



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

**Testimony before the City Council Committee on Governmental Operations,
State & Federal Legislation**

**Preconsidered T2026-2196 (Williams): Compensation of the mayor, public
advocate, members of the city council, borough presidents, comptroller, and
district attorneys**

250 Broadway – July 7, 2026

Good morning, Council Members. My name is Grace Rauh, and I am the Executive Director of Citizens Union, a nonpartisan good government group that has worked to advance honest and accountable government and open and fair elections in New York for nearly 130 years.

We supported the establishment of the 2026 Quadrennial Advisory Commission through both advocacy and testimony because we believe periodic reviews of elected officials' compensation are essential to good government, and because the ten-year salary freeze was unsustainable.

We thank the Council for incorporating nearly all of the Commission's recommendations – including most of our recommendations to the Commission – into the proposed bill, Preconsidered T2026-2196, and for bringing it to a public hearing today.

We support the bill but are concerned about the proposed automatic inflation-adjusted salary increases as a backstop when a commission is not convened. This testimony details our views on each of the bill's elements.

Increase all elected officials' salaries by 18.2%

SUPPORT

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 signal the importance of public service. The proposed increase reflects those goals, and we support it.

Restore the Quadrennial Advisory Commission cycle to the third year of the term, with the next commission to be established in 2028 (Admin Code § 3-601(a))

SUPPORT. *Citizens Union recommended this reform to the Quadrennial Commission.*

To ensure a Quadrennial Advisory Commission is established in 2026 – the first time in more than ten years - the Council moved the legal commission cycle to the first year of a mayoral term. But keeping that cycle creates a practical and political risk for future commissions, since a newly inaugurated mayor may lack the time, capacity, or political incentive to initiate a review of elected officials' salaries within 15 days of taking office.

Shifting the cycle back to the third year of the term, as the Commission recommended, makes it more likely that commissions will be established and reinforces the principle that compensation changes should be prospective.

Codify prospective salary recommendations (Admin Code § 3-601(b))

SUPPORT. *Citizens Union recommended this reform to the Quadrennial Commission.*

The proposed bill adopts the Commission's recommendation that future salary adjustments take effect during the first year of the next term of office. Citizens Union has long supported prospective salary adjustments so that elected officials cannot immediately benefit from raises they approve themselves, consistent with similar principles found in the U.S. and New York State Constitutions.

Extend the Commission's timeframe from 75 to 120 days (Admin code § 3-601(c))

SUPPORT. *Citizens Union recommended this reform to the Quadrennial Commission.*

Both the 2015 and 2026 Quadrennial Advisory Commissions concluded that the current 75-day review period is too short and recommended extending it. The Commission's work requires reviewing extensive data, evaluating qualitative aspects of each elected office, securing administrative support from city agencies or outside organizations, and seeking meaningful public input and deliberation. Commissioners typically maintain other professional responsibilities while serving. Extending the review period to 120 days would provide adequate time for analysis, public engagement, and deliberation, resulting in better-informed recommendations.

Establish automatic inflation-adjusted salary increases if no Commission is convened

(Admin code § 3-601(i))

OPPOSE

Citizens Union does not recommend adopting the backstop mechanism proposed by the Commission and incorporated into this bill - an automatic inflation-adjusted salary increase, capped at 8.25 percent every four years, taking effect on the first year or a mayor's terms if no Commission was convened in the previous four years.

We fully support establishing a mechanism that ensures that Quadrennial Advisory Commissions are convened in a timely manner and prevents another decade-long salary freeze. We have repeatedly called for such reform before the Council, the Commission, in the press, and through other forms of advocacy.¹

However, we are concerned that the proposed approach would effectively eliminate the incentive to convene quadrennial advisory commissions in the future.

Although Commission said its proposal is not intended to become an automatic, inflation-based cost-of-living adjustment like those used in Chicago and Philadelphia,² in practice, the result may be the same. Mayors and City Councils may prefer to avoid the political sensitivity of convening a pay commission and voting on compensation increases and instead allow the automatic CPI adjustment to take effect.

But a Commission-based review process is preferable to an automatic adjustment for two principled reasons.

