

Testimony

Felice Robertson, Chapter Chair of DCAS and OATH

New York City Council Hearing FY 23 Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 22, 2022

Local 1549

Hello Chair Sandra Ung, Governmental Operations and Council Members

My name is Felice Robertson and I am the Chapter Chair of NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) and Office of Administrative Trials and Hearing (OATH) employees of Local 1549. Under the leadership of Eddie Rodriguez, President of Local 1549, and our 13,000 members; we would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to speak at this Budget Hearing.

- The employees of DCAS and OATH are recommending the implementation for employees to obtain pay disparity other than passing exams. The employees of OATH are in need of developmental growth, (i.e.) Procurement, Human Resources, Revenue and Cashier training. DCAS and OATH employees are strongly recommending promotional opportunities to all employees not just a selective few.
- Once a position in DCAS and OATH is open, staff should be made aware that an employee is leaving and or retiring from the agency. By which, that job should be posted on the Bullet Board. Additional, responsibilities should not be added without compensation.
- DCAS and OATH employee's achievements should be recognized for their college degrees and certificates. For every educational level the employee achieves, they should be recognized and given a job opportunity and or monetary pay.
- Finally, DCAS and OATH employees stress the recommendation to be allowed to work from home during inclement weather conditions (such as snowstorms) and not expect for us to make every effort to make it to work. Specifically, this would help with the morale by implementing hybrid schedules one day a week regardless of the weather.

In conclusion, we would again like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to offer our opinions and recommendations on this Budget Hearing.

Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings
Summons Received by Issuing Agency - FY18 to FY22 YTD

Violations Received	FY 18		FY 19		FY 20		FY 21		FY 22 YTD	
SANITATION(DSNY)	389,707	52.7%	378,289	54.1%	317,942	55.6%	275,078	57%	128,168	49%
BUILDINGS(DOB)	87,412	11.8%	93,767	13.4%	83,692	14.6%	76,353	16%	46,147	18%
FIRE(FDNY)	45,400	6.1%	50,230	7.2%	50,063	8.8%	41,782	9%	22,048	8%
HEALTH(DOHMH)	68,227	9.2%	38,339	5.5%	21,452	3.8%	13,590	3%	17,727	7%
TRANSPORTATION(DOT)	48,937	6.6%	50,316	7.2%	39,828	7.0%	32,284	7%	20,337	8%
POLICE	76,426	10.3%	55,921	8.0%	31,794	5.6%	17,652	4%	11,245	4%
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION(DEP)	12,851	1.7%	21,394	3.1%	19,839	3.5%	20,478	4%	12,152	5%
PARKS(DPR)	10,048	1.4%	9,461	1.4%	6,403	1.1%	5,066	1%	2,263	1%
PUBLIC TELEPHONE(DOITT)	214	0.0%	455	0.1%	295	0.1%	76	0%	127	0%
AGENCY CODE MISSING OR INVALID	405	0.1%	237	0.0%	35	0.0%	19	0%	2	0%
MISCELLANEOUS AGENCIES(999)	337	0.0%	324	0.0%	290	0.1%	738	0%	809	0%
LANDMARKS(LPC)	45	0.0%	25	0.0%	10	0.0%	-	0%	-	0%
MARKET CASES(BIC)	58	0.0%	87	0.0%	150	0.0%	76	0%	22	0%
DOF TOBACCO	56	0.0%	164	0.0%	104	0.0%	-	0%	-	0%
NYC SHERIFF	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	350	0%	132	0%
VENDOR CASES(DCA)	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0%	381	0%
SUBTOTAL	740,123	100%	699,009	100%	571,897	100%	483,542	100%	261,560	100%

TAXI	94,310	67.9%	96,621	69.6%	96,547	74.3%	48,282	85.9%	40,652	75%
DOHMH	30,568	22.0%	31,333	22.6%	22,035	17.0%	662	1.2%	7,515	14%
DCA	14,001	10.1%	10,815	7.8%	11,383	8.8%	7,259	12.9%	5,737	11%
SUBTOTAL	138,879	100.0%	138,769	100.0%	129,965	100.0%	56,203	100.0%	53,904	100.0%

TOTAL	879,002		837,778		701,862		539,745		315,464	
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Tuesday March 22, 2022

**Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
Testimony Before the New York City Council
Committee on Governmental Operations**

Good morning, Chair Ung, and members of the Committee on Governmental Operations. My name is Mark Levine, and I am the Manhattan Borough President. I would like to thank Chair Ung for holding this hearing on the preliminary Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) Budget. These hearings are critical to ensure key government functions are not left by the wayside in the FY23 budget.

To that end, I was disheartened to learn that Community Boards were not included on the agenda for last week's hearing. Community Boards are often overlooked, but they play an essential role in our city's government. They provide New Yorkers with the opportunity to directly advocate for the needs of their communities, facilitate civic engagement for agencies, and help elected officials more effectively address hyperlocal issues in their districts. Despite these critical functions, Community Boards have not seen a budget increase in nearly a decade. This lack of investment has significantly limited their ability to modernize and hire the staff needed to meet communities demands and needs.

Recognizing this, the Council has stepped up in recent years – to the tune of \$2.5 million – to help support Community Boards. This funding should be baselined in the FY23 budget so it can be consistently relied upon. The budget should also allocate funding to meet Community Board's longstanding technology needs. This includes providing them with updated websites, improved internet access, computers, digital and data literacy training, and other basic technologies that have become standard for other organizations working in the public realm. Community Boards cannot fulfill their charter mandated duties or serve their neighborhoods effectively unless we provide them with the technology and tools needed to do so.

The FY23 budget should also allocate funding to increase the number of full-time staff members on Community Boards. They are currently composed of very few full-time staff members and a number of unpaid volunteers. Understandably, these volunteers often have competing priorities. However, this limited staff capacity is concerning given that Community Boards are expected to weigh in on land use and zoning applications, review liquor license applications, participate in the budgeting process, maintain committees on various issues, monitor complaints in their district, write resolutions, host public meetings, and more. Without funding for staffing being baselined in the budget, it is next to impossible for district managers to plan long term and hire and retain staff.

In closing, Community Boards play an invaluable role in our government and city. I look forward to working with my elected and agency partners to ensure the FY23 budget provides them with the resources and funding they need to function efficiently and effectively. Thank you again to Chair Ung for holding this hearing.



Asian American Federation

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Government Operations

March 22, 2022

Written Testimony

I would like to thank Committee Chair Ung and the Council Members of the Committee on Government Operations for providing the Asian American Federation the chance to testify on this year's Budget. I'm Ahmed Butt, the Civic Engagement Coordinator at AAF, where we proudly represent the collective voice of more than 70 member nonprofits serving 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers.

Since 2010, the Asian population in New York City has increased 34%, growing from over 1.1 million in 2010 to over 1.5 million in 2020, making up 17.3% of our city's total population. Overwhelmingly, Asian New Yorkers are immigrants, with two out of three in the city being foreign-born. Of those Asian immigrants, 47% arrived in 2010 or after.

But while Asian New Yorkers comprise more than 10% of the population in 28 out of 51 City Council districts, and 36 districts have some of the fastest-growing Asian populations, from Fiscal Year 2002 to 2014, the Asian American community received a mere 1.4% of the total dollar value of New York City's social service contracts. And while these numbers reflect a broader, long-term trend, this year's Budget is an important opportunity for us to elevate the communities who supported us by putting an equitable pandemic recovery at the forefront and prioritizing their role in New York's civic life.

Information Access (Language Translation)

Amidst an ongoing pandemic, language barriers have revealed dramatic shortcomings in how our government is connecting New Yorkers with the programs and facilities they need. From receiving alerts about severe weather conditions to updates about masking mandates, language barriers are a significant impediment to Asian Americans with life-and-death implications.

We appreciate initiatives set forth by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) to improve their communications with LEP clients and agencies like the Campaign Finance Board and Civic Engagement Commission finding new ways to engage with LEP voters, including the expansion of the languages covered by voter education materials. However, language barriers remain high among Asian New Yorkers. Overall, 46% of Asians have limited English proficiency (LEP) in New York City, compared to a citywide rate of 23%.

Amongst speakers of South Asian languages, 54% of Bengali speakers, over 46% of Urdu speakers, and 33% of Hindi speakers have limited English proficiency (LEP). Among Filipinos, 32% of Tagalog speakers identified themselves as LEP. And for Asian American seniors living in poverty, LEP rates were 83% for Asians, compared to 47% for non-Asians. Specifically, 87% of Chinese- and Korean-speaking seniors had LEP.

The impact of these barriers on voter registration will be addressed not just by good policy, but by competent implementation, by ensuring that in-language resources are made adequately available and bilingual staff are accessible to LEP community members.

To make voting more equitable, in addition to improving language accessibility at city agencies, it is vital that culturally competent CBOs who are trusted in their communities are funded to conduct their own outreach in the communities they know best. For many potential voters, registration is not the push that gets them to the polls – they have to see how voting centers them and the needs of their neighbors. By partnering with CBOs, including those belonging to our AAPI Power Coalition, who collectively made almost 2 million contacts with Asian voters last year, and who serve 8 different ethnic communities in 4 boroughs, our city can improve the way in which it serves LEP voters. Our coalition members must be a part of the process, engaged as partners and centered as experts.

The following recommendations for this year's Budget will help city agencies ensure that LEP community members are not excluded from their voter registration efforts due to a lack of adequate resources or training:

- Ensure an adequate and timely supply of translated voter registration forms in citywide languages.
- Agency websites should link to voter registration forms translated into the above languages, in addition to English.
- Ensure an adequate and timely supply of voter educational materials in all citywide languages.
- Ensure adequate staffing of bilingual employees at city agencies who are properly trained to register voters.
- Partner with CBOs, including those belonging to our AAPI Power Coalition, to conduct culturally competent voter outreach.

Effective communication from government resources requires a well-rounded communications effort, in multiple languages, that can effectively mobilize our community with clear safety and logistical guidance. And it won't simply be enough to have information translated in multiple languages. More than at any other time, translations will need to be timely. Community education requires the outreach efforts of the Census, which delivered timely, accurate information using messaging that was accessible to immigrant populations. Politicians, community organizations, governmental institutions, and other stakeholders need to be engaged not only to educate our community but to ensure we are keeping them safe and informed.

