



Testimony to NYC Council Charter Revision Commission

Re: Updated Council Charter Proposals Should Further Strengthen Oversight Agencies, and Mayoral Removal Should Go Before Voters

June 23, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments for today's Charter Commission hearing. Reinvent Albany advocates for more transparent and accountable New York government.

We thank the Commission and its staff for their [updated recommendations](#) from the Preliminary Staff Report, and in particular its continued focus on strengthening oversight agencies and a more fleshed out proposal on mayoral removal. We urge the Commission to make sure these recommendations are as effective as possible, and get our ethics oversight bodies up to full strength. Democratic norms, the rule of law, and the institutions that work to promote these ideals are being rapidly eroded, and it is crucial that New York City make its oversight agencies as strong as possible.

We urge this Commission to do the following five things:

1. **Restore the capacity of the Conflicts of Interest Board and Department of Investigation via a formula for independent funding** that gets the agencies back to prior staffing and funding levels, as adjusted by inflation (\$3.5 million for COIB, and \$63 million for DOI for FY26).
2. **Allow COIB and DOI greater independence in their hiring and budgeting decisions** like the Campaign Finance Board.
3. **Require a City Council hearing and approval for the removal of the DOI Commissioner.**
4. **Put the two-step removal mechanism for the mayor on the ballot**, allowing NYC to have more local control over removal of the mayor. Currently, only the governor can remove the mayor for malfeasance or corruption, and the current NYC Charter inability process is insufficient.
5. **Reject allowing ballot proposals to be submitted to voters at low-turnout special elections.**

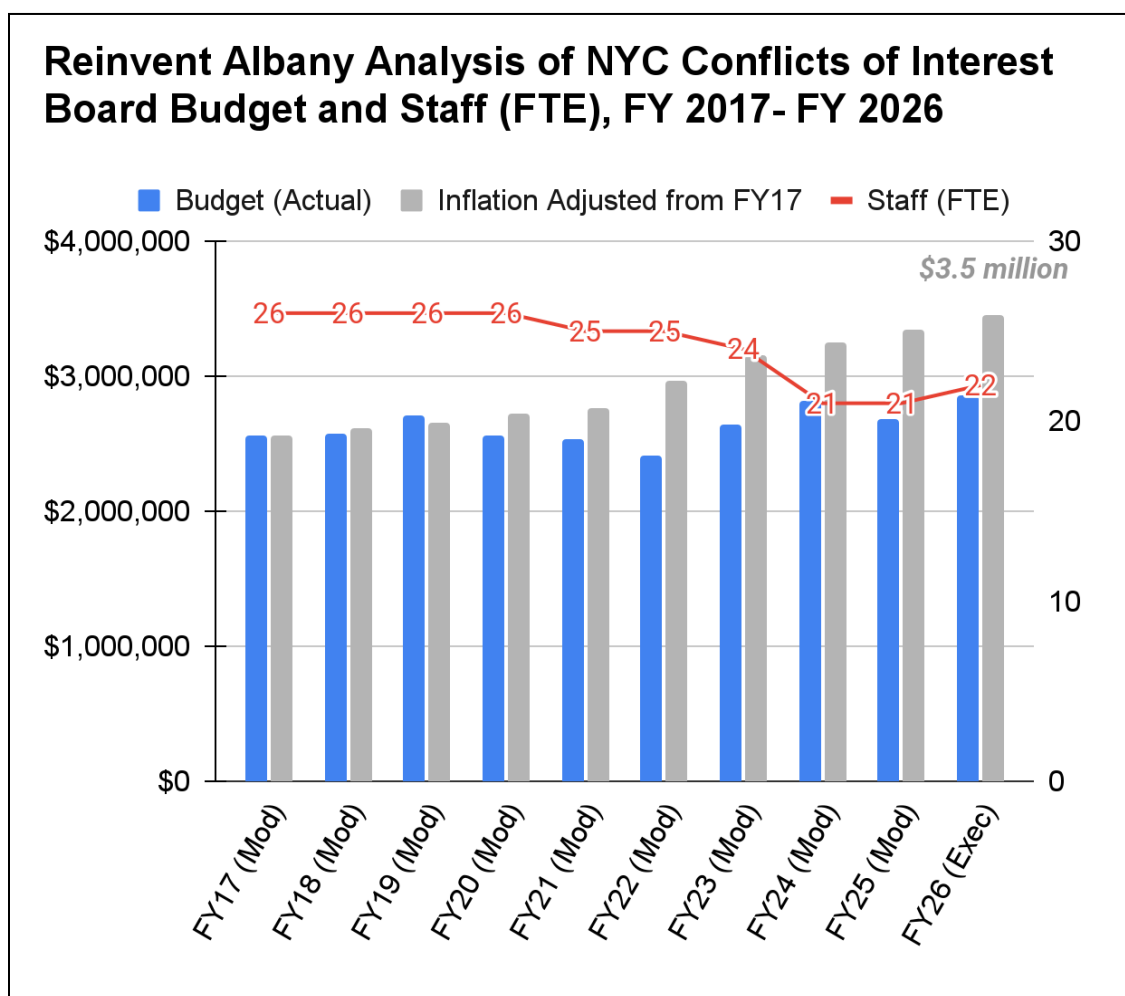
More detail regarding these recommendations is below.