First, salary reviews involve qualitative considerations that cannot be captured through an inflation adjustment alone. These include whether the responsibilities of an office have changed over time (for example, the 2015 Commission concluded that City Council Members should be treated as full-time officials); whether certain offices warrant different adjustments than others (every prior commission recommended different increases for different offices); how salaries compare with analogous public positions (e.g.

¹ See January 30 2026 testimony on legislation establishing a one-time compensation commission <https://citizensunion.org/document/2026-01-30/testimony-in-support-of-council-legislation-establishing-a-one-time-compensation-commission/>; March 10, 2026 statement - Citizens Union Commends City Council for Advancing Compensation Review Through Independent Commission, Says Bill Leaves Mayoral Appointment Loophole Unresolved https://citizensunion.org/document/2026-03-10/citizens-union-commends-city-council-for-advancing-compensation-review-through-independent-commission-says-bill-leaves-mayoral-appointment-loophole-unresolved; May 21, 2026 testimony to the 2026 Quadrennial Advisory Commission <https://citizensunion.org/document/2026-05-21/testimony-to-the-2026-new-york-city-quadrennial-advisory-commission>

² See footnote 54, page 24, The 2026 Quadrennial Advisory Commission Final Report https://www.nyc.gov/assets/quadrennial/downloads/pdf/Quadrennial_Commission_Report_21.pdf

district attorneys and the Corporation Counsel; City Comptroller and commissioners of large agencies); the overall economic and fiscal climate and the public perception (For example, the 2020 New York State Commission on Legislative, Judicial, and Executive Compensation recommended no salary increases because of the COVID-19 pandemic); and the public perception of a task hike.

These considerations help explain why **no public servant in New York City or New York State receive guaranteed automatic salary increases.**

Second, pay commissions serve as vehicles for broader institutional reform, not merely salary recommendations. The 2015 Commission's recommendations resulted in the ban on outside earned income, the elimination of Council "lulus," and other significant reforms. Commissions have also advanced recommendations related to transparency and accountability. Eliminating the incentive to convene commissions would diminish an important mechanism for improving government.

Finally, as drafted, **the bill appears to provide that the automatic salary adjustment would take effect even if a Quadrennial Advisory Commission were convened.** If a Commission concluded that no salary increase was warranted or if the Council passed a law adjusting salaries for some offices but not others – the CPI salary increase would still go into effect in the first year of the term. This may be a drafting error. The triggering event should be the failure to convene a Commission within the previous four years, not the absence of a local law adjusting salaries during that period.³

We recommend amending the bill 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 the statutory deadline.⁴ This would reduce the likelihood that a

³ To make the commission's appointment the trigger to the automatic salary adjustment, proposed § 3-601(i) should be amended to read as follows:

i. 1. If, on the January 1 of any year following the election of a mayor pursuant to section 4 of the charter, **no Quadrennial advisory commission has been appointed pursuant to this section during the previous 4 calendar years**, the salaries of one or more of the offices of mayor, public advocate, comptroller, borough president, council member, or district attorney of the counties of New York, Bronx, Kings, Queens, and Richmond **have not been amended by local law during the previous 4 calendar years, the salaries of any such offices that have not been amended** shall be adjusted by the total change from the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers for New York-Newark-Jersey City published by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics 4 years prior to the most recent such index and the most recent such index, or increased by 8.25 percent, whichever is lower.

⁴ The 2026 Quadrennial Advisory Commission said that giving another official the power to appoint a commission would likely require approval through a referendum. That is inaccurate. This power pertains to creating an advisory commission and it is codified in the Administrative Code, not the City Charter.

commission is not convened for political reasons while allowing another citywide official with perspective into the City's fiscal health to ensure that the process moves forward.

To strengthen accountability around the mayor's decision, **the mayor should also be required to provide a written explanation whenever a Commission is not convened** by the required deadline.

Finally, we support two additional recommendations from the Commission's final report that are not included in this bill:

1. The law should require the City Council to provide a written explanation whenever it modifies or declines to adopt the recommendations of this or future Quadrennial Advisory Commissions. This would complement a similar requirement for the mayor to explain any failure to convene a Commission.
2. The Council should consider codifying the prohibition on Council Member "lulus," since the practice remains authorized under Charter § 26(b), even though it has long since been abandoned.