The time has also come for City Council to invest in a community legal interpreter bank, so those needing legal services and social services can access qualified interpreters directly from their own communities. Additionally, funding worker co-ops can support the recruitment, training, and dispatching of qualified interpreters while increasing job opportunities for multilingual immigrants. To these ends, in coalition with African Communities Together, Masa and the New York Immigration Coalition, we're asking City Council to fund a community legal interpreter bank with \$2.25 million and commit \$300,000 per worker co-op for three language translation co-ops covering Asian, African, and Latin American languages. As seen in the implementation of Washington, DC's community legal interpreter bank, these initiatives will help in several ways: from providing employment opportunities in our immigrant communities, to relieving strains on existing CBO capacity to provide interpretation, to addressing the serious gap in quality language interpretation for the communities that need it the most.

Nonprofit Support

Our community, as with every other community of color, also bears a disproportionate burden of the basic need insecurity brought on by the pandemic. The City must increase investment in safety net programs, such as community health centers and clinics, as well as food pantries. Asian New Yorkers have a greater need for access to these programs in part due to the continued aftereffects of the previous Presidential administration's public charge assault that resulted in immigrants disenrolling from public benefits out of fear that it would affect their and their family's chances of pursuing a path to citizenship. Specifically, the City must fund an emergency network of linguistically and culturally competent food service programs and connect Asian seniors and other vulnerable populations to these alternative food benefits in order to begin to address the harm inflicted on this population by the loss of access to traditional government assistance programs.

As City Council works on this year's budget, Council members must also keep in mind the persistent inequities in city contracting practices and the systemic barriers facing our CBOs seeking the dollars the Council is allocating for this year. In addition to increasing funding for the AAPI Community Support Initiative, we're also asking City Council to fund the Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund at \$7 million so our nonprofits can invest in capacity-building projects as demand for their work only increases.

Contracting processes must prioritize the CBOs that have the expertise needed to make the most of every dollar in our communities by giving greater weight to organizations with a demonstrated track record of serving low-income, underserved immigrant communities with linguistic and cultural competency. Our CBOs are leading by example in the provision of direct services, from providing wrap-around services that include mental wellness checks, to allying with food suppliers that provide culturally-competent food. And it'll be our CBOs that will be instrumental in restoring trust between our immigrants and the City.

I want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak with you today. The Asian community has been through so much over this past year and the Budget is the best way for City Council to show that we are a priority and our community is cared for as it deserves.



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

ANTONIO REYNOSO

Brooklyn Borough President

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations Preliminary Budget Hearing, March 22, 2022

Good afternoon and thank you to Chair Sandra Ung and the Committee on Governmental Operations for allowing me the opportunity to speak. My testimony today will focus specifically on community boards and their budgets. I was disappointed to see that community boards didn't make it to today's agenda despite this committee having oversight, but wanted to go on record anyway with my comments.

As Brooklyn Borough President, I oversee the borough's 18 community boards, and this is a responsibility I take very seriously. The boards are a critical first point of contact between the public and City government. Yet because of their extremely limited budgets, they are currently struggling to maintain their basic Charter-mandated functions. This is in addition to everything else they have been called upon to do during the pandemic, ranging from pivoting quickly to virtual meetings, to literally feeding their communities in some cases. Community boards have not had a significant baselined budget expansion since 2014, and I was extremely disappointed to see that the new administration has no plans for any budget increase for the boards in the next four years.

You don't need to take my word for it. Earlier this year, a group of District Managers released a report (attached) outlining exactly what they need to do their jobs more effectively. The most critical things that the administration can help address now are the following:

- 1) **Physical spaces:** DCAS helps community boards find office space, but the quality varies widely. District Managers reported a range of issues, from not having light switches in their office or doors on their bathrooms, to being located in non-ADA-compliant buildings, meaning constituents with disabilities cannot physically come to their offices for assistance. We can and must do better.

Additionally, having public meetings is one of the boards' most important functions. Their hearings are an important opportunity for the public to connect with local government. Yet board staff must coordinate space for these meetings with no support from DCAS, meaning they are forced to spend precious staff time finding and securing space that can accommodate a large number of people, is ADA accessible, and meets the standards of Open Meetings Law. This was



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ANTONIO REYNOSO

Brooklyn Borough President

already a challenge before the pandemic. Now that boards have been away from their previous meeting spaces for two years, they are once again forced to go through this process, but with even fewer spaces available to meet their needs. For example, community rooms in hospitals and schools may no longer accommodate public meetings. Other venues may have a vaccine screening mandate in place, which it is our understanding is a violation of Open Meetings Law. Still other spaces may be too small to accommodate social distancing. The boards need support from the City to address this before the Governor's emergency order allowing virtual meetings expires, and from the State to allow hybrid meetings permanently. Which brings me to...

- 2) Technology and Communications:** During the pandemic, many boards had to pivot to entirely online meetings. Yet the technology available and the expertise required to use that technology varies from board to board. The City Charter requires boards to make their meetings available for broadcast, but only some have the tech capability to livestream. The boards' ability to comply with the Charter should not be dependent upon my discretionary budget.

Along those lines, the 2018 Charter Revision required DOITT to assist the boards with building functional websites, but right now the quality of these sites still depends on the board either having its own expertise or the financial means to contract outside help. What's worse, DOITT had one staff member dedicated to helping all of the city's 59 community boards with their technology issues, but he recently left and has not been replaced, leaving the boards stranded at a particularly crucial time. One district manager reported recently waiting weeks for DOITT to create an email address for a new staffer. This is simply unacceptable.

We also need to consider that not all New Yorkers have regular internet access or fluency in English. They shouldn't be left out of the democratic process. Community boards need funding for non-digital communication such as flyers and mailers, as well as translation services for those materials, for their websites, and for their meetings.

- 3) Staffing:** The boards' existing budgets only provide for a minimal number of staff lines, and leave little room to provide competitive salaries, making recruitment and retention of professional staff difficult. Inability to fill vacancies has a major impact on an office with only a handful of staff. Without baselined funding, district managers have difficulty planning for staff expansion long-term, not knowing if the lines will be renewed the next year. Baselining a budget line for a



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ANTONIO REYNOSO

Brooklyn Borough President

staff analyst or community coordinator would make a huge difference in the boards' ability to function efficiently. It would allow them to connect more directly with their constituents and encourage engagement from more diverse populations, including youth.

Additionally, most boards need technical assistance to review complicated land use proposals or to plan proactively for their districts, as the Charter allows them to do. The Civic Engagement Commission has said they are developing a consultant program to provide the boards with urban planning resources but have given no indication of whether or how the boards are supposed to pay for these consultants with their limited budgets. The City needs to instead fund professional urban planners to work directly with the boards.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. I want to be a partner with the Council and the administration to dramatically improve the experience of working for and serving on a community board. There is so much more to be done, including making sure board membership reflects our city's diversity, creating and enforcing membership standards, providing consistent trainings and support for board members and staff, and creating a more productive working relationship between the boards and the administration. I hope we can start this year by providing them with some of the basic resources they need to function efficiently, and continue working together to address all of these issues over the next few years.



THE FUTURE OF NEW YORK CITY'S COMMUNITY BOARDS

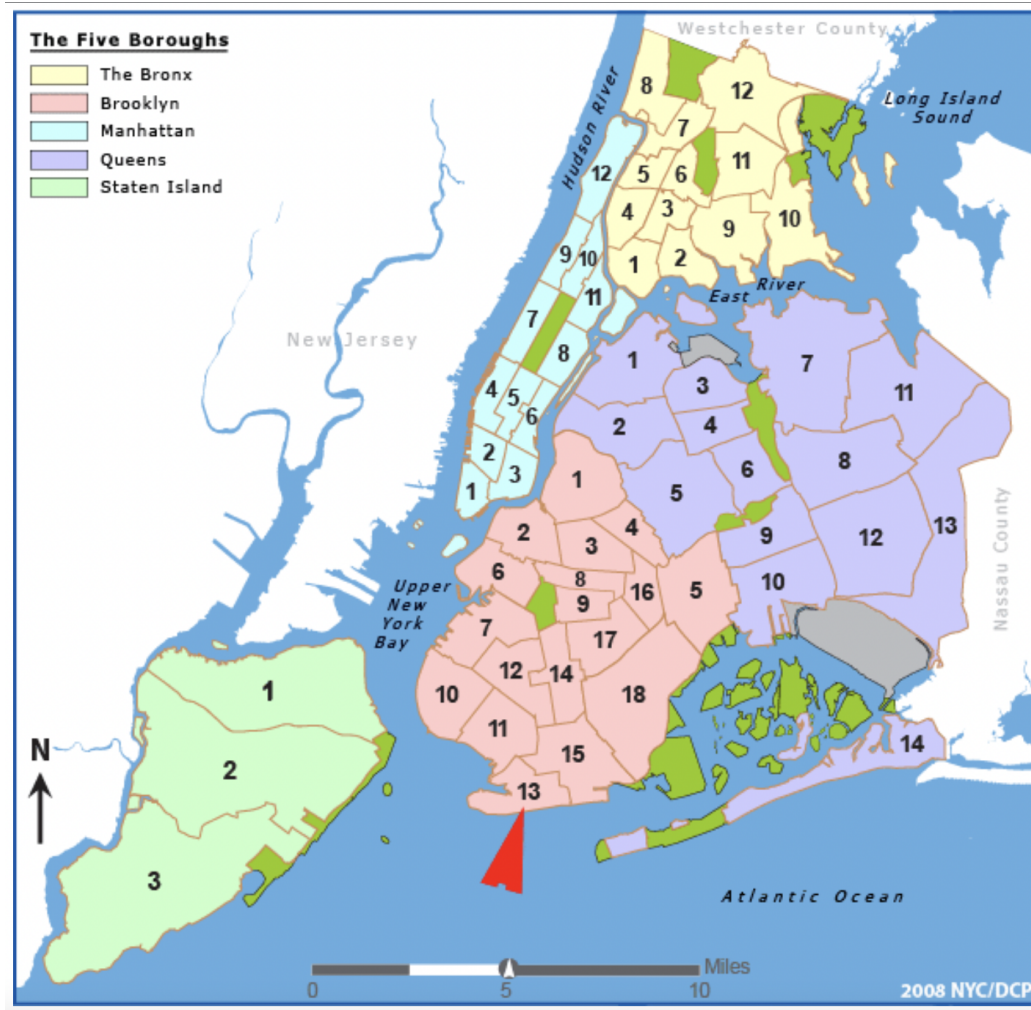
THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY BOARDS WORKING GROUP FINAL REPORT

DECEMBER 2021



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Map via NYC Department of City Planning

INTRODUCTION

New York City's 59 community boards serve a vital function as connectors between residents and City government services. The paid staff and 50+ volunteer members of each board dedicate time and energy to serving their communities every day. Each board currently represents approximately 50,000 to more than 200,000 people¹, which on the higher end is a population larger than that of Birmingham, Alabama or Akron, Ohio. We inform the public about government programs and proposals, help constituents resolve issues with City agencies, advise on local land use proposals and City budget allocations, liaise with local elected officials, and hold monthly meetings and public hearings so stakeholders' voices can be heard. And those are just the most common responsibilities.

