



Testimony to NYC Charter Commission on Government Reform
Queens Public Input Session

***Support for Even-Year Elections and a “Vote Once” General Election With
No Primary that Harnesses the Logic of Ranked Choice Voting***

May 28, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to comment remotely and compliments to the Commission and staff on your excellent preliminary report.

Reinvent Albany advocates for more transparent and accountable New York government. Our staff of policy experts have drafted and passed dozens of city and state bills, and we are frequently called upon by journalists and elected officials.

The [preliminary staff report](#) correctly emphasized long-standing concerns about poor voter turnout and identified even-year elections and some form of open primaries as possible solutions. The Commission also noted that 1 million NYC voters are unaffiliated and cannot vote in party primaries.

Research suggests that the two biggest factors driving local election turnout is [whether the election is in an even year](#) and [how competitive a race is](#). New York City rarely has both a competitive Democratic Party primary and general election for citywide offices, and typically has very low turnout for one or both elections.

Today we are here to urge you to place two charter changes to the election process on the ballot.

First, ***Even-Year Elections*** are a great idea and should be on the ballot.

Second, we urge you to consider a ***Vote Once*** process that holds a single election using ranked choice voting (RCV). RCV has changed everything, and the overwhelming logic to best take advantage of this voting process is to hold one election and eliminate primaries. Turning eligible voters out once is far easier than turning them out twice, and holding an RCV election guarantees the highest level of competitiveness without splitting the vote. San Francisco uses a general election RCV process with no primary

and has extremely high voter turnout: 79% in the 2024 San Francisco mayoral election vs. NYC's 23% turnout in the 2021 general election for mayor.

Another potential advantage of Vote Once is that it could dilute the ability of a single issue independent expenditure (IE) to sway an election in a general election with only two candidates. Vote Once does not have to be non-partisan; candidates could list their political party or parties to provide voters with more information, but candidates should be listed once.

Vote Once would save taxpayers tens of millions of dollars: the June 2023 City Council primary [cost the Board of Elections \\$31 million](#). Some of the savings from eliminating primaries could go into encouraging the public to vote in the general election.

Can NYC adopt Vote Once via charter change alone?

New York State Election Law Section 8-100 requires New York City to hold primaries. This would have to be changed to allow for Vote Once.

Support for Semi-Open Primaries

We think the Commission should also consider the more politically palatable alternative of “semi-open” primaries, which allow unaffiliated voters to participate in party primaries of their choosing. This system is currently in use in Massachusetts for state elections. This change would have the benefit of providing unaffiliated voters – of which there are 1 million in New York City – a more meaningful choice at the polls, while minimizing the size of the change and, unfortunately, also the benefits.

Support for Empowering MOCS as a Mayoral Agency

Lastly, on other issues you are considering, Reinvent Albany strongly supports making the Mayor's Office of Contract Services a full mayoral agency. We support giving it the power to mandate other agencies standardize procurement procedures, vendor evaluations, and data collection.

Thank you for your consideration.