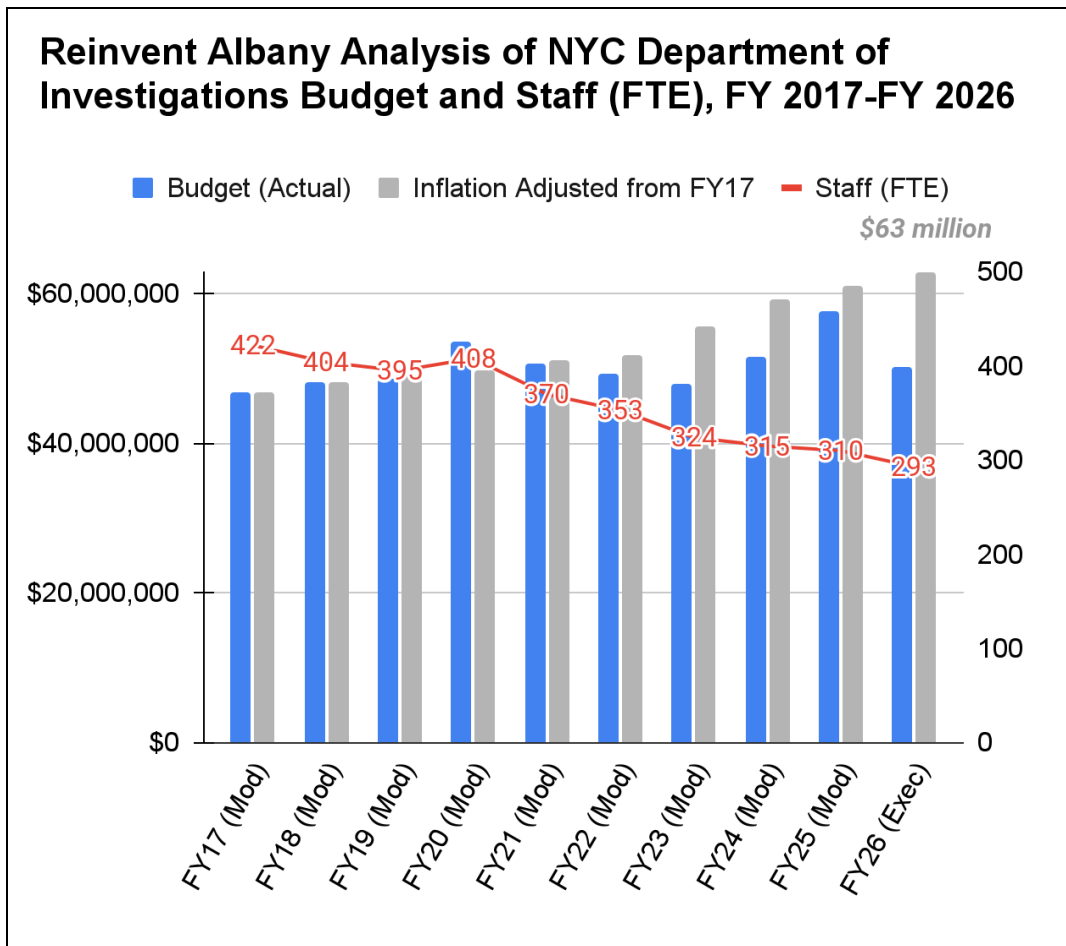
1. Independent Funding for the Conflicts of Interest Board and Department of Investigation