¹ NYC Department of City Planning. "Community District Profiles."

In the past year-and-a-half, the urgency and need for these services has become increasingly apparent. As New Yorkers responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of reliable information, access to resources, and the ability to adapt while maintaining space for civic engagement became more important than ever. Community boards have also increased collaboration with City agencies to ensure food delivery, communication of vital information, and access to healthcare services for our constituents.

Community boards as we know them today were formed in the 1960s in response to calls for more representative local democracy. The need for this representation remains clear, although the boards' functioning, as with many government agencies, has struggled to adapt in the 21st century. District managers and staff from community boards in all five boroughs see this time of transition to a new Mayoral administration and many new citywide, boroughwide, and local elected officials as an opportunity to reflect on what is working and what changes and resources we need to effectively carry out our Charter-mandated duties and best serve our constituents.

It is an honor and privilege to serve our communities. We aim to empower the next generation of leaders to give back and improve the quality-of-life in their communities as well. During this process, we sought answers to: What will community boards be like in the future? What do our communities need? How can we better serve them?

In this report you will find our analysis and recommendations. It is important to note that while all boards operate uniquely and adapt to serve their diverse neighborhoods and communities, we've discovered that we share many of the larger challenges affecting us today. Our goals are to raise awareness about the difficulties we face conducting our Charter-mandated responsibilities, begin a conversation with the incoming administration and elected officials about how community boards can be improved today and in the future, and determine how we can best work with our governmental partners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Celestina León". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Celestina León, District Manager, Brooklyn Community Board 4

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Susan Stetzer". The script is cursive and elegant, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Susan Stetzer, District Manager, Manhattan Community Board 3

on behalf of the Future of Community Boards Working Group

PARTICIPANTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the Fall of 2019 and early 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the community board district managers who participated in the Brooklyn Borough Service Cabinet meetings began a discussion about the issues and challenges they similarly face. This led to the creation of the Future of Community Boards Working Group, which expanded to include representatives of community board staff from all five boroughs. This group held six meetings between August 2020 and October 2021 and distributed a survey to community board staff to solicit written feedback about a number of topics, including budgets, technology, membership, the boards' relationship with City agencies, and more.

Participants in the Future of Community Boards Working Group represent staff from:

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARDS 7, 8, 10, 11, 12

BROOKLYN COMMUNITY BOARDS 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 17

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARDS 3, 4, 6, 8, 11

QUEENS COMMUNITY BOARDS 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11

STATEN ISLAND COMMUNITY BOARD 2

Special Thanks to: NYC Office of Management and Budget; NYC Department of City Planning, Planning Coordination and Brooklyn Office; Pratt Institute Graduate Center for Planning & the Environment; NYC Civic Engagement Commission; Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer; City Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair, Committee on Governmental Operations; Office of City Council Member Antonio Reynoso; New York City Council Land Use Division; Beta NYC; The Center for Urban Pedagogy; and to our consultant Lacey Tauber for assistance with finalizing this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Future of Community Boards Working Group, consisting of district managers and other community board staff from all five boroughs, formed in 2020 with the goal of identifying and seeking solutions for shared issues and challenges. Through a series of meetings and a survey, they identified the following issues:

RESOURCES: Community Boards are currently being asked to do more with less. All participants felt they needed more resources to effectively carry out their Charter-mandated duties.

CONSISTENCY: Board members and staff have a wide range of skills and expertise related to necessary duties, such as communications and technology, zoning and land use, human resources, development of bylaws, meeting procedures, and fundraising. With little or inconsistent access to trainings and other support, too much responsibility falls on the boards' small staffs, creating inequities across boroughs and from board to board.

WORKING RELATIONSHIPS: Boards' relationships with the Mayor and City agencies have varied from administration to administration and currently, there is a feeling among many board staff that their input is not taken seriously and there is lack of transparency. Some City agencies have decreased the types of proposals that require community board review, and/or lessened their participation in the budget consultation process.

THIS REPORT OUTLINES RECOMMENDATIONS THAT THE WORKING GROUP IDENTIFIED TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES, ORGANIZED INTO FIVE AREAS:

COMMUNITY BOARD BUDGETS AND OPERATIONS: Community boards have not had a significant baseline budget expansion since 2014. Additionally, district managers receive little support for the day-to-day management of their offices. The community boards need a significant budget increase to maintain their Charter-mandated duties, as well as a "Central Staff" that will assist the boards with a number of important matters, from human resources to onboarding new board members. The boards also need consistent access to technology, functional office space, and expertise in land use and zoning.

BOARD MEMBER SELECTION, TRAINING, AND CONDUCT: Beyond the prerequisites that members be at least 16 years old and must live, work, or have a significant interest in the district, there are no other mandated requirements for individual board membership. While many members are deeply engaged in their responsibilities, others are either disconnected from the board's work, or lack the tools they need for success. Borough Presidents should require prospective members to attend board meetings prior to making their appointments,

and the City should provide and require consistent trainings and guidance for members on zoning and land use, meeting procedures, and conflicts of interest.

THE BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS: The Charter mandates a strong role for community boards in the City's process for developing its annual budget. However, despite the City's efforts to streamline this process using online tools, the fact that agencies no longer require one-on-one consultations with each board and often provide cursory feedback on budget requests has led to growing frustrations with this process. The incoming Mayor should ensure that community boards receive regular data updates and detailed budget information, instruct agencies to offer one-on-one budget consultation meetings with boards (in addition to borough-wide consultations), and provide meaningful feedback on their requests.

TECHNOLOGY, COMMUNICATIONS, AND OUTREACH: The Charter mandates boards to disseminate information to the public; to collect the public's complaints, requests, and inquiries; and to track and communicate directly with local community-based organizations. However, communicating with the public is increasingly complex, and the day-to-day responsibilities related to this mandate have presented challenges, especially during the pandemic. The City should ensure that the boards have funding for and access to necessary technologies for digital and non-digital communication, and training and support for using it effectively.

LAND USE AND ZONING: Community Boards play a crucial role in the land use process. Yet the rules and procedures surrounding zoning, land use, and housing are notoriously complex, and boards often rely on the expertise of their membership, which varies widely. The City should provide each community board with a staff line and funding for a professionally trained planner, consistent and required trainings for new and continuing board members, and space and support to ensure the public can meaningfully participate.

The Future of Community Boards Working Group sees the transition to a new Mayoral administration and the replacement of all five Borough Presidents and a majority of the City Council in 2022 as an opportunity to strengthen the collaborative relationship between the community boards and all the elected officials and agency staff with whom they interact.

BACKGROUND

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY BOARD?

New York City is divided into 59 geographic community districts, determined roughly based on neighborhood boundaries, and to include nearly equal populations of no more than 250,000 people per district.² As shown on the map on page 2, there are 12 boards in the Bronx, 18 in Brooklyn, 12 in Manhattan, 14 in Queens, and 3 in Staten Island. Each has a community board that consists of up to 50 appointed, unpaid board members. Community boards are autonomous City agencies, and their members are City officers.

Prospective board members apply to their Borough President for membership, and the Borough President appoints half of each board's members themselves, and the other half on the recommendation of the local City Councilmember(s) whose district(s) intersect with the community district. Board members must demonstrate that they live, work, or have some other significant interest in the community, and are appointed to staggered, two-year terms. Each board also has a staff led by a district manager, who manages the board's day-to-day operations, as well as other staff whose roles and responsibilities vary from board to board.

The purpose of each board is to encourage and facilitate civic engagement within their communities, and to work with City agencies that deliver municipal services. While the boards are only mandated to hold at least one meeting and public hearing per month, many boards go well beyond this requirement, including having multiple issue-based subcommittees that meet monthly, participating in borough-level meetings with other board representatives, and much more. The community boards play an important role in improving quality-of-life for all New Yorkers and provide a means for constituents to have a voice in planning for their own communities.

The City Charter mandates a number of responsibilities for the boards³, including:

CONDUCT OPERATIONS:

- Elect officers and create and adopt bylaws
- Submit an annual report each year to the Mayor and local elected officials

² New York City Charter, Chapter 69 Section 2701.

³ New York City Charter, Chapter 70 Section 2800.

LIAISE WITH CITY AGENCIES AND ELECTED OFFICIALS:

- Consult with and assist City agencies and local elected officials with service delivery and communication of information to constituents. Call upon agency representatives to attend board meetings as needed.
- Assist with setting agency priorities and objectives in the district
- Evaluate service delivery by agencies
- Cooperate with other community boards as needed

EDUCATE AND INVOLVE THE PUBLIC:

- Hold at least one full board meeting and public hearing per month (except in July and August) on issues impacting the district
- Disseminate information about City services and programs
- Process complaints, requests, and inquiries from the community
- Create and maintain a list of active community-based organizations in the district and their contact information

PARTICIPATE IN THE BUDGET PROCESS:

- Submit an annual statement of community district needs and recommendations for programs, projects, or activities to meet those needs
- Consult with agencies on the district's capital and expense budget needs and submit budget priorities annually
- Conduct public hearings and make recommendations on how funding allocated to the district should be spent
- Review agencies' plans for capital projects and evaluate the implementation of those projects

TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT:

- Prepare plans for growth and development of the district
- Attend scoping meetings for environmental review for proposals located in the district
- Hold public hearings on proposals and make recommendations as the first step in the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP).

