



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.

Common Cause New York

Written Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Governmental Operations, State & Federal Legislation
January 30, 2026
Re: Local Law Establishing a One-Time Commission on Elected Officials' Compensation, **INT.**
No: T2026-0123

Chair Brewer and Member of the Committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the proposed local law to establish a one-time independent commission to review the salaries of elected officials in New York City.

My name is Susan Lerner, and I am the Executive Director at Common Cause New York, a nonpartisan organization dedicated to government accountability, transparency, and ethical governance. My organization previously testified before this Committee in December regarding City Council compensation, and I appreciate the opportunity to continue that conversation.

CCNY's Core Position: Process, Not Pay

Common Cause New York supports fair and reasonable compensation for public officials. We supported the last salary increase enacted in 2016, and we continue to support periodic, independent review of compensation levels- particularly given that no such review has occurred in nearly a decade.

Our concern has consistently been about procedural fairness, rather than compensation.

For more than fifty years, New York City has had an established legal framework requiring the appointment of a quadrennial compensation commission. That system was designed to ensure independence, transparency, and public trust by separating compensation decisions from those who directly benefit from them.

The problem before the City today is not that this framework is inadequate- it is that it has not been enforced.

Clarification Regarding Retroactive Pay

In light of public discussion since the December hearing, Common Cause New York wishes to state our position clearly: we do not support retroactive pay increases for elected officials.

Retroactive compensation pays officials for time already served without voter awareness or independent review. When combined with salary self-adjustment, retroactivity creates avoidable perceptions of self-dealing and undermines public confidence in the integrity of the process.

Even reasonable compensation adjustments lose legitimacy when they are retroactive or lack independent evaluation. Any changes to compensation should be prospective and grounded in an independent, transparent review process.

Concerns with the One-Time Commission Proposal

The legislation under consideration reflects understandable frustration with years of inaction. However, Common Cause New York is concerned that establishing a one-time, freestanding commission outside of the quadrennial framework does not resolve the underlying governance failure. Specifically, our concerns are the following:

- The proposal does not address why the existing legal requirement was ignored.
- It does not create enforceable consequences if a mayor again fails to act.
- It risks creating duplicative or competing commission processes.
- It encourages new duplicative laws instead of enforcing existing ones.

Responding to noncompliance by passing additional, one-off legislation leaves the structural problem unresolved.

The Proper Fix: Enforceability of the Quadrennial Framework

From a good-government perspective, the appropriate response is to close the enforcement gap in the existing system. If the quadrennial commission is not appointed by a required deadline, there should be a clear, automatic fallback mechanism allowing another citywide actor, such as the Council, to convene the commission without resorting to litigation. Such an approach would:

- Reinforce rather than undermine existing law
- Prevent future breakdowns in the review process
- Eliminate the need for ad hoc legislative fixes
- Strengthen public trust in compensation decisions

Common Cause New York supports the goal of convening a compensation commission now, but believes the Council's efforts would be better directed toward making the quadrennial framework self-executing rather than substituting a one-time solution.

Conclusion

Durable governance depends on enforcing the systems already in place- not creating new ones when those systems are ignored. Compensation decisions for elected officials should be made through independent, enforceable processes that do not rely on goodwill or political alignment. We urge the Council to focus on fixing the enforceability of the quadrennial compensation framework to ensure this situation does not recur.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Lerner
Executive Director
Common Cause New York
slerner@commoncause.org



Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations, State & Federal Legislation

*Re: Mayor and Council doing the right thing by creating compensation commission;
Any bills creating compensation commissions should require a public hearing*

January 30, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the compensation of New York City elected officials, and on [Intro 123](#). We are generally supportive of salary increases for elected and appointed government officials because they ensure that the important job of serving in government is appealing to a broad spectrum of qualified candidates. However, as we and our colleagues [urged you on December 16, 2025](#), salary increases should only be done after recommendations are made from an outside compensation commission.

We appreciate that the Council announced it was [moving away from raising salaries unilaterally](#), even prior to [Mayor Mamdani announcing on January 23, 2026](#) that he would be convening the Quadrennial Commission this year. We are also encouraged that the Mayor said that the commission would be holding public hearings.

On the topic of today's hearing, Intro 123 would require the Mayor to appoint a three-member commission. The commission's duties and responsibilities are nearly identical to the Quadrennial Compensation Commission under § 3-601 of the Administrative Code. However, there are a few notable changes:

- The Mayor must appoint the commission within 15 days of the bill becoming law.
- The commission has 60 days, rather than 120, to submit a report.
- The report is sent directly to both the Mayor and Council – there is no 30-day period for the Mayor to review the report and send it to the Council with a recommendation for approval, disapproval, or modification.

Given that Intro 123 shortens the timeframe for consideration by 90 days, limiting public review, we believe that a public hearing should be mandatory – not optional. Should this bill be passed, it should be amended to require the commission to hold a public hearing before it makes its recommendations, or on preliminary recommendations before they are finalized.

Lastly, as we recommended in our [written testimony from December 16, 2025](#), we also continue to support a quadrennial commission that is more independent, with:

- Two appointments from the Mayor;
- One from the Public Advocate;

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- One from the Comptroller;
- One from the Speaker of the City Council; and
- The chair should be selected by the commission, not the Mayor.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions, please email Rachael Fauss, Senior Policy Advisor, at rachael@reinventalbany.org.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: BPN Wipinsky

Address: _____

I represent: Citizens Union

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/31

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SUSAN LERENSTEIN

Address: #48 Wall St.

I represent: Common Cause NY

Address: _____

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