

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL
OPERATIONS, STATE & FEDERAL
LEGISLATION

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January 30, 2026
Start: 10:10 a.m.
Recess: 10:35 a.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway-8th Fl. Hearing Rm. 2

B E F O R E: Gale A. Brewer
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Eric Dinowitz
Oswald J. Feliz
Ty Hankerson
Frank Morano
Althea V. Stevens
Susan Zhuang

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and
4 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
5 the Committee on Governmental Operations, State and
6 Federal Legislation. At this time, we would like to
7 remind everyone to silence all electronic devices.
8 Also, at this point going forward, no one is to
9 approach the dais, no one. Ready to begin.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much,
11 Sergeant. So, I am Gale Brewer, Chair of the
12 Committee on Government Operations, State and Federal
13 Legislation, and I'm looking forward to chairing this
14 committee. I must admit, I did it before in 2010 to
15 2013 when I was in the City Council previously.
16 Thank you for joining us. I'd like to thank my
17 colleagues, particularly Council Member Morano who is
18 on Zoom. So, today, we will be hearing from Deputy
19 Speaker Williams' bill, Introduction 502,
20 establishing a one-time commission to review the
21 salaries of elected officials in New York City and
22 make recommendations regarding those salaries.
23 Elected official pay is set by Local Law, but under
24 our City Administrative Code, the mayor, any mayor is
25 required to appoint a commission to review the

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3 compensation levels of elected officials every four
4 years and make recommendations to the Council.

5 Ostensibly, they're supposed to do that in their
6 third year of their term. With the exception of the

7 District Attorneys, the last time city elected

8 officials received a raise was in 2016. Mayor de

9 Blasio failed to impanel the required commission in

10 2020, and Mayor Adams subsequently declined to

11 convene one in 2024. This 10-year gap is the longest

12 the city officials have gone without a raise in the

13 40 years since the quadrennial commission framework

14 has been in place. Over that time, salaries of New

15 York elected officials have failed to keep pace with

16 inflation and with the salaries of elected officials

17 across the country. Legislators in Los Angeles-- I

18 know there are nine Council Members in LA. In

19 Chicago, where there are 51-- I don't know what

20 Philadelphia number is, but all of them make more

21 than we do in New York. And as we know, all of these

22 cities have much smaller budgets and much smaller

23 workforces. These stagnant wages not only affect

24 elected officials, while some top executives can

25 receive salaries higher than the elected officials

they serve for non-executive roles and elected

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1 official salary serves as a cap on the salaries of
2 those employees. These salary caps can keep the city
3 from offering competitive wages which can keep us
4 from being able to attract the best and brightest to
5 crucial city jobs, although, it's often the best and
6 the brightest, I have to say. Low salaries for
7 elected officials can also negatively influence who
8 is able to run for office. Although, nobody seems to
9 worry about that. People run, I will say. Being an
10 elected official in New York City is a challenging
11 and demanding 24/7 job. I certainly know that. And
12 elected officials should be able to support
13 themselves and their families on this salary,
14 regardless of their economic status prior to running.
15 If salaries are too low, then elected officials risk
16 being accessible only to wealthy individuals. That's
17 true. I think we should look at the Senate. It's
18 quite full of wealthy individuals-- U.S. Senate. The
19 legislation that we are hearing today, Intro 502,
20 requires the Mayor to convene a one-time three-person
21 commission to review the salaries of the Mayor, the
22 Public Advocate, the Borough Presidents, Council
23 Members, and the District Attorneys. The commission
24 would have 60 days to make their recommendations to
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3 the Mayor and the Council. The Mayor would be able
4 to send his approval, disapproval, or modifications,
5 and the Council would have discretion to review and
6 accept, reject, or modify the commission's
7 recommendation prior to passing any legislation,
8 altering salaries for the city's elected officials.
9 Before I conclude, I would like to thank the
10 following Council staff for their work on this
11 hearing. From the Government Ops Committee staff,
12 Johari Frasier [sp?], who's fabulous, Erica Cohen,
13 who's fabulous, Attia Mohammad [sp?] who's also
14 fabulous from Finance. From my staff, the wonderful
15 Sam Goldsmith and everyone in the background to make
16 this hearing run smoothly. I don't think any other
17 Council Members have joined us. As I indicated we
18 certainly have Council Member Morano on the Zoom.
19 So, now I will ask-- I believe because we don't have
20 anybody here from the administration, so we don't
21 need to ask anybody to be sworn in. So, I open the
22 hearing for public testimony. I remind members of
23 the public that this is a government proceeding and
24 that decorum shall be observed. As such, members of
25 the public shall remain silent at all times. The
witness table is reserved for people who wish to

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3 testify. No video recording. No photography.