HISTORY OF NYC COMMUNITY BOARDS

The framework for today's community boards was shaped over four decades:

1951: Manhattan Borough President Robert F. Wagner establishes twelve Community Planning Councils of 15-20 members each, to advise him on planning and budgetary matters.

1963: Jane Jacobs, author of *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, recommends local districts to inform City agencies. Mayor Wagner cements this recommendation in the City Charter, establishing the framework for “Community Planning Boards.”

1968: Local Law 39 expands the powers of Community Planning Boards and establishes their current structure.

1975: A Charter Revision Commission establishes 59 community boards, defines the role of district manager, establishes the District Service Cabinet (consisting of City agency representatives and district managers), and strengthens the boards’ role in budgeting and service delivery. Importantly, this Commission also established the ULURP process, mandating an advisory vote from the community board on land use applications.

1989: Another Charter Revision Commission changes the structure of City government and increases the role of community boards in the planning process, allowing them to proactively create plans for their districts through section 197-a.⁴

Many members of the Future of Community Boards Working Group have been involved with their community board through multiple Mayoral administrations, and many noted that recently, communication and consultation between many (but not all) City agencies and the boards has become less frequent and less substantive. Participants expressed an interest in strengthening this relationship as the next administration takes over in 2022.

RECENT CHARTER CHANGES IMPACTING COMMUNITY BOARDS

The de Blasio administration also saw changes impacting community board operations. In 2018 Mayor de Blasio appointed a Charter Revision Commission. While all Charter Revision Commissions may examine and make changes to any piece of the Charter, Mayor de Blasio tasked this Commission specifically with examining the City’s policies regarding campaign finance, voter participation, civic engagement, and the electoral process as part of his DemocracyNYC initiative.⁵

During the public hearing process, Commissioners heard about, “the significant contributions of New Yorkers who volunteer their time, skills, and energy to their local communities... [and that] some community boards do not always live up to their potential to transmit and amplify

⁴ Forman, Seth. “Community Boards,” *Gotham Gazette*.

⁵ NYC Office of the Mayor. “Mayor de Blasio Announces Charter Revision Commission Appointees.” April 12, 2018.

the voices of all members of the community.”⁶ Based on this, the Commission recommended three measures directly impacting community boards, which voters ultimately approved through referenda. The referenda:

IMPOSED TERM LIMITS ON COMMUNITY BOARD MEMBERSHIP to four consecutive two-year terms, consistent with the eight years total for City elected officials, effective for appointments or reappointments on or after April 1, 2019. (One cohort of appointees whose terms began on April 1, 2020 are limited to five terms, in order to stagger vacancies.)

REQUIRED BOROUGH PRESIDENTS TO SEEK OUT “PERSONS OF DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS” in making appointments to community boards and added new application and reporting requirements related to these appointments.

CREATED THE NYC CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMMISSION, and tasked this body with providing community boards with access to professional planning expertise, translation resources, and training in land use, technology, and meeting procedures, among other responsibilities. It also required the City’s Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DOITT) to provide support to the boards to develop and maintain functional websites to facilitate providing information to the public.⁷

Because these changes are so recent, the full extent of their impact is not yet fully clear, although some measures have already been implemented. While the effects of term limits on board membership are not likely to be felt for a few years, members of the Working Group reported that the new applications and the fact that they are now available online, as well as the updated guidance on appointments, seems to have had a small impact on increasing diversity of board membership (though this varied by borough).

Mayor de Blasio convened the Civic Engagement Commission (CEC) in April of 2019. The Mayor appoints eight of the 15 Commissioners, each Borough President has one appointment, and the City Council Speaker has two appointments. This body is staffed by employees of the Mayor’s office.

The Civic Engagement Commission released its first annual report in October 2021. It notes that the CEC has conducted a needs assessment with district managers and board chairs, secured the use of Language Line translation services for use by community board staff, conducted a series of virtual workshops on board functions, and sourced informational materials on zoning and land use for distribution to the boards.⁸ However, Working Group

⁶ Final Report of the New York City Charter Revision Commission. September 6, 2018.

⁷ Final Report of the New York City Charter Revision Commission. September 6, 2018.

⁸ NYC Civic Engagement Commission 2021 Annual Report. October 2021.

members reported a mix of experiences working with the Commission so far. While for the most part, Working Group members appreciated what the Commission has provided, they felt it was clear (and reasonable) that the City's efforts to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the Commission's capacity to implement new programs. Working Group members also reported feeling that the Commission's main focus thus far has not been working with the community boards, rather they have concentrated their efforts on other Charter-mandated duties, such as creating a citywide participatory budgeting process.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. COMMUNITY BOARD BUDGETS AND OPERATIONS

THE ISSUE: Community Boards are historically under-resourced. A typical board is currently allocated \$231,100 for staff and \$26,407 per year for OTPS (other than professional services - including office supplies, printing, mailing, and other needs), leaving little room for adding more staff, obtaining technical assistance, or upgrading communications and technology.

Community boards have not had a significant baseline budget expansion since 2014⁹, while staffing needs and responsibilities have grown. Especially in the last year-and-a-half, community boards have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis. As the first point of contact between the community and the City, they have been called upon to, in addition to their already significant workload, deal with the economic devastation in their communities and the impacts of the pandemic on City services that they oversee. Yet Working Group participants reported having challenges with hiring and retaining professional staff due to budget constraints. Given that the boards already have very small staffs, the inability to hire and retain employees has a much larger impact on their work than it would in a larger agency.

Even while other agencies' budgets increased over time (for example, the Mayor's office budget increased by 71% from 2014-2020¹⁰), community boards' budgets remain precarious. A lack of baselined funds has meant that even when funding is increased, district managers cannot use the extra funds to hire staff or plan for the long term, because there is no guarantee that these funds will be renewed in the next fiscal year. In fact, in December 2020, the City threatened to cut community boards' budgets by approximately 19%, which would have been

⁹ NYC Independent Budget Office. "Fiscal History: Community Boards."

¹⁰ NYC Independent Budget Office. "Fiscal History: Community Boards."

devastating to the boards. However, the City Council intervened to support the community boards by restoring their budgets.

Some boards have addressed this challenge by creating 501c-3 non-profit organizations or informal “Friends of” groups, which give the boards the option to independently fundraise. As Brooklyn Community Board 6 describes why it has such a group: “At current levels of City funding, CB6’s District Office chronically lags in its ability to keep up with the demands of the Board’s work. Proactive planning and long-term thinking are rare privileges for an organization that is mandated to represent and advocate for the varied needs of its neighborhoods.”¹¹ However, not all boards have the capacity to do this, or constituencies with extra income to donate, creating inequities across boroughs and from board to board.

Also inconsistent are the spaces the City provides for community boards. While the City does cover rent costs, the quality of office spaces varies widely. One district manager reported not having light switches in their office for a decade, while another reported waiting seven years for their bathrooms to be made accessible, as well as frequent flooding in their basement. Another reported being evicted from their space, only to be moved into a non-ADA-accessible basement where the bathroom had no door, where they remained for over a year. Yet another reported identifying a space to upgrade their office, only to have their planned move cancelled by the administration. Some boards are lucky to have their own meeting spaces included with their office, while others must turn to local institutions to provide space for them, creating an additional administrative burden to identify, secure, and coordinate the use of space. This can make the boards’ mandate to hold regular public hearings challenging.

Additionally, human resources support, such as guidance on hiring procedures, vacation time, etc. is generally provided by Borough Presidents, and Working Group members reported that this can be very inconsistent from borough to borough.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1A. BASELINE AN INCREASE IN COMMUNITY BOARD BUDGETS FOR FY 2023. The Working Group will gladly take part in discussions about what the exact number should be, however it should be significant enough to cover the needs identified in this report. Ensuring that the increase is baselined is critical for the reasons outlined above.

1B. PROVIDE CONSISTENT FUNDING FOR ALL COMMUNITY BOARDS FOR TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES, including software, livestreaming, etc. (See section #4 for more on technology.)

¹¹ Friends of Brooklyn Community Board 6 website.

1C. CREATE AND FUND POSITIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL URBAN PLANNERS on each board's staff. The planner should be independent and report directly to the District Manager. (See section #5 for more on land use.)

1D. CREATE A CENTRALIZED OFFICE TASKED SPECIFICALLY WITH WORKING WITH COMMUNITY BOARDS. The Working Group imagines this being similar to City Council's "Central Staff", wherein community board staff can go to a central resource for assistance with technology, policies and procedures, human resources, legal counsel, training, etc. Working Group participants had varied opinions on where in City government this Central Staff should be housed; while its responsibilities would overlap somewhat with the Charter-mandated duties of the Civic Engagement Commission, this would require significant expansion of the scope, funding, and resources of the CEC, and some had concerns about it being directed by an appointed body that is inherently political and frequently changing. For that reason, many Working Group members felt it should be a separate entity, to ensure that employees of this Central Staff would be solely responsible for working with community boards and that their mandate would be consistent over time. (See section #2 for more on training.)

1E. PROVIDE CONSISTENT GUIDANCE ON HUMAN RESOURCES. Staffing policies should not vary from borough to borough. The Central Staff should provide the boards with consistent guidance, including on hiring procedures, vacation and leave policies, retirement, etc.

1F. CONDUCT A PHYSICAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY BOARD OFFICES. The Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) should work with district managers to identify new spaces for those boards whose offices are not easily accessible to the public and/or do not have public meeting space.

1G. CREATE A FORMAL, REGULAR CONVENING OF COMMUNITY BOARD STAFF AND A DIGITAL PLATFORM for information and resource sharing. The Civic Engagement Commission would be a natural partner in this effort.

2. BOARD MEMBER SELECTION, TRAINING, AND CONDUCT

THE ISSUE: As referenced above, each community board has up to 50 non-salaried members who live, work, own a business, or have some other significant interest in the community district. Each board member is considered an official of the City of New York. All members are appointed by their respective Borough President, half of them at the recommendation of their local City Council Member(s). They serve in a voluntary capacity for two-year, staggered terms.

