

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

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January 19, 2023  
Start: 10:41 a.m.  
Recess: 10:49 a.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Sandra Ung, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Gale A. Brewer  
Shahana K. Hanif  
Lincoln Restler  
Lynn C. Schulman  
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, good  
3 morning. Could everyone take a seat, please? Thank  
4 you. Good morning and welcome to the New York City  
5 Council vote of the Committee on Governmental  
6 Operations.

7 At this time, can everyone please place  
8 your phones on silent? Thank you for your  
9 cooperation.

10 Chair, we are ready to begin.

11 CHAIRPERSON UNG: [GAVEL] Good morning.  
12 I'm City Council Member Sandra Ung, Chair of the  
13 Committee on Governmental Operations. I'd like to  
14 welcome my Colleagues who have joined us today,  
15 Council Members Hanif, Schulman, Brewer, and Brooks-  
16 Powers.

17 At today's hearing, the Committee will be  
18 voting a bill sponsored by Council Member Brooks-  
19 Powers that will provide greater transparency around  
20 expenditures made in support of or opposition to  
21 municipal ballot proposals or referenda. The Council  
22 passed its first Campaign Finance Laws in 1988 and  
23 has been regularly improving on this groundbreaking  
24 legislation ever since. They have increased the  
25 matching rate, lowered contribution limits, and even

2 made public funds available earlier in the election  
3 cycle all in an effort to reduce the influence of  
4 large, well-healed donors, amplify the voices of  
5 average citizens, and reduce the possibility for  
6 corruption. While we have been able to reduce direct  
7 contributions to candidates from wealthy donors, we  
8 have recently seen a drastic increase in independent  
9 expenditures. An independent expenditure is an  
10 election-related expenditure made by an outside  
11 organization or person that no candidate has  
12 authorized, requested, or corroborated in. While the  
13 United States Supreme Court has said that independent  
14 expenditures are protected speech and cannot be  
15 restricted, we can require the disclosure of their  
16 funding sources and spending. While we (INAUDIBLE)  
17 require independent spenders to disclose when they  
18 spend money in support of or in opposition to a  
19 candidate, we have not required the same disclosure  
20 when they spend in support of or opposition to a  
21 municipal ballot proposal or referendum. The bill  
22 that we're (INAUDIBLE) today, Intro 855-A, will close  
23 that loophole by requiring independent spenders who  
24 spend in either support of or opposition to a  
25 municipal ballot proposal or referendum to report

2 information regarding its funding sources.  
3 Additionally, it will required the same "paid for by"  
4 notices currently required on communications on all  
5 support of or opposition to a candidate on  
6 communications in support of or opposition to a  
7 ballot proposal or referendum. While we cannot  
8 outright ban independent spenders from trying to  
9 influence our elections, this bill will serve to at  
10 least let New Yorkers know exactly who's trying to  
11 influence their vote on ballot proposals or  
12 referendum. Informed electorate is key to a healthy  
13 democracy.

14 With that, I'd like to thank C.J. Murray,  
15 Erica Cohen from Central Staff for their working in  
16 putting together this hearing as well as my own  
17 Chief-of-Staff Alexander Hart for his assistance.

18 Now, I believe Council Member Brooks-  
19 Powers will have a few words about her bill.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you,  
21 Madam Chair, and good morning to you and this  
22 esteemed Committee. Today, the Council will take an  
23 important step towards transparency and democratic  
24 accountability in our elections. Currently, when a  
25 Super-PAC spends thousands for or against a

candidate, they must disclose where the money came from and include "paid for by" notices on advertisements, but when a Super-PAC spends money on a ballot measure, the PAC is not subject to these requirements. This discrepancy doesn't make sense. Ballot measures have major implications for our city. For example, in 2019, the City adopted rank choice voting in local elections. Last year, voters approved a series of ballot measures in 2022 to support racial justice in New York including the establishment of the Mayor's Office of Racial Equity. Organizations have spent millions to impact voter decisions on the city ballot measures. When big money is spent to influence our elections whether for a candidate or a ballot proposal, the public should know who is spending the money. Disclosure is how we mitigate the impacts of dark money in New York City. That's why today alongside Council Members Farias, Caban, and others, I am co-sponsoring Introduction 855. This bill will make our Campaign Finance Law more consistent and improve transparency and accountability in our elections. I thank my Colleagues for their support, and I look forward to

2 the passage of this legislation. With that, I ask for  
3 the support of this Committee. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you. Now, I'll  
5 turn it over to the Clerk for the roll call.

6 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN: Good  
7 morning. William Martin, Committee Clerk. Roll call  
8 vote, Committee on Governmental Operations, Proposed  
9 Introduction 855-A. Chair Ung.

10 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Aye.

11 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN: Brewer.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Aye.

13 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN: Hanif.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Aye, and  
15 congratulations, Majority Whip Brooks-Powers. Here's  
16 to a stronger democracy.

17 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN: Schulman.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Aye, and  
19 congratulations to Council Member Brooks-Powers on  
20 this very much needed legislation.

21 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN: Thank  
22 you. By a vote of four in the affirmative, zero in  
23 the negative, and no abstentions, item has been  
24 adopted by the Committee.

1 COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

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2 CHAIRPERSON UNG: I would like to leave  
3 the vote open. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN:  
5 Continuation roll call, Committee on Governmental  
6 Operations, Proposed Introduction 855-A. Council  
7 Member Restler.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Aye.

9 COMMITTEE CLERK WILLIAM MARTIN