4 Members of the public may not present audio or video
5 recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts
6 to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the record.

7 I think those who are here know you need to fill out
8 an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms. And

9 when recognized, you have two minutes to speak on the

10 topic, although we can ask you a question so you can

11 speak longer. Establishing a one-time commission to

12 review the salaries of elected officials and make

13 recommendations these salaries, that's what is the

14 topic today. If you have a written statement or

15 additional written testimony you wish to submit,

16 please provide a copy to the Sergeant. You can also

17 send in via email written testimony to

18 testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of the

19 close of this hearing. audio and video will not be

20 accepted. And now, those who are here and want to be

21 called, we will call the witnesses for this

22 particular panel. And I want to call the wonderful

23 Ben Weinberg from Citizens Union. Thank you. You

24 just broke all the laws. Thank you.

25 BEN WEINBERG: Good morning, Chair Brewer

and Council Member Morano on Zoom. My name is Ben

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3 Weinberg. I'm the Director of Public Policy at
4 Citizens Union. First, I want to congratulate
5 Council Member Brewer on her appointment as Chair for
6 this important committee. This week on Contracts,
7 Council Member Restler said I was the top one
8 appearance at the Gov Ops Committee last term. So,
9 I'm sorry to say you'll see more of me in the next
10 few years.

11 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Had to do it, but,
12 you know, Mr. Restler says a lot of funny things.

13 BEN WEINBERG: He does. He does. That's
14 right. We testified before you a month ago to ask
15 you to pause legislation providing for an immediate
16 increase in elected official compensation. In that
17 hearing, we presented several alternative legislative
18 actions that would allow for salary adjustments to
19 proceed through the traditional commission-based
20 review process, given that, as you mentioned, the
21 previous mayor refused to appoint one. One of those
22 options was to pass a new law requiring Zohran
23 Mamdani, Mayor Zohran Mamdani to convene a one-time
24 compensation commission in 2026. So, we're here to
25 thank Council Member Williams, Chair Brewer and
Speaker Menin for heeding our request in bringing