Beyond the prerequisites that members be at least 16 years old and must live, work, or have a significant interest in the district, there are no other mandated requirements for individual board membership. (The Charter also mandates that no more than 25% of each board membership can be City employees.) As mentioned above, recent changes to the Charter require the Borough Presidents to report on their efforts to ensure that board members represent the demographics of the communities they represent. Still, Working Group participants reported that, while many members are deeply engaged in their responsibilities, others are either disconnected from the board's work, or lack the tools they need for success. For example, they noted some members have been appointed who are wholly unfamiliar with the work and processes of community boards, indicating that their appointments were likely more political than practical. One district manager asked, "Why would you join something about which you have no direct knowledge?"

Additionally, though Borough Presidents sometimes provide training for incoming members, the quality and thoroughness of content is disparate across boroughs. While the 2018 Charter changes required the Civic Engagement Commission to provide these trainings, as noted above, the CEC's annual report shows they have only provided a handful of optional trainings since they began in 2019. Working Group members reported that while these trainings were useful, they were not necessarily tailored to community boards, for example a training on parliamentary procedure was conducted by an outside group that generally works with corporate boards.

Board Members come to their positions with a broad range of professional experience, and Working Group members noted that this has resulted in many board members lacking the necessary understanding of important processes, such as implementing Roberts Rules of Order, writing resolutions, commenting effectively on land use and zoning matters, or reporting conflicts of interest. The burden has instead fallen to the district managers and their staff to provide in-depth trainings, which some have more capacity to do than others, once again creating inequities across boards.

Because each board is tasked with creating and enforcing its own bylaws, Working Group participants reported, ensuring active participation from board members and enforcing issues with their conduct can be difficult. They reported that a lack of consistency in and enforcement of attendance policies can lead to some unfortunate "members in name only," who do not attend meetings, but are not removed as the board's bylaws may allow or even require. Additionally, some district managers reported that there is a lack of clear procedure for addressing interpersonal issues that may arise between board members and staff, or between members and other members. Some also reported being aware of conflicts of interest within

their membership, particularly in regard to housing and land use matters, that were going unreported and/or unaddressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

2A. REQUIRE PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS TO ATTEND AT LEAST TWO MEETINGS BEFORE APPLYING, AND PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITH THE APPLICATION. This will ensure that prospective board members are familiar with board procedures and the necessary time commitment before committing to becoming a member.

2B. CREATE AND REQUIRE CONSISTENT TRAINING FOR BOARD MEMBERS ON ZONING, HOUSING AND LAND USE, AND MEETING PROCEDURES. The Civic Engagement Commission and/or the Central Staff should go beyond simply providing informational materials and work with relevant agencies, such as the Departments of City Planning and Housing Preservation and Development and community partners, to create in-depth trainings on these subjects that are required for all board members in all boroughs to take before they start their term and with regular refreshers throughout their time as a member.

2C. PROVIDE CONSISTENT GUIDANCE FOR CREATION AND ENFORCEMENT OF BYLAWS, including attendance and conduct policies and procedures for removing board members.

2D. MAKE CITY EMPLOYEE TRAININGS AVAILABLE FOR BOARD MEMBERS. This should include Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Ethics, Sexual Harassment, and Reasonable Accommodation.

2E. REQUIRE ALL BOARD MEMBERS TO SUBMIT CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST DOCUMENTATION TO THE BOARD OFFICE AND BOROUGH PRESIDENTS ANNUALLY and provide clear information about procedures.

3. THE BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS

THE ISSUE: The Charter mandates a strong role for community boards in the City's process for developing its annual budget. They are responsible for creating a Statement of Needs for their district, holding public hearings on budget priorities, and consulting directly with City agencies to discuss priorities. The boards can then submit up to 40 capital budget requests and up to 25 expense budget requests to the City's Office of Management and Budget. The agencies are then required to respond formally to these requests during preparation of the Preliminary Budget. Board members and staff also have the opportunity to testify at the City Council's budget hearings.

Under the de Blasio administration, the City developed new tools to help streamline this process, including an online platform that the Department of City Planning (DCP) launched in 2016, with the goals of better aligning the District Needs Statements with budget priorities, standardizing the way the boards deliver this information, and assisting City agencies with accessing and identifying relevant requests and quantifying the types of requests coming from all the boards.

While these are laudable goals, this platform has created issues that need to be addressed. Working Group members reported that DCP did not consult with the boards during development of this platform, and the result has been a system that is better at facilitating City functions than supporting meaningful local input. The initial platform was clunky and drop-down menus were not conducive to unique features and needs of community districts. However, many community board staff agreed to work with DCP, attend trainings, and play a role in making improvements to the system, with the understanding that the ultimate result would be a more fruitful consultation process with more meaningful feedback provided by City agencies and the opportunity to aggregate all the boards' requests to create a more clear picture of citywide needs.

However, Working Group members reported that those goals have not been met. The platform has been tweaked to make it more user-friendly since it was first introduced, but budget consultations have not improved, and in fact have become less transparent. District managers said that data they previously received from the Mayor's Office of Operations about 311 complaints in the district to help inform their requests is no longer provided, and that the one-on-one consultations they used to have with many City agencies, including the Department of Transportation, New York City Police Department, and Department of Parks and Recreation no longer take place. Rather, these meetings are now held at the borough level, leaving no room for board staff to raise district-specific needs and have them addressed. The onus is on the boards to request one-on-one meetings if they want them. As stated by one district manager, the group consultations provide a broad scope of the agency's budget, but are not detailed enough to provide a real picture of how the individual boards will be accommodated.

As a result, a small but seemingly growing number of boards do not participate in the budget consultations at all.

Furthermore, agency responses to specific budget requests have declined in quality. An analysis of agency responses to budget requests from the 18 Brooklyn community boards gleaned that of over 900 requests submitted, nearly 75% of the responses provided lacked any substance, including such feedback as, "funding for this request cannot be determined at this time," "further information is required," or "it is recommended that this request be brought to

your elected officials.” For example, a review of boards’ consultations with the City’s Human Resources Administration (HRA) in recent years showed that HRA responses tended to take the form of program descriptions or milestone reports, rather than budget updates or clear responses to specific requests. Reporting that “everything is fine” and that agencies do not have further needs (as they are currently instructed to do by the administration) does not allow community boards and agencies to work together to meet community needs.

As one community board representative said, “We put a lot of time and effort on budget consultations and District Needs....We need to have a better mechanism for response from the agencies for our requests.”

The City Council’s budget hearings provide a good example to build off for the budget consultation process. During these hearings, agencies provide a detailed and specific review of their budgets, including changes in the course of the current fiscal year, any major issues related to the budget, a projection of current trends to out-years, as well as analysis and highlights of their capital budgets. Having access to this information during the budget consultation process would help the boards put their requests into the broader City context and assess district-specific budget priorities vis-a-vis citywide priorities and any anticipated financial challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

3A. REGULARLY PROVIDE DATA TO COMMUNITY BOARD STAFF, such as a summary of monthly 311 complaints from the Mayor’s Office of Operations, to assist the boards with preparation of the District Needs Statements.

3B. REQUIRE ALL AGENCIES THAT ARE REQUIRED BY THE CHARTER TO DO SO TO OFFER INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATION MEETINGS WITH BOARDS in addition to the current borough-level meetings. The Office of Management and Budget could assist with this process.

3C. REQUIRE ALL AGENCIES TO PROVIDE MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK regarding the boards’ budget requests. The Mayor should make it clear to agency representatives that simply stating, “needs further study,” and/or other such comments noted above are insufficient.

3D. PROVIDE MORE DETAILED BUDGET INFORMATION TO BOARDS, similar to the information provided by each City agency to the City Council, so board representatives have the opportunity to provide meaningful testimony.

4. TECHNOLOGY, COMMUNICATIONS, AND OUTREACH

THE ISSUE: Community boards serve as a critical bridge for communication between the government and the general public. The Charter mandates boards to disseminate information to the public; to collect the public's complaints, requests, and inquiries; and to track and communicate directly with local community-based organizations.

Yet the boards struggle with a lack of awareness of their work from the general public. As one district manager put it: "Our main challenge communication-wise is a lack of public knowledge of community boards and an overall lack of civic engagement from our constituents."

On top of this, communicating with the public is increasingly complex, and the day-to-day responsibilities related to this mandate have presented challenges that are directly related to those already raised regarding staffing, budgets, and inconsistent or unavailable training and assistance. Boards are currently responsible for upgrading and maintaining their own technology; one district manager reported spending approximately \$185,000 of their limited budget over the last five years on technology upgrades. All 59 boards currently rely on one person for IT support; while participants in the Working Group reported that he was quite responsive, they agreed that more support would be helpful.

Though DOITT is assisting boards with building functional websites as mandated by the 2018 Charter update, boards' websites currently range from basic to extensive depending on their in-house capabilities or their financial capacity to contract outside help. Experience using social media (and therefore what platforms are used and how) also varies widely and training is not available. As the COVID-19 pandemic has forced boards to conduct meetings virtually or hybrid (simultaneously in-person and virtual), some boards have struggled with this shift, affecting the public's ability to meaningfully participate in meetings.

The Charter requires boards to make their meetings available for broadcast or cablecast, but boards choose to meet this requirement in different ways. Some boards choose to pay for livestreaming of their meetings on their website or social media, while others require participants to join the virtual meeting to watch online. Meanwhile, the digital divide remains an issue. Some boards choose to pay local public access television to broadcast their meetings to those who may not be able to watch online, while others do not. Some boards also address the digital divide by using Every Door Direct Mailing through USPS to contact district residents with important information and meeting notices, while others rely on online notifications. This lack of consistency from board to board in how they reach their constituents creates confusion on behalf of those who might want to participate, and all of this (software used to design flyers, broadcasting contracts, printing, mailing) digs into the boards' already limited budgets.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

4A. PROVIDE COMMUNITY BOARD STAFF WITH CONSISTENT TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATIONS, such as computers and design software, internet connectivity, website platforms, livestreaming capabilities, and hybrid meeting setups.

4B. PROVIDE COMMUNITY BOARD STAFF WITH THE NECESSARY TRAINING to use all of these efficiently, as well as social media.

4C. ENSURE THAT THE BASELINED BUDGET INCREASE FOR COMMUNITY BOARDS INCLUDES SUFFICIENT FUNDING TO COVER THE COST OF NON-DIGITAL COMMUNICATION, including printing and mass mailings.

4D. EXPAND RESOURCES FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE TO COMMUNITY BOARD STAFF, to be provided by the new Central Staff.