We applaud the staff and Commission for their interest in protecting the budgets of COIB and DOI. We request that the Commission ensure that whatever formula is used to determine funding levels for the agencies gets them back to prior staffing highs. In FY 2017, COIB had 26 staff and DOI had 422 - see the charts below and [our prior testimony](#).

One Dollar Budgeted for DOI Saves NYC \$18 to \$123 in Waste, Fraud, and Abuse

Assuming that New York City's DOI is equally as effective as [federal Inspector Generals](#), a dollar spent on DOI saves NYC at least \$18 in tax dollars. If DOI is as effective as the federal [General Accounting Office](#), a dollar spent on DOI saves NYC \$123.





2. Give COIB and DOI Greater Independence Over Spending and Hiring

In addition to independent budgeting, we ask the Commission to ensure that DOI and COIB have greater authority over spending and hiring; this could also be applied to other agencies of interest to the Commission.

In Los Angeles, voters recently approved language in November 2024 that gives this authority to their Ethics Commission, along with a minimum budget of \$7 million (note that the LA Ethics Commission's scope is bigger than COIB's, also including lobbying and campaign finance regulation). The following language is included in LA's City Charter:

(b) The expenditures of the commission shall not require prior approval of City offices or personnel where the expenditures are within the Commission's budget, unless Council makes a finding of exigent circumstances. The commission shall comply with applicable City requirements, procedures, and laws relating to the expenditures.

(c) The commission is not subject to hiring freezes when it operates within its budget, unless the Council makes a finding of exigent circumstances.

We urge the Commission to consider something similar for New York City's oversight agencies.

3. Require a Hearing for Council Consideration of DOI Commissioner Removal

We thank the Commission for supporting mechanisms to protect the DOI Commissioner. Reinvent Albany supports DOI's recommendations, and urges the Commission to further expand the controls around removal of the DOI Commissioner. We agree that it would be beneficial to amend the Charter to add a requirement that removal of the DOI Commissioner be for cause only, and with approval of the City Council. We ask the Commission to also require the holding of a public hearing to further explore the Mayor's statement of reasons and the Commissioner's response.

4. Put the Removal Mechanism for the Mayor on the Ballot

We thank the staff for embracing [Citizens Union's proposal](#) that would require a 70% vote of the Council to initiate the hearing process, and an 80% threshold to recommend removal to the voters, triggering the Special Removal Election. Reinvent Albany supports a lower threshold with a 2/3 vote for the initial hearing, and a 3/4 vote of the Council to recommend removal to the voters. Following voter approval during a "Special Removal Elections," the mayor would be removed, triggering a special election to select a new mayor.

It is important for NYC to have more local control over removal of the mayor. Currently, only the governor can remove the mayor for malfeasance or corruption, and the current NYC Charter inability process is not sufficient.

5. Ballot Proposals Should Not Go Before Voters at Low-Turnout Special Elections

Lastly, we urge the Commission to not proceed with the proposal that would allow ballot proposals to go before voters at special elections. Turnout at NYC special elections is abysmal; the last city-wide special election was held in February 2019 for the Public Advocate, where turnout was only 9.5%, [according to the NYC Campaign Finance Board](#).

It is also unclear if under this proposal, ballot items could be submitted at special elections where there are only City Council races on the ballot, essentially adding a city-wide measure. These local races have even worse turnout; in the March 2025 special election for the [44th Council District](#), turnout was 7.2%, according to our calculations. Turnout for [51st Council District](#) in April 2025 was 7.7% of [registered voters](#).

It makes far more sense for ballot proposals – which can be complex – to go before voters in more high-information elections: General Elections.

Thank you for your consideration.