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1 forward this bill. We are also pleased-- or we were
2 pleased to see last week's joint announcement from
3 the Mayor and the Speaker announcing that the
4 commission will indeed be created. We support this
5 proposed legislation. It would establish a
6 commission within 15 days of the law's effective
7 date. The commission's composition, powers, and
8 criteria and for salary evaluation basically mirror
9 those in the current law in the Admin Code. So, that
10 means it would function essentially just like a
11 regular quadrennial compensation commission, advisory
12 commission. We believe this is a wise approach. It
13 maintains the integrity of the salary-setting
14 process, increase public confidence and preserves
15 half-century of precedent. The bill does diverge
16 from current law, the law that regulates the
17 compensation commission in three minor aspects, if
18 you don't mind me running through them. First of
19 all, the timeline for completion. So, this bill
20 would provide the commission with 60 days to complete
21 its work rather than the 120 days that are currently
22 set in law. We believe this is a reasonable
23 timeframe. In fact, all commissions had 60 days.
24 After the last commission 2015 convened, it
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1 recommended that the timeline be extended for 120
2 days, and that's what that council has done. We've
3 extended the timeline, and that extended timeline is
4 still in effect for future advisory commissions.
5 This proposed bill also proposes that the final
6 reports of the commission will be sent to both the
7 Council and the Mayor rather than just the Mayor.
8 That obviously makes sense and actually should apply
9 to all commissions. Lastly, it requires the
10 commission to recommend retroactive salary
11 adjustment, meaning it will start from January 1st.
12 As a general principle, we believe salary adjustment
13 should be prospective, and we typically caution
14 against retroactive pay increases, but given these
15 unusual circumstances, the fact that a decade has
16 passed since the last adjustment, and that the
17 retroactivity will only cover a few months, we
18 support this as an appropriate one-time solution. We
19 should note either criteria could be set at the
20 December hearing. Some Council Members, I believe
21 including you, Chair, proposed that Council Member
22 salary evaluation will be somehow linked to their
23 council staff salaries. So, that's another way to
24 go. But importantly, this bill preserves the regular
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1 four-year salary review cycle, and we think this is
2 critical because it allows the city to return to a
3 predictable process and avoid the disruptions we've
4 seen in the past. An advisory commission has to be
5 established in 2028 in our opinion. January 2028 is
6 really the next time an advisory commission should
7 under the law be established, and we want to make
8 sure that tradition continues even if that commission
9 would be established and say, you know-- even if a
10 commission is established and says there's no reason
11 for a salary increase. However, and this is an
12 important point we want to make, retaining the
13 existing framework also preserves the same loophole
14 that allowed us-- that got us so far, right? It
15 allowed the past three mayors to avoid appointing a
16 commission at time. There's really no guarantee that
17 a future mayor or even Mayor Mamdani in 2028 will not
18 do the same, just ignore the law. And we know that
19 lawsuits on these issues are politically tricky. So,
20 we therefore strongly urge the Council to either
21 amend this bill or introduce another bill that will
22 be passed alongside it to authorize another citywide
23 elected official, for example, the Comptroller, to
24 appoint an advisory commission if the Mayor fails to
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3 do so by the January 15 of the required year under
4 the law. We think if you-- advancing that
5 legislation now when, you know, the public still
6 remembers Mayor Adams' failure to comply with the
7 law. This issue is still under active consideration.
8 You have the support of groups like us. That's more
9 feasibly and more less politically reasonable than
10 waiting for the next crisis, and that will save both
11 elected officials and us [inaudible] significant time
12 in the future. Before concluding, I just want to
13 reiterate our long-standing position that elected
14 officials should be well compensated. Competitive
15 salaries attract strong candidates, enable
16 individuals who are not independently wealthy to
17 pursue public service, reduce incentives for
18 corruption, and reflect the importance of serving the
19 public. And we have consistently supported the fair
20 pay for elected officials while also insisting on
21 integrity, accountability, and transparency in the
22 process. We thank you for advancing this bill, and
23 we look forward to seeing the compensation commission
24 begin its work. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Thank you very much.

25 Council Member Feliz is also on Zoom. So, Susan

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2 Lerner, do you want to join us up here, and then we
3 can ask questions to both of you, if that's okay with
4 you?

5 BEN WEINBERG: Of course.

6 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go ahead with your
7 testimony.

8 SUSAN LERNER: Thank you. And I
9 apologize for being delayed. I-- we at Common Cause
10 New York, as Citizens Union and our colleagues at
11 Reinvent, have been strong advocates for fair pay for
12 elected officials, and that's why we were so active
13 in 2016 to be sure that the last pay raise was
14 adequate and that it was accompanied by appropriate
15 restrictions on outside income. And also why we were
16 so active in pushing for the amendment of the
17 quadrennial advisory committee law to ensure that we
18 did not have the same problem that we had in 2016.
19 Our concern with this bill is that it does not really
20 address the real problem which is that mayors are
21 just blowing past the existing law requiring a
22 quadrennial advisory commission, and without closing
23 that loophole, having these one-off bills when people
24 have lost patience with the lack of a regular review
25 undercuts the entire system. I was pleased to see

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1 the Mayor and the Council Speaker hold a press
2 conference saying that they would appoint a
3 commission. I hope they will do so right away and
4 obviate the need for this kind of one-off resolution
5 of a repetitive problem. The idea that we had-- in
6 2006 Mayor Bloomberg did this. There was a one-off
7 commission. Does not solve the problem. We don't
8 want to be here in 10 years having exactly the same
9 conversation. So, one, I believe we should give the
10 Mayor and the Speaker an opportunity to make good on
11 their promise to the public. Passing new laws when
12 old laws do basically the same thing are being
13 ignored, I believe sets a really bad precedent. So,
14 we join in with CU on the request that this lack of
15 enforcement of the existing law be addressed. And I
16 do want to say that we do not agree with Reinvent to
17 make the commission more complicated. This should be
18 a regular, quadrennial review. It should be handled
19 in an expeditious manner by auditors, by people who
20 have the experience. That's worked very well in the
21 past, and I don't see the need for making this into a
22 10 or 12-person commission with a lot of back and
23 forth. This should be a regular salary review that
24 government officials can rely on the same way that we
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3 in the nonprofit and the private industry world
4 expect regular salary reviews.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Well, thank you
6 both. I think what you're saying-- I know you had a
7 suggestion that could be sort of if you're not going
8 to do it, Mr. Mayor, we're going to call on the
9 Comptroller to do it, and that is certainly-- would
10 be a push I think as one suggestion. So, we need to
11 come up with a stick as opposed to a carrot, because
12 a carrot didn't work. Yeah. So, we need a stick
13 that would say this is what's going to happen if you
14 don't do it. I mean, they are breaking the law. It
15 is in the administrative code.