4E. PUBLICIZE COMMUNITY BOARDS THROUGH AN ONGOING PSA CAMPAIGN to make the public aware of what the boards do and opportunities to participate. This naturally should be developed in partnership with the boards citywide.

5. LAND USE AND ZONING

THE ISSUE: Community Boards play a crucial role in the land use process. While the opinions they issue in the ULURP process are advisory, their recommendations often influence outcomes when they are carried through negotiations. Community boards must also hold a public hearing as part of the ULURP process, and so serve a crucial role in involving stakeholders in decision making on these issues. Under the City Charter section 197-a, community boards also have the authority to develop their own plans and submit them to the City Planning Commission and City Council for approval.

The rules and procedures surrounding zoning, land use, and housing are notoriously complex. Working Group members reported that training provided for board members by Borough Presidents, the Civic Engagement Commission, and/or third-party organizations are inconsistent or unavailable. This means boards often rely on the expertise of their membership, which varies widely. As one board representative put it, “We should not have to rely on the hope and chance that community members with this type of expertise will apply for board membership and that the Borough President's staff will review applications to make sure such experts are appointed.”

Regarding the creation of “197-a plans,” as the plans that boards may develop under that section of the Charter are known, the number of plans created in recent years has dwindled due to lack of capacity within the boards to undertake this work, combined with the lack of implementation of previous plans that have been passed.¹² One Working Group member said, “City adherence to 197-a plans and/or other formalized community planning recommendations... would better ensure that communities will invest in these planning efforts.”

The Civic Engagement Commission’s Annual Report acknowledges this issue: “In an ideal world, community board budgets could incorporate funds to hire professional land use experts on staff as was the case prior to the Giuliani administration. It is also important to consider the Charter allows for 197-a plans, and without funding, bottom-up participatory planning remains unrealized.” The report indicates that the CEC is developing a “consultant program...to fulfill the mandate to support community boards with ‘neutral’ urban planning resources,” but does not clarify how this program will work or what, if any, budget will be provided for consultants.¹³

Additionally, Working Group members reported issues with holding meaningful public hearings. Specifically, as outlined above, the shift to virtual and/or hybrid meetings has created difficulties. Working Group members also reported not being able to access translation services for meetings, meaning language-isolated individuals are excluded from participation. As one Working Group member pointed out, “(This leaves) out many of the nearly 50% of my (district) that is foreign born. Land use decisions often impact these more vulnerable community residents harder.”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

5A. PROVIDE EACH COMMUNITY BOARD WITH A STAFF LINE AND FUNDING FOR A PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED PLANNER, to be hired by each board.

5B. CREATE AND PROVIDE CONSISTENT TRAINING FOR BOARD MEMBERS IN ZONING, LAND USE, AND HOUSING that is required and regularly available for all new members, and as a refresher for existing members.

5C. ENSURE THAT COMMUNITY BOARDS HAVE NECESSARY TECHNOLOGY AND SPACE TO HOLD MEANINGFUL HEARINGS in person, online, and hybrid.

5D. PROVIDE COMMUNITY BOARDS WITH TRANSLATION SERVICES AND CHILD CARE FOR ULURP HEARINGS, so that the public can meaningfully participate.

¹² Flynn, Gerard. “5 Challenges to de Blasio’s Promise of Inclusive Planning.” City Limits, April 1, 2015.

¹³ NYC Civic Engagement Commission 2021 Annual Report. October 2021.

CONCLUSION

Community boards are the most local, grassroots form of City government, and the connection we provide between our communities and our elected officials and City agencies is important for a healthy democracy. We have always been small but mighty, accomplishing a lot with a little. However, as the city emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become even more clear that the resources provided are insufficient for us to effectively carry out our responsibilities, including our critical role on the frontlines of managing both local and citywide crises. The Future of Community Boards Working Group is hopeful that the new, incoming leadership of our city will seriously consider these recommendations, and proactively work with us to solve the issues that stand in the way of our collaborative success.

Contact us: futureofnyccommunityboards@gmail.com

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY ACTOR

AGENCY	RECOMMENDATION
MAYOR/MAYOR'S OFFICE AND AGENCIES	<p>1A. Baseline an increase in Community Board budgets for FY 2023.</p> <p>1B & 4A-4C. Provide consistent funding for all community boards for technology upgrades and to cover the cost of non-digital communications.</p> <p>1C & 5A. Create and fund positions for professional urban planners to be hired by each board.</p> <p>1D. Create a centralized office ("Central Staff") tasked specifically with working with community boards.</p> <p>1F & 5C. Conduct a physical needs assessment of community board offices and ensure they are accessible have space to hold hearings (DCAS).</p> <p>3A. Regularly provide district-level 311 complaint data to community board staff.</p> <p>3B. Require all agencies that are required by the Charter to do so to offer individual budget consultation meetings with boards. (OMB)</p> <p>3C. Require all agencies to provide meaningful feedback in the budget consultation process.</p> <p>3D. Provide more detailed budget information to boards, similar to what City Council receives.</p> <p>4E. Publicize community boards through an ongoing PSA campaign.</p>

<p>CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMMISSION AND/OR NEW COMMUNITY BOARD “CENTRAL STAFF”</p>	<p>1E. Provide consistent guidance for board staff on human resources.</p> <p>1G. Create a formal, regular convening of community board staff and a digital platform for information sharing.</p> <p>2B & 5B. Create and require consistent training for board members on zoning, housing and land use, and meeting procedures.</p> <p>2C. Provide consistent guidance for creation and enforcement of bylaws.</p> <p>2D. Make City employee trainings available to board members.</p> <p>4A & 4B. Provide community board staff with technology training and support.</p> <p>4D. Expand resources for information technology available to community board staff.</p> <p>5D. Provide community boards with translation services and child care for ULURP hearings</p>
<p>BOROUGH PRESIDENTS</p>	<p>2A. Require prospective members to attend at least two meetings before applying and provide information about roles and responsibilities of membership with the application.</p> <p>2E. Require all members to submit conflict-of-interest documentation to the board offices and Borough Presidents annually.</p>



Coalition For Asian American
Children+Families

Organization: Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)

Name: Lloyd Feng

Position: Policy Coordinator

Testimony:

Thank you and good to see you again, Chair Ung and thank you to Committee members and Committee hearing staff for giving me the chance to speak today.

My name is Lloyd Feng, Policy Coordinator at the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF). For 35 years, CACF has led the fight in New York City for improved and equitable policies, systems, and services to support those most marginalized in the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. We are a member organization with over 60 AAPI-led organizational members and partners serving the AAPI community, which is the fastest growing population in NYC, comprising up to 18% of the city's total population.

Today, I come before you amid budget oversight discussions and hearings to remind the Committee on Governmental Operations to, in the interest of government efficiency, prioritize the revision of the City's existing laws that mandate demographic and linguistic data disaggregation across city agencies (Local Laws 126, 127, 128 from 2016). As you may recall at the last Gov Ops hearing in November 2021 during which we discussed the Intro 1937 that aimed to revise these Local Laws, CACF urged significant changes and we would like to reiterate the importance of revising such laws this year. Since we last met, Governor Hochul also signed a historic NYS law mandating data disaggregation for AA and NH/PI populations at state agencies, offices, commissions, and boards already collecting demographic data.

Many of today's agency testimonies, Committee questions, and public testimonies highlighted the importance of agencies recognizing the diverse needs of different ethnic, immigrant, and linguistic populations in the city. As BOE Executive Director Ryan mentioned, thoughtful community-driven outreach and engagement with Korean-speaking populations made a considerable impact in increasing voter education and participation last year. Revising the data disaggregation laws to incentivize and compel implementation across agencies will enable all agencies to collect more granular, better data that will ultimately aid them in their individual mission and efforts to serve New Yorkers.



That said, it is imperative that the City Council reintroduce a data disaggregation revision bill so that we can take the necessary steps toward data equity for not only the AAPI community, but also for groups across the city like Black, White, Hispanic, Indigenous, LGBT+, and others.

We strongly recommend that any future considerations of oversight of city agency operations will include evaluating demographic and linguistic data collected on communities and people served by agency functions and agencies' data collection practices. After all, just as Mayor Adams often quips that crime reduction/public safety is a prerequisite to prosperity and recovery, good data collection underpins good governance, good policy, and government efficiency.

**Written Testimony by the New York State Nurses Association
(Part of the Climate Works for All Coalition)
Preliminary Budget Hearing - Governmental Operations
March 22, 2022**

Nella Pineda-Marcon, BSN, RN-BC

Mount Sinai Morningside and Mount Sinai West

Dir. at Large (Secretary); Chair of the Climate & Environmental Justice Committee

My name is Nella Pineda-Marcon and I work as a nurse at Mount Sinai Morningside and Mount Sinai West. I am also a proud union member of the New York State Nurses Association. I serve as a Director at Large (Secretary) and am Chair of our Climate & Environmental Justice Committee. NYSNA represents 42,000 nurses across New York State, including 25,000 RNs in New York City. This includes nurses in all the city's public hospitals.

As nurses on the frontlines of patient care, we have seen up close the horrors of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 67,000 people in New York City have died and countless others have been left wounded, physically and emotionally. We have seen the deep impact that the pandemic has had on low-income communities of color. The disparities are all-encompassing, affecting marginalized communities physically, mentally, and economically. We know that this is just a preview of what lies ahead if we do not take climate change seriously. It is critical that we heed the warning.

In fact, we have already seen the destruction that climate change and environmental degradation has had on the health of our patients. Increases in heat have contributed to an increase in hypertension. Pollutants are being discharged into our city air, causing a steady increase in chronic asthma conditions in our most vulnerable communities. In addition, these communities also face environmental injustices like contaminated water supplies and tainted

soil. They are also the ones that are usually hit the hardest by catastrophic events such as Superstorm Sandy. This is not OK.

We are proud members of the Climate Works for All coalition, a coalition of unions, climate and environmental justice organizations, and advocacy groups. We fully endorse the Green Healthy Schools campaign. Investing \$14.5 billion by 2030 (an annual investment of \$1.8 billion over the next 8 years) to install solar panels and do deep retrofits will go far in combatting pollution and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In doing this we would want to prioritize those schools located in environmental justice communities. This undertaking would create many good, green, career jobs. We would want the hiring process to put emphasis on those that are traditionally marginalized, such as women, immigrants and people of color.

As nurses we are always making the link between climate and environmental justice and public health. The installation of HVACs in schools is incredibly important. These do not only create cleaner air but increase ventilation that can mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 and other airborne diseases. This has become an even more significant need as we see the lifting of critical protections taking place, such as masking.

Ultimately the Green Healthy Schools roadmap will be a huge driver for NYC to achieve its climate goals. NYC Public schools are known to be some of the largest polluters and account for 25% of all city-owned buildings. Solar panel installations will cut carbon emission by at least 50%.

We must treat this climate crisis like the emergency it is. We must do better for our children, our patients, and our communities. This plan is a solid step forward for the sustainability of New York City and the health of its residents. We also have an opportunity to act as a catalyst for our state, the country, and the world.

Thank you for your time and consideration today.

NONPROFIT NEW YORK

A relentless,
collective
force for good.

To: New York City Council Committee on Government Operations
From: Chai Jindasurat, Vice President, Policy, Nonprofit New York
Date: Tuesday, March 22, 2022
Re: FY23 Government Operations Budget Testimony

Good afternoon Chair Ung and members of the City Council Government Operations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Nonprofit New York. Nonprofit New York is a membership based organization of approximately 1,000 nonprofit organizations in the New York City area. Our mission is to strengthen and unite the nonprofit sector, through our member services, capacity building work for the sector, and policy advocacy to promote nonprofits.

I am testifying this morning in support of two campaigns relevant to Government Operations: 1) A Place at the Table; and implementation of Our City Our, Our Vote.

A Place at the Table¹ seeks to increase nonprofits' ability to advocate by reforming the lobbying expenditure threshold

All nonprofits have a constitutional and legal right to engage in lobbying.² However, according to the National Council of Nonprofits, fewer than 3% of nonprofits engage in lobbying.³

Nonprofit advocacy brings more voices to the policymaking process

Nonprofits often represent under-represented communities, and deeply understand the challenges faced by the communities nonprofits serve. In a time when New Yorkers and nonprofits face economic uncertainty, record unemployment, racial injustice, a looming eviction crisis, affordability, and other challenges, policymakers need to hear more from nonprofits, not less.

The expenditure threshold prevents nonprofits from engaging in advocacy

During a listening session three years ago with nonprofits and legal practitioners, the \$5,000 expenditure required for nonprofits to have to register with the city clerk as lobbyists was the most common barrier shared with us. An organization that plans to spend \$5,000 in a year doing legislative advocacy must: register as a lobbyist and submit bi-monthly reports on their activities to the state (and city); file a minimum of 6 reports each year; and risk paying late filing fees ranging from \$75 to

¹ Campaign page from previous City Council class and list of signatories: <https://p2a.co/p0btebo>

² 26 U.S.C. § 501(c)(3)

³ National Council of Nonprofits (2019). Nonprofit Impact Matters. <https://www.nonprofitimpactmatters.org/>

\$2,000 per filing.⁴ **This causes many nonprofits to decide not to lobby at all - taking their voices, and the voices of their communities, out of the conversation.** Reporting lobbying activity can be expensive - **big lobbyists spend upwards of \$500 a month on reporting alone.** Small nonprofits simply can't afford that.

We are hopeful a new bill will be introduced to raise the expenditure threshold to \$10,000

New York City currently allows architects to spend up to \$10,000 before registering and reporting as a lobbyist,⁵ and we seek the same standard for nonprofits. During the previous City Council class we were successful in getting a bill introduced, [Int. 2148-2020](#), but it unfortunately did not pass. We are hopeful the new City Council will again introduce legislation to raise the threshold and create a place at the table for grassroots and under-resourced organizations to make their voices heard.

Nonprofit New York supports implementation of Our City, Our Vote

Nonprofit New York is also a proud supporter of Our City Our Vote (OCOV), Int. 1867. We recommend as part of OCOV's implementation:

1. The creation of a **\$25,000,000 fund to be distributed to CBOs**, particularly the Our City, Our Vote Coalition, to conduct truly expansive city-wide voter registration, voter education, and GOTV.
2. An increase in the budgets of **every City agency**, department and office that will be involved in the implementation of municipal voting, including:
 - a. **\$25,000,000** for the Board of Elections
 - b. **10% increase** from the FY22 budget of the Civic Engagement Commission, the Campaign Finance Board, and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
 - c. **5% increase** from the FY22 budget of the Department of Youth & Community Development and any other relevant City agency, department and office.

Sincerely,



Chai Jindasurat

⁴ 19 NYCRR Part 943 - Comprehensive Lobbying Regulations.

⁵ New York City Administrative Code § 3-213

New York City Council – Committee on Governmental Operations

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2023, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2023-2026 and The Fiscal 2022 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

Testimony from the New York Immigration Coalition March 22, 2022

Good Afternoon. My name is Wennie Chin and I'm the Director of Civic Engagement at the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella policy and advocacy organization that works statewide with over 200 immigrant-serving member organizations. Thank you to Chair Ung and the members of the City Council Government Operations Committee for convening this important hearing and allowing us the opportunity to submit testimony on the organization's budget and policy priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

The City Council took an important step toward New York City being a true representative democracy with passage of the Our City, Our Vote legislation (Int 1867), the Municipal Voting law that was passed on December 9, 2021 and adopted on January 9, 2022.

In December 2022, over 800,000 individuals with Green Cards and those authorized to work will become eligible to register to vote. Those same individuals will also be able to vote, depending on when the first election is held, in January 2023. The City Council's investment in the implementation of this law will be crucial to the initial and future success of municipal voting in NYC. It will also serve as a blueprint for other municipalities that are going to follow what this Council did and pass similar legislation. Because of these factors there is a huge need and opportunity to ensure that organizations are funded sufficiently to perform their duties at an adequate and necessary level.

The NYIC is proposing:

1. The creation of a **\$25,000,000** fund to be distributed to CBO's, particularly the Our City, Our Vote Coalition, to conduct truly expansive city-wide voter registration, voter education, and GOTV. This initiative will build upon previous civic engagement efforts investments and continue to leverage the direct reach that community-based organizations have to drive voter engagement and participation across New York City
2. **An increase in the budgets** of every City agency, department and office that will be involved in the implementation of municipal voting
 - a. **\$25,000,000** for the Board of elections to facilitate the hiring and training of staff, printing and creation of new multilingual voter registration forms, development of voter cards and guides, creation of additional early voting sites, public education efforts, and related activities. We urge the that the Board of election take a headstart

in their planning and preparations to ensure an effective implementation within the agency.

- b. **10% increase from the FY22 budget** of the Civic Engagement Commission, the Campaign Finance Board, and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
- c. **5% increase from the FY22 budget** of the Department of Youth & Community Development and any other relevant City agency, department and office

The New York Immigration Coalition believes that these initiatives will create conduit for the City to immigrant communities during the implementation of this historic law to provide crucial education and outreach services, particularly to communities that face significant language access barriers.

Testimony of Queens Community House
Committee on Governmental Operations
Council Member Sandra Ung, Chair
Implementation of Municipal Voting Rights
March 22, 2022



Queens Community House is proud to submit our testimony to support the effective implementation of the municipal voting rights law that expands voting rights in New York City elections to nearly one million immigrant New Yorkers.

Starting in January, our noncitizen neighbors will have the opportunity to participate in one of the most fundamental rituals of our democracy and cast their ballots for the candidates they want to represent their communities. These neighbors will now have a say in how their tax money is spent. They will have a say in the education policies that impact the schools their children attend. They will have the opportunity to vote for candidates who reflect their positions and values in the communities where they work, own businesses, go to church/temple/mosques, attend community board meetings, and volunteer.

But for the intentions of this law to become reality, the mechanisms of democracy must be given adequate resources. City agencies and community-based organizations must work together to ensure that our immigrant neighbors are made aware of their right to vote and in what elections, new voters are registered, their paperwork is processed, voter rolls are updated, and new registrants are educated on how to exercise their right to vote. Every City agency, department, and office that will be involved in the implementation of municipal voting must have their budgets increased. We therefore urge the Council to fund:

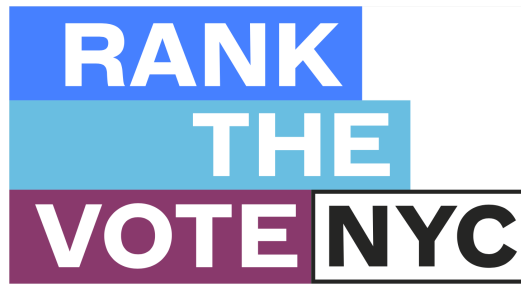
- **\$25 million** for the Board of Elections;
- a **10% increase** in the budgets of the Civic Engagement Commission, the Campaign Finance Board, and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs; and
- a **5% increase** for the Department of Youth & Community Development and any other relevant City agency, department, and office.

Finally, we ask for the creation of a **\$25 million fund** to be distributed to community-based organizations, particularly those who are members of the Our City, Our Vote Coalition, to conduct truly expansive city-wide voter registration, voter education, and get out the vote campaigns.

Queens Community House serves 25,000 residents in 14 different neighborhoods across Queens each year. Queens is arguably the most diverse county in the United States and, in many ways, it represents our future in a global world: one where people from many different countries live side by side, sharing concerns, aspirations, and a common humanity if not a common passport. In this world, increased voting rights will strengthen our communities. We have both an opportunity and an obligation to lead the way, and to do it in a way that sets an example for the rest of the world.

We applaud the City Council for its commitment to democracy in passing the municipal voting rights law. We now call on the Council to sustain that commitment by budgeting for its effective implementation, without which the law will have little of its potential impact.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify.



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF RANK THE VOTE NYC SUBMITTED TO PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING- GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS, MARCH 22 , 2022

We recommend New York City should include support for a citywide voter education program in its budget on an on-going basis. We base our recommendation on three factors.

First, the successful introduction of ranked choice voting (RCV) in last year's June municipal primary¹ illustrates that support for voter education can have a positive impact. The extensive outreach and education effort by numerous organizations representing many different communities was significantly assisted when the city allocated funding for a pre-primary advertising and education push. However, the city's efforts have been criticized as starting too close to the June primary to reach effectively into all of the city's myriad and diverse communities. While it is true that the greatest amount of city resources wasn't dedicated to the RCV Education effort until 3 months before the primary, it is also true that the most extensive voter education regarding RCV was properly postponed to start after the 2020 presidential election. In 2020, voters' attention was almost exclusively focused on the federal election. Municipal elections were just not on most voters' minds. A municipal voter education and outreach program which focuses solely on ranked choice voting education will be subject to uneven application, peaks and valleys of activity tied to the municipal election calendar, which blunts its desired impact.

Second, the successful implementation of non-citizen voting, adopted last year, will require an extensive education and outreach effort. The program cannot initially be expected to be self-executing if it is to register and turnout substantial numbers of eligible residents. While there will no doubt be extensive outreach and education efforts by numerous civil society and social service groups on the ground, experience with census outreach and ranked choice voting education shows that the resources available to the city dwarf by many magnitudes any privately funded programs. New York City's non-citizen residents come from many different countries. Some countries have little or no tradition of democratic elections. Residents originating from those countries will need education that emphasizes civic engagement and the value of voting, in addition to voter outreach that provides familiarity with how, when and where to register and vote in New York City. Others come from countries where voting is much simpler to access than it is in the United States. Those residents will need significant outreach and education to familiarize them with the American system and help them access the municipal ballot.

Finally, historically, New York City voter turn-out rate has been trending downward. Resources directed towards voter registration have resulted in some gains in registration, although more

¹ Exit polling can be found [here](#).

can be done. We expect that the planned implementation of Automatic Voter Registration by New York State will have a positive impact in adding registered voters in New York City. However, experience shows that registration does not automatically result in turn-out.

Our experience, as well as the experience of partner organizations, with voter registration drives and RCV education has led us to the conclusion that the most effective way to begin to reverse low voter turn-out and any lingering concerns regarding familiarity with ranked choice voting is by the creation of a city-funded program of community-based civic engagement AND voter education. To that end, Ranked the Vote NYC has begun planning conversations with partner organizations to design a program that can be presented to the Council.

Accordingly, we make the following initial recommendations:

- Commit a minimum of \$5 million in the upcoming budget year for a city-funded program of community-based civic engagement and voter education, with the expectation that the program funding would continue for at least 4 years, through the next mayoral election. The City funding would support a program that is administered by, and centered in, community partners with the cultural and linguistic competence and community-based experience to successfully implement such a program. Such a program would have clear metrics and performance expectations and subgrant to an agreed number of community organizations, in addition to using culturally and linguistically competent organizers and student fellows. The program would build on, but expand, current voter outreach efforts at various agencies.
- Require regular coordination between the different city agencies which currently have responsibility for some form of civic engagement, with an emphasis on cross-agency standardization of terms in the different languages most familiar to voters, materials, and advertising.
- As a condition of funding, require the New York City Board of Elections to coordinate outreach and advertising efforts with the Voter Assistance Advisory Committee. Some such coordination has taken successfully place at times. It should be regularized and expanded, rather than occurring episodically.
- As a condition of funding, require the New York City Board of Elections to establish a multi-person communications unit with regular reporting obligations to the City Council.

In furtherance of these recommendations, Ranked the Vote NYC has begun planning conversations with partner organizations to design a program that can be presented to the Council. We look forward to working with members of the Government Operations Committee as well as other Council members to provide the information and education that New York City's voters need to be effective participants in our representative system of government.



March 22, 2022

Hello members of the Governmental Operations Committee,

My name is Adeel Ahmed, and I am the community organizer for The Black Institute. Our organization engages in research and actions on issues through the lens of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. I am providing my written testimony on the seriousness of having the implementation of the law Introduction 1867-2020 be included with the new budget. I echo the others' call for funding voter education on the implementation of this law, but I also want to emphasize the inclusion of racial and cultural equity regarding that. The truth is black and brown people have faced voter suppression systemically for quite some time. We want to make sure that this does not happen with the new budget and the implementation of the new law. As we call for you to fund voter education, consider collaborating with community organizations and community members and advising and working alongside educating lawful noncitizens their new coming ability to vote municipally. Please also consider language barriers and funding strategies in reach out to institutions of faith for this new law. Please work alongside the Our City Our Vote coalition, a diverse coalition of organizations from all different areas, who are experts on all the suggestions I just mentioned to working on having those suggestions implemented. Thank you.

Adeel Ahmed
Community Organizer
The Black Institute



45 Broadway, 22nd Floor, New York, NY 10006
212-967-0322 | www.unhny.org

**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council Committee on Government Operations
Council Member Sandra Ung, Chair**

**Oversight - FY 2023 Preliminary Budget
Submitted by Lena Cohen, Senior Policy Analyst
March 22, 2021**

Thank you, Chair Ung and members of the New York City Council Committee on Government Operations for the opportunity to testify. My name is Lena Cohen, and I am a Senior Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). UNH is a policy and social change organization representing 45 neighborhood settlement houses, 40 in New York City, that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life.

A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

Introduction 1867 Implementation

For over a century, settlement houses have driven higher levels of civic engagement, particularly among disenfranchised community members. UNH works closely with settlement houses to promote civic engagement across New York City through leading nonpartisan voter mobilization, promoting the inclusion of all residents in the 2020 Census and the redistricting process, and advocating for modernized election laws to ensure residents who live and work in the city are fairly represented in local government.

Expanding the right to vote is essential to an inclusive, representative democracy; as such, UNH is a proud co-lead of the Our City, Our Vote coalition which advocated for the city to restore municipal voting rights for over 800,000 Legal Permanent Residents and individuals with work authorization.

In December of 2021, the City Council overwhelmingly passed Introduction 1867 to usher in the largest enfranchisement of New York City municipal voters in over a century. Now, these neighbors have a say on the issues that we all care about, like schools, safety, food and shelter access, public transportation, and more. On December 9th, 2022 the law goes into effect and eligible non-citizens will be able to register to vote in city elections starting in 2023. It is crucial that the City begin preparations for this law to go into effect right away, as we learned with both the 2020 Census and with the implementation of Ranked Choice Voting that early education is key to driving civic engagement in all neighborhoods.

Budget Recommendation

With the passage of Intro 1867, New York City has an opportunity to encourage greater civic engagement and mobilize our communities to advocate for good public policies that invest in and enhance our city. To effectively implement this legislation, **UNH recommends a \$25 million City Council Initiative to support community-based outreach to newly enfranchised voters.** This funding would be distributed to community-based organizations (CBOs) to conduct citywide, nonpartisan voter registration, voter education, and get-out-the-vote activities. This initiative could be modeled after the 2020 Census Initiative that the Council previously supported, and would be a key way to engage smaller, grassroots organizations with connections in key neighborhoods as a complement to the broader outreach efforts being planned by the City.

Additionally, the city must increase the budgets of every government agency, department, and office that will be responsible for the implementation of municipal voting. The breakdown of this funding would be as follows:

1. **\$25,000,000** for the Board of Elections
2. **10% increase from the FY22 budget** of the Civic Engagement Commission, the Campaign Finance Board, and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
3. **5% increase from the FY22 budget** of the Department of Youth & Community Development and any other relevant City agency, department, or office.

Conclusion

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you to strengthen and expand voter education and outreach to newly enfranchised New Yorkers. For more information about this testimony or budget ask, please contact me at Lena Cohen, lcohen@unhny.org.

My name is Donna Romo and I am urging the members of this committee to denounce what I term the new segregation and discrimination by co-sponsoring bill number INT 0001-2022 otherwise known as dismissal of summonses alleging violations of executive orders in connection with COVID-19, along with the refund of any monetary penalties paid in connection with such violations. These actions are acts of violating a human being's protections and rights under the state and federal Constitution, the HIPPA, ADA (American Disability Act), the Civil Rights Act and the Nuremburg Code.

These violations can also be considered federal felonies:

18 USC 242: Whoever, under color of any law, statute, ordinance, regulation, or custom, willfully subjects any person in any State, Territory, Commonwealth, Possession, or District to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured or protected by the Constitution or laws of the United States, or to different punishments, pains, or penalties, on account of such person being an alien, or by reason of his color, or race, than are prescribed for the punishment of citizens, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than one year, or both ...

And:

Title 42 1983. 42 U.S. Code § 1983 - Civil action for deprivation of rights

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress ...

By continuing to allow, and not voting in line with bill number Int 0001-2022, you are violating your Oath of Office of which you solemnly swear to support and uphold the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of New York, and the Charter of the City of New York.

Good afternoon Chair Ung, and members of the council. My name is Sean Lally here today representing myself.

I see alot of Democrats using language of inclusivity, "Delivering a fairer, safer, and brighter future for Every New Yorker." is Eric Adams motto on his Twitter page so then why is it that he refuses to end this two-tiered, Jim Crow reminiscent society?

Time was, if you were born with the wrong color skin you couldn't patronize certain restaurants, couldn't walk down the street, buy groceries, or go to the park without getting harassed. Is that the society you want your children to grow up in?

I will take this opportunity today to call on all members of the New York City Council to denounce the policies of Jim Crow and move to strike this two tiered society. I call on the members of this committee to co-sponsor Int 0001-2022 Otherwise known as Dismissal of summonses alleging violations of executive orders in connection with COVID-19 and the refund of monetary penalties paid in connection with such violations.

This law would lift the economic burden of compliance that NYC puts on Businesses and would in turn help the city build back better.

New York City Council – Committee on Governmental Operations

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2023, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2023-2026 and The Fiscal 2022 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

Testimony from the New York Immigration Coalition March 22, 2022

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In December 2022, over 800,000 individuals with Green Cards and those authorized to work will become eligible to register to vote. Those same individuals will also be able to vote, depending on when the first election is held, in January 2023. The City Council's investment in the implementation of this law will be crucial to the initial and future success of municipal voting in NYC. It will also serve as a blueprint for other municipalities that are going to follow what this Council did and pass similar legislation. Because of these factors there is a huge need and opportunity to ensure that organizations are funded sufficiently to perform their duties at an adequate and necessary level.

The NYIC is proposing:

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The New York Immigration Coalition believes that these initiatives will create conduit for the City to immigrant communities during the implementation of this historic law to provide crucial education and outreach services, particularly to communities that face significant language access barriers.