law. This is a common-sense legislative improvement that should apply to all such commissions.

3. Retroactive salary adjustments

The bill requires the commission to recommend retroactive salary adjustments starting from January 1, 2026. As a general principle, we believe salary adjustments should be prospective, and we typically caution against retroactive pay increases. However, given the unusual circumstances, the fact that a decade has passed since the last adjustment, and that any retroactivity would cover only a few months, we support this provision as an appropriate, one-time solution.

The bill could also be amended to expand the criteria evaluated by the commission. At the December hearing on this topic, some council members have expressed interest in linking council member salary evaluations to the salaries of the Council's professional staff.

Importantly, this bill preserves the regular four-year salary review cycle. This is critical, as it allows the City to return to a predictable process and avoid the disruptions that were all too common over the past two decades. A Quadrennial Advisory Commission must be established again in January 2028 if we are to ensure this tradition continues.

However, retaining the existing framework also preserves the loophole that allowed the previous three mayors to avoid appointing commissions on time. There is no guarantee that a future mayor – or even this mayor in 2028 – will not do the same.

We therefore strongly urge the Council to amend this bill, or introduce companion legislation, to authorize another citywide elected official—such as the City Comptroller—to appoint a Quadrennial Advisory Commission if the mayor fails to do so by January 15 of the required year under Administrative Code § 3-601(a). Advancing such legislation now, while the public still

remembers Mayor Adams's failure to comply with the law and while this issue is already under active consideration with the support of good government groups, is more feasible and politically reasonable than waiting until the next crisis. Doing so would save both elected officials and advocates significant time in the future.

Before concluding, I want to reiterate Citizens Union's longstanding position that elected officials should be well compensated. Competitive salaries attract strong candidates, enable individuals who are not independently wealthy to pursue public service, reduce incentives for corruption, and reflect the importance of serving the public. We have consistently supported fair pay for elected officials, while also insisting on integrity, accountability, and transparency in the process.

We thank you for advancing this bill and look forward to seeing the compensation commission begin its work.