16 SUSAN LERNER: Yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, you know, if it
18 was a nonprofit and the AG was on you, then you would
19 actually be in a lot of trouble and probably fined,
20 but that's not something that happens in government.
21 So, I think that's sort of the message of today is
22 come up with something so that this doesn't happen
23 again. And I do like the small stature of it in
24 terms of those who are participating. I don't know
25 who the three people selected-- they don't have to be
members of the administration. They can be outsiders

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1 is my understanding. I asked that question earlier.
2 So, certainly auditors, people who have professional
3 financial knowledge, historical, etcetera, would be
4 the ones that I would suggest. And I think we're
5 both saying the same thing. I think the question is-
6 - I think in this case, because there's such
7 pressure, it will happen, this what you call one-off.
8 Then the question is in three years which is
9 basically when it's supposed to take place, would
10 that be something that we need to think harder about
11 making sure it happens? Because also, you mentioned
12 also the perspective versus going back to January.
13 And I have to say I am agnostic on that, but my
14 colleagues are not. So, I just want to let you know
15 that's a-- that will come up, I'm sure, as a topic. I
16 want to let you know that is not something that they
17 have no opinion on. They have very strong opinions.

19 SUSAN LERNER: But we do have an opinion
20 in which we stated in the December hearing where my
21 colleague Samantha Sanchez testified, and that is we
22 are on record. Retrospective raised are not
23 acceptable anywhere in government. That's why the
24 constitution requires Congress to-- when they raise
25 their-- when they raise congressional salaries, it

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3 has to be prospective. It is a terrible look to the
4 public. I understand the frustration. We share the
5 frustration that, you know, the regular review
6 process has not taken place as it should, but
7 granting retrospective raises to yourself is just a
8 bad look and raises real questions in the minds of
9 the public.

10 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Go ahead.

11 BEN WEINBERG: I'll also add on this, the
12 commission time was moved in 2015, after the 2015
13 commission from the second year to the third year of
14 the term, and the idea there was to encourage the
15 next council the next time a commission will be
16 convened to implement the salary increases
17 prospectively for the next term after the next
18 election. And 2018, if indeed that happens, if
19 hopefully a commission is established, that is I
20 think is the best time to try out that pilot.
21 Because it will be only two years after this raise
22 that's coming. There will be an election after-- one
23 year after, so I think that's maybe a sensible pilot
24 I'd say for that prospective increases.

25 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Also, you mentioned--
- and I think what would happen as this commission is

1 formed, there will be hearings. I mean, I assume
2 there'll be a hearing and that is something that you
3 could bring up. As you indicated, I think it's just
4 in this one-off there'll be council input also.

5
6 SUSAN LERNER: We have no problem with
7 the stick being that the threat if you do not comply
8 with the law and set up the commission as required,
9 that the Council could set up its own commission. I
10 want the strongest possible goad so that as I said
11 we're not back here.

12 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Right.

13 SUSAN LERNER: Having the same
14 conversation trying to fix the law and seeing mayors
15 blow by it without any consequences.

16 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: I think that should
17 be absolutely part of the discussion, absolutely.
18 What is the stick? Obviously, the one in the past
19 did not work.

20 SUSAN LERNER: Yep.

21 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, I think that's
22 extremely important. I don't have any other
23 questions. I think that this is going to happen,
24 this one-off, and I think if you have suggestions
25 about people who should be appointed, it is the Mayor

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3 who makes the appointment, not the Council. And then
4 it's interesting that you mentioned for other such
5 commissions, it would be good to have the Council to
6 have some input. So, I listen carefully to what you
7 said about that. Nothing to do with this one,
8 specifically, but something to look at. So, I thank
9 you both. Any other things-- anything else you want
10 to add?

