



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

***Ranked Choice Voting Works, Let's Use It Fully***

July 7, 2025

Good evening. I'm John Kaehny, executive director of Reinvent Albany. We advocate for transparent, accountable New York government and strong democracy.

Reinvent Albany has previously testified several times for major changes to the NYC voting process. We thank the Commission for proposing a charter amendment that would enable New York City to move city elections to even years following passage of a state constitutional amendment to authorize this change.

We agree with the Commission that New York City's voting process needs to evolve. Here's why:

1. Ranked choice voting works, and it doesn't make sense to use it in the major party primaries and then not use it in general elections that average ten mayoral candidates.
2. Young people are [increasingly](#) unaffiliated voters, especially young people of color.
3. Independent expenditures are skyrocketing and unstoppable.

**Ranked choice voting (RCV)** has been a huge success, is very popular with New York City voters, and has led to a new style of campaigning that recognizes like-minded candidates as potential allies rather than spoilers or vote splitters.

Oddly, New York City uses ranked choice voting solely in primary elections, while continuing to use first-past-the-post voting in general elections. New York City is the only one of dozens of cities and states using ranked choice voting that does this.

A key reason to have primaries is to winnow out candidates lacking broad support and allow the public to focus on the most viable candidates. Unfortunately, New York's current closed primaries don't allow this due to additional independent and third-party ballot lines in the general election. *In the last five mayoral elections, there were an average of ten candidates in the general election versus fewer than nine in the Democratic and GOP primaries combined.*

Large fields of general election candidates are ripe for spoiler candidates that can split votes and confuse the public – especially when those spoilers are boosted by enormous independent expenditures.

**Unaffiliated voters**, especially young people, are an increasingly [large share](#) of the NYC voting public and will grow larger because of Automated Voter Registration. Among 2025 active voters in 2025, 26% of [18-29 year olds are unaffiliated](#) versus 12% of 70-79. This gap between young and old varies widely by race: among black voters, 28% of 18-29 year olds are unaffiliated compared to 7.5% of 70-79 year-olds.

**Independent expenditures** are skyrocketing and cannot be limited by the City of New York. IEs spent \$30 million on this mayoral primary, after spending a total of \$32 million last cycle in general and primary elections combined. *The only thing restraining IE spending in New York City is social norms, and as wealth inequality continues to rise, so will the number of people spending enormous amounts on IEs.*

#### **Top 4, Top 2, and Other Options**

Reinvent Albany continues to believe one election using ranked choice voting (like San Francisco) is the most logical way to use RCV. Next we would support a Top 4 open primary process using RCV, which provides the biggest benefits to voters. It would give unaffiliated voters more of a voice and reduce fringe and spoiler candidates, while still giving voters a range of major and minor party independent candidates to choose from and reducing the influence of independent expenditures.

We do not know why the Commission conducted a pre-clearance review of only Top 2 and effectively dismissed further consideration of Top 4 or other approaches. The Commission did not produce any written analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches or an explanation of their thinking.

This is a shame because the Commission and staff have done a great deal of good work, and a clear written comparison of various voting scenarios would be evidence of the Commission's independence and objectivity.

#### **Draft Ballot Question**

If the Commission moves forward with the draft question proposing a Top 2 system, we ask that you allow candidates to include party endorsements on their primary and general election ballot lines in addition to party registration.

Thank you for your consideration.