

Testimony of John Kaehny, Executive Director Reinvent Albany  
before the  
New York City Council Committee on Technology  
Oversight Hearing on Local Law 11 of 2012 (NYC Open Data Law)

November 20, 2013

Good afternoon. I'm John Kaehny, executive director of Reinvent Albany, and co-Chair of the New York City Transparency Working Group. In that role I worked closely with Council, the Mayor's Office and DOITT to win passage of the NYC Open Data Law. My non-profit group works with both city and state government to promote the use of everyday technology to make government more open and accountable.

We've handed out copies of the Transparency Working Group's report "NYC Open Data Law Progress and Challenges" which my testimony partially summarizes.

1. We strongly support the NYC Open Data Law and its intent. It's a smart-phone era tool for opening up the valuable government information that has been gathered at great public expense. It makes that information vastly easier for everyone, in and out of government to use. The NYC Open Data Law is widely considered one of the best in the world, and we urge the council and the next administration to fully fund and support its implementation.

2. The Open Data Law is working. It has led to the release of long sought datasets like the PLUTO and ACRIS tax lot and real estate databases, and 311 complaints. The City's open data portal is being used by the public, advocates, apps developers and journalists. The NY Times and National Public Radio regularly cite and credit the open data portal. NYC Big Apps has given open data

in NYC a big push, and apps like Roadify, Yelp and NYC Building Violations make government information more easily accessible. Government agencies are starting to use the city's Open Data Portal for their own, easy, data retrieval. TLC has published data on medallion vehicles and drivers.

3. Implementation of the Open Data Law needs improvement. Many city agencies did not submit the mandated Agency Compliance Plans. Of those that did, many gave themselves a multi-year extension on releasing data that was supposed to have been released on March 13, 2013. (That was the deadline for publishing data currently on city websites in a non-open format.) At that time, agencies released about half of the datasets they should have. Additionally, the data portal itself needs improvement, especially the search function.

4. Despite much progress, there is an overall mismatch between what's on the portal and what the public wants to see. Many agencies have dragged their feet on releasing data they know the public is interested in. For example, the NYPD, has not made data on crimes and traffic crashes available in usable, open formats --- though most major American cities already do this. Also, important city data, especially rules and reports, are still only available in closed formats, or are being sold in an open format in apparent contradiction of the law.

5. We have two recommendations for getting the data the public is most interested in published. First, the city should be using 311, FOIL and website usage to identify common requests for data, and making those common requests public. Second, the council should pass a new "One Strike You're In" law which requires that data sets released through FOIL be published in the open data portal.

Thank you.