11 BEN WEINBERG: I'll just say, you know,
12 the trick with raises across the board is that
13 they're politically delicate for all sides. So,
14 that's why this mechanisms are invented. It's not
15 only for kind of our interest or the public interest,
16 it's also for elected official interest, because the
17 public often unfortunately doesn't appreciate the
18 need for an increase. So that's why I think it is
19 important to find these-- to avoid the need for
20 litigation to force a mayor which obviously will not
21 happen, because I don't see a future council suing a
22 mayor to get its own raises. It's--

23 SUSAN LERNER: [interposing] Although the
24 new council rules would allow the council's counsel
25 to do that.

BEN WEINBERG: Perhaps, yeah.

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2 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: Well, thank you both
3 very much. We will keep in touch.

4 BEN WEINBERG: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: And thank you for
6 being the folks who have been pushing for this.
7 Really appreciate that. Thank you.

8 BEN WEINBERG: Thank you, Council Member.

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: So, now we're going
10 to hear from Mr. Johnson on Zoom.

11 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, hello.
12 Hello, my-- yeah. Hello. My name is Christopher
13 Leon Johnson. I'm calling on the City Council to
14 condemn Grace Bruha [sp?] from the Citizens Budget
15 because she the one that pushed this thing in. This
16 is a disastrous concept, man. I don't know why that
17 she's trying to stop you guys from getting a
18 paycheck. You guys have family. You guys have kids
19 to feed. I know some of you members have like five,
20 six, seven kids like Yusef Salaam. Y'all need that
21 money. This is ridiculous that you have to do a
22 commission like this. I think that City Council
23 should be on the record. You know, [inaudible] Grace
24 Bruha suggesting this crap. This is stupid. This
25 Mayor Mamdani is going to appoint his cronies to be

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1 part of his commission to find a way to make sure
2 that you guys don't get a raise. And I'll say this
3 right now that the City Council need to come together
4 to tell Mamdani that if you have a problem with you
5 guys get a raise, he needs to resign as a mayor.
6 This is not right for you guys to be suffering like
7 this. LA get \$205,000 a year. Other states get like
8 \$250, \$205, \$175, \$180. Why you guys suffer at
9 \$148,500? That's a-- that's low in New York City.
10 That's low. That's like-- that's no money in New
11 York. And I want to call on City Council to make
12 aware that if they want to be a dickwad, a asshole
13 and make sure this day keep on happening like this,
14 you should remove the proportion where you guys
15 allowed to get increase-- outside income. You got to
16 be able to get outside income. You know, the way--
17 I'm say this right now. The way you can start
18 getting more people to run for office, if you
19 eliminate the outside income. Let's say if I make
20 \$250,000 year, why would I would leave my \$250,000 a
21 year job to go for \$140,000 in the public sector
22 where I'm [inaudible] every money-- every dollar I
23 make after. It's ridiculous. So, I support the City
24 Council with their anger and upsetness [sic] when it
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1 comes to this commission. I understand it's got to go
2 through-- I don't support this commission, but it's
3 going to be-- it's optics, and Julie Menin should say
4 that if Mamdani has a problem with you guys getting a
5 raise, he needs to resign. He needs to drop out.
6 So, this is sad. I mean, this is really ridiculous
7 what's going to happen, and I know he's going to--

9 CHAIRPERSON BREWER: [interposing] Thank
10 you. Thank you very much for your testimony. Thank
11 you so much. Thank you very much. We've now heard
12 from everyone who has signed up to testify. If we
13 inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify
14 in-person, please visit the Sergeant's table and fill
15 out a slip. If we miss anyone who would like to
16 testify virtually please use the raise hand function
17 in Zoom and we will call on you in order of hands
18 raised. No hands. So, seeing no one, I would like to
19 note again that written testimony which will be
20 reviewed in full by committee staff may be submitted
21 to the record up to 72 hours after the close of this
22 hearing by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.
23 And now I'd like to close out this hearing thanking
24 everybody who helped make it possible, and I'm sure

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1
2 my colleagues will be very happy when this commission
3 is formed. Thank you very much.

4 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date February 20, 2026