



Testimony to 2024 NYC Charter Revision Commission On Ranked Choice Voting and NYC Elections

June 17, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. Reinvent Albany is a watchdog organization that advocates for open and accountable government in New York. Today's testimony will focus on New York City election issues.

We urge the Charter Revision Commission to follow the basic oath taken by doctors: "First, do no harm," or put another way, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

We strongly believe that New York City's core democracy programs work well for voters. Our city is a national leader due to our strong pro-voter and campaign finance laws, which have evolved and improved over decades. Importantly, our laws include mechanisms for continuous improvement, like the Campaign Finance Board's post-election reports on voting and campaign finance. These provide fact-based analyses of voter participation and campaign contributions that help the City determine the next best steps for strengthening our democracy.

This Charter Commission intends to publish preliminary recommendations on June 26th, which is just nine days away. Given this very short timeline, we urge the Commission not to propose sweeping changes to our election laws, including altering how votes are cast or candidates raise money for office.

Ranked Choice Voting works

We strongly support Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), and were one of many groups [urging its adoption](#) via the 2019 Charter Revision Commission. Here are some of the many benefits of the program:

1. RCV saves voters millions of dollars by sparing them the cost of a runoff election.
2. RCV reduces polarization by encouraging candidates to run more positive campaigns.
3. RCV creates a democracy in which more voters have a say in who becomes their elected representative.

In combination with the City's robust public campaign finance system, the 2021 elections also produced the most diverse NYC Council in history – two-thirds of the current City Council are people of color, up from 51%. Additionally, 61% are women, up from 27%. We believe that ranked choice voting played a major part in this, and continue to support its use in New York City. We strongly believe RCV should continue for the 2025 elections.

Campaign Finance Board and public matching program works

We testified to the New York City Council about the campaign finance system just [last week](#). We think the City's campaign finance system is not in crisis, and public matching funds are well protected. We believe the CFB, though imperfect, does a good job protecting public funds while helping campaigns navigate complicated rules and getting them matching funds.

We know there is always going to be some dissatisfaction with a system that punishes offenders after the campaign audit is completed rather than when they are caught, but that is an inherent part of the NYC campaign finance process and is difficult to change. However, the CFB can hugely reduce the time it takes to do audits, and our understanding is that this is their new administration's top priority.

Further, we believe that the public matching system in New York City works. Coupled with strong doing-business restrictions, the public matching system amplifies the voices of small donors so they can be heard over special interests seeking to influence city government. The program also makes it possible for candidates without deep pockets to run competitive campaigns, and we strongly believe it must be retained.

Term limits work

We also believe that term limits in New York City have resulted in a more representative democracy where a greater diversity of voices and perspectives are reflected in the elected officials representing the City. Open seats draw greater voter turnout as well, which ensures that more voters participate to select the candidates who will represent them. We strongly believe term limits must be retained.

Even-year elections a good idea

One known and [well-studied problem](#) the Commission should review is the timing of New York City elections. The Charter Revision Commission cannot unilaterally change the timing of the City's elections due to the New York State Constitution's requirements, but it could spend time studying this problem.

According to the NYC Campaign Finance Board's [2023 Voter Analysis Report](#), while voter registration remained high in 2023 (81.8%) , voter turnout was lackluster, at 7.2% in the primary election and 12.8% in the general election. This is abysmal, and has been a problem for New York City elections for decades.

Given the consideration of even-year elections by the New York State Legislature this [past legislative session](#), the Charter Revision Commission studying mechanisms to allow even-year elections to be implemented in the event of NYS constitutional changes would be a much better use of your resources than undoing years of improvements to our election and campaign finance laws.