



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Written Testimony to the 2026 New York City Quadrennial Advisory Commission
Public Hearing - 120 Broadway
May 21, 2026

Dear Commissioners Carl Weisbrod, Lillian Barrios-Paoli, and Richard Angelo:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Ben Weinberg, and I am the Director of Public Policy at Citizens Union, a nonpartisan good government group working for honest and accountable government and open and fair elections for nearly 130 years.

We have provided testimony and input to many previous pay commissions at both the city and state level, and several of our reform recommendations — including ending outside income, lulus, and part-time positions — were adopted through prior compensation review processes.

We also advocated for this specific commission to be formed after council members sought to bypass the commission process late last year, and we are pleased that the integrity of the compensation review process has been preserved. We therefore ask that you approach this responsibility with the independence, thoughtfulness, and transparency it deserves.

This testimony responds to several of your guiding questions and offers additional recommendations.

A summary of our recommendations:

1. Elected officials' salaries should be increased to reflect cost-of-living growth and attract strong candidates, promote integrity, and enable people from all backgrounds to serve.
2. Salary adjustments should occur in 2026 as a one-time exception to the preferable prospective pay increase.
3. Another citywide elected official should be allowed to appoint a Quadrennial Advisory Commission if the mayor fails to do so.
4. Commission cycle should be restored to the third year of a four-year term.
5. Commission timeline should be restored to 120 days.
6. Commission's public hearing mandate and transparency measures should be codified.
7. The Council should explain departures from the Commission's pay recommendations.
8. Elected officials' financial disclosure statements should be in an open-data format.

Should elected officials' salaries be increased?

Yes. Given the increase in the cost of living in New York over the past decade, as well as salary adjustments for city government employees, we believe the salaries of elected officials in New York should be increased.

Citizens Union's longstanding position is 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 public service. New salary levels should reflect those goals.

Have the roles of any NYC elected officials changed significantly since the 2015 Commission?

We do not believe they have. The authority and powers of elected officials under the City Charter and state law have not substantially changed over the past decade, and only modest adjustments to appointment powers for boards and commissions have been enacted.

Last year, voters approved several charter amendments that shifted some authority over land use decisions from council members to city agencies — including the City Planning Commission and the Board of Standards and Appeals — as well as to borough presidents. It is not yet clear how these changes will affect council members' responsibilities in practice, though a future pay commission may wish to examine the issue further. Borough presidents' offices already maintain substantial staff capacity dedicated to land use matters.

Some quantitative changes have occurred. An individual council member now represents more people than they did ten years ago and therefore receives more constituent requests. The modern news cycle requires more frequent and immediate public engagement across multiple communications platforms. The Council introduces more bills with every term. However, none of these developments constitute a qualitative change in the role itself, and many could be addressed through additional staffing support, which may be done legislatively or through the budget process.

Although the roles themselves have not fundamentally changed, the cost of living in New York has risen substantially since 2015. We therefore recommend that the Commission benchmark new salary levels against CPI growth and comparable compensation for other elected officials and senior positions in the public and private sector.

On what date should proposed changes in compensation levels take effect?

Citizens Union has long supported making salary adjustments prospective so that elected officials cannot immediately benefit from pay increases they approve themselves. The U.S. and New York Constitutions generally require legislative salary increases to take effect in the next term, after an election, so voters can hold officials accountable for those decisions. The City Charter addresses a similar concern by prohibiting salary increases during the lame-duck period after an election.

To strengthen this principle, the Council moved the commission process to the third year of the term in 2016 ([LL 22/2016](#)) to “make it more likely” that any recommendations would take effect in the following term, after an election.

The current circumstances are unusual, however. The last two commissions — in 2020 and 2024 — were never appointed by the mayor, producing a decade-long freeze. Of the 64 incumbent elected officials who would be affected by a salary adjustment, five were first elected before 2020 and an additional 40 were first elected before 2024. Those officials entered office without ever seeing a compensation review during their tenure, a fundamentally different situation from the normal prospectivity concern, where officials raise their own pay mid-term. Given this context, we support a one-time increase taking effect in 2026.

We do, however, oppose a recent change in the law that shifted the commission cycle from the third year of a term to the first year ([LL 81/2026](#)). While that change was enacted to address the immediate problem — the ten-year salary freeze — those temporary circumstances should not have been permanently codified. Shifting the cycle to the first year undermines the principle that compensation decisions should be prospective and considered well in advance. It also creates a significant practical and political risk: a newly inaugurated mayor may lack the time, capacity, or political incentive to appoint a commission within 15 days of taking office, as would be required in January 2030. The law should be amended to restore the prior cycle.

Should there be modifications or conditions to future compensation review processes?

Yes, any legislation increasing compensation should also include reforms to strengthen the review process itself.

Provide another citywide elected official with backstop appointment authority

Mayors have repeatedly ignored the mandate to appoint a compensation commission every four years — including Mayor Bloomberg in 2003 and 2011, Mayor de Blasio in 2020, and Mayor Adams in 2024. In fact, over the past quarter century, elected officials’ salaries have been reviewed and increased only twice. If this pattern continues, council members will eventually bypass the advisory process altogether and raise their own salaries.

There is currently no enforcement mechanism if the mayor refuses to comply, short of litigation — an unlikely remedy given the politics involved. The Council should therefore amend the Administrative Code 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).

Without reforming the commission appointment mechanism, there is no guarantee future mayors will comply with the current law. Advancing this legislation now, while the issue is under active consideration, is more feasible politically than waiting until another mayor again declines to act.

Restore the prior commission cycle and review period.

The commission cycle should revert to the third year of the term, instead of the new first-year cycle, for the reasons stated above. That means the next Quadrennial Advisory Commission

would be established in January 2028. Even if that commission ultimately recommends no or only modest adjustments, given the short time passed from the upcoming adjustment, restoring a predictable review process would itself benefit the city.

The review period should also be restored to 120 days. LL 81/2026 reduced the window to 75 days, despite the 2015 Commission's recommendation that it be extended to allow adequate time for analysis, public feedback, and deliberation.

Codify transparency requirements.

Transparency measures should be written into the Administrative Code: the commission should be required to hold public hearings (current law provides only that it "may" do so) and to publicly release the underlying data, materials, and testimony it relies upon.

Should other conditions be recommended for new compensation levels?

Yes. We support two recommendations advanced by Reinvent Albany in their testimony.

First, the City Council should be required to provide a written explanation for any changes it makes to the Commission's recommendations before holding hearings on implementing legislation. This requirement would create a meaningful record of the Council's reasoning and deter self-interested departures from the Commission's independent judgment.

Second, elected officials' financial disclosure statements should be published in an open-data format. Structured, machine-readable disclosure data would substantially improve public accountability by enabling journalists, researchers, and watchdog groups to analyze conflicts of interest at scale — rather than reviewing individual PDF filings.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. We appreciate the Commission's work on this important issue and would be happy to provide any additional information or clarification that may be helpful to your deliberations.

Recent writings and advocacy on elected officials' compensation from Citizens Union:

- January 2026: [Citizens Union Commends City Council for Advancing Compensation Review Through Independent Commission, Says Bill Leaves Mayoral Appointment Loophole Unresolved](#)
- January 2026: [Testimony in Support of Council Legislation Establishing a One-time Compensation Commission](#)
- December 2025: [Watchdog Groups Oppose Rushed Council Pay Hike: Electeds Should Receive Fair Raise Through Outside Review Process](#)
- December 2025: [Testimony to the City Council: Legislation to Increase Compensation Levels for New York City Elected Officials](#)
- December 2025: [Explainer: How to Increase Elected Officials' Salaries in New York City](#)