

Open Data Law Oversight Hearing

NYC Council Committee on Technology

October 27, 2014

Good afternoon, Chairman Vacca and Members of the Technology Committee, my name is Dominic Mauro, Staff Attorney for Reinvent Albany. My organization co-chairs the NYC Transparency Working Group and is an active part of the broader civic coalition working on open data policy in New York City and New York State.

We join with our colleagues in thanking you very much for holding this oversight hearing. Council oversight is extremely important for ensuring that the hard won Open Data Law is complied with by city agencies.

Overall, we are excited about the progress of the Open Data Law, which is still in its early days. We believe the City's open data efforts are robust, healthy, and improving. The implementation of the Open Data Law is fundamentally strong, though much work remains. First, here's what's working:

1. The City has five fully funded, dedicated open data staff. This is probably more than any state or local government, and gives the City the capacity to rapidly improve and expand its open data efforts.
2. Open data has strong support from the Mayor and City Council and has a synergistic relationship with the Mayor's Office of Data Analysis (MODA) which ensure it is sustainable.
3. Open data has an expanding group of public stakeholders, including businesses, academics, advocates and government who use the data.
4. The quantity and quality of the data available continues to expand, and with it, so does use of that data.

We especially applaud DOITT for its sincere and energetic efforts to get agency data published. DOITT is clearly meeting the spirit of the Open Data Law, and their staff has strived to make it work.

The Open Data Law calls for a new way for government to share information with the public, going forward, forever. One way to think about it is that we

are in year three of a permanent change lasting for centuries. Every year, the City needs to get a bit better at Open Data – and fortunately, we have the resources and commitment to succeed.

In the next year, we hope the de Blasio administration advances open data in four key ways:

First, the Mayor's Office of Operations needs to get agencies to put the most frequently FOILED and requested data on the Open Data Portal. Most agencies still do not understand that the Open Data Law is intended to help them reduce FOIL requests, reduce 311 requests for information, and help them get information to the public at a lower cost with less hassle.

Second, DOITT needs to create a public feedback process for the Open Data Portal which results in more and better city data being put online. When data errors are discovered and reported by the public, the responsible agency should correct those problems. DOITT should ensure that the public can track the progress of those corrections.

Third, the severe problems with the search function of the Open Data Portal have to be completely fixed. Despite repeated, emphatic, requests from the Transparency Working Group and other many open data stakeholders, it took DOITT more than two years to correct crippling flaws with the search function – flaws that severely reduced the usefulness of the Open Data Platform, and undoubtedly kept people from using the data on it. This kind of fundamental usability problem, cannot be repeated, and cannot take so long to fix in the future.

Four, DOITT needs to clearly show the status of data sets to be published, or which have been delayed or removed from the open data plan. Overall, it's hard for the public to tell if the City is meeting its own data release targets. For example, a dataset essentially disappears from view if it was scheduled for release in the 2013 plan, delayed, and then not included in the 2014 plan.

DOITT and City Hall are easily capable of achieving these goals, and we look forward to assessing their progress with you at the 2015 oversight hearing.

Thank You.