



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Testimony before the City Council Committee on Oversight and Investigations
City Hall – March 18, 2026

Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

Good afternoon, members of the New York City Council Committee on Oversight and Investigations. My name is Ben Weinberg, and I am the Director of Public Policy at Citizens Union. Citizens Union is a nonpartisan good government group working to ensure honest and accountable government, fair and open elections, and a civically engaged public.

We congratulate Council Member Shekar Krishnan on his appointment as chair of this important committee and appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the preliminary budget for Fiscal Year 2027.

We urge the Council to provide increased funding in the FY2027 budget for the city's ethics and anti-corruption watchdogs beyond the levels proposed in the mayor's preliminary budget. This includes both the Department of Investigation (DOI), which is the subject of today's hearing, and the Conflicts of Interest Board (COIB), which does not receive a dedicated budget oversight hearing.

Both DOI and COIB experienced budget reductions, funding freezes, and significant attrition under the previous administration. Yet Mayor Mamadni's preliminary budget keeps their funding largely flat compared with the most recent financial plan. The need to ensure a clean and ethical government, however, has not remained flat. If anything, it has grown in the wake of the ethical misconduct that marked the previous administration. As the size and complexity of city government—and its budget—continue to increase, so too must the capacity of the agencies responsible for safeguarding its integrity.

Recent years have demonstrated why these agencies must be adequately resourced to function as truly independent watchdogs. As DOI and COIB pursued matters involving City Hall officials, they were affected by Office of Management and Budget refusals to authorize the filling of vacancies. The former DOI commissioner suggested that requests for support received limited response as investigations involving City Hall became public.¹

A charter commission appointed by the City Council last year recognized these challenges and the need to strengthen the capacity of both agencies, including addressing chronic staffing reductions and

¹ Greg Smith, THE CITY, 01/22/2026. Adams Hired Her. She Probed Him. Mamdani Let Her Leave <https://www.thecity.nyc/2026/01/22/jocelyn-strauber-doi-department-investigation-exit-interview-eric-adams/>

ensuring sufficient funding for non-salary expenses. The Commission to Strengthen Local Democracy recommended in its final report that the budgets of DOI and COIB be increased and protected, setting minimum funding levels of 0.06 percent and 0.0035 percent of the city's total budget, respectively.

The agencies' FY2027 budget requests are more modest than those recommended levels, and we urge the Council to include them in its budget response.

We support DOI's request for 17 new full-time positions to assist with investigations, background checks, and operations. These additions would bring DOI to a total of 326 full-time employees—still significantly below the 408 positions in FY 2020. DOI also requires additional OTPS funding to keep pace with technological developments. In addition, a recent Council resolution directing DOI to investigate what the city knew about Ground Zero toxins following the September 11 attacks will likely require further resources (Reso. 560-2024).

At the same time, DOI's workload has increased significantly. The number of complaints received, arrests made, and cases referred for prosecution has risen in recent years, even as staffing levels have declined. This strain is reflected in the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report metrics: the time required to complete investigations increased from an average of 201 days in FY2023 to 251 days in FY2025, and to 325 days in the first four months of FY2026; the average time to complete a background investigation increased to 117 days in the first four months of this fiscal year, compared to 109-day average during the first four months of FY2025.

We also support restoring COIB's staffing levels. In January 2022, COIB had a staff of 26; today it has only 20, with approval to fill two vacancies that would bring the total to 22. The mayor's proposed budget keeps funding flat at \$2.86 million, effectively returning COIB to the same budget level it had prior to the Adams administration, despite substantial growth in the city's overall budget and the effects of inflation. The widening gap between the scale of city government and the small agency responsible for enforcing its ethics laws poses a real risk to maintaining a clean and honest government.

COIB should receive sufficient funding to restore its staffing to 26 positions. This would allow the Board to better support the city workforce by strengthening its advice, education, and legal units. Adequate funding is also necessary to retain experienced staff. In an agency of COIB's size, retention is critical to preserving institutional knowledge and maintaining operational integrity.

Looking ahead, we also strongly support establishing charter-protected minimum funding levels for both DOI and COIB to help ensure their independence and stability over time. We urge the Council to continue advancing the reforms proposed by its own Charter Revision Commission. These thoughtful measures should be placed on the ballot, either by the Commission to Strengthen Local Democracy or as part of any future mayoral Charter Revision Commission.

Investing in oversight agencies is an investment in a more efficient and effective city government. DOI investigations alone resulted in more than \$6 million in financial recoveries last year and helped generate millions more in savings through oversight of contracts, vendors, and procurement processes. COIB trains tens of thousands of city employees each year, helping ensure that those entrusted with public resources do not misuse their authority.

For these reasons, we urge the City Council to ensure that DOI and COIB receive the resources necessary to effectively carry out their critical oversight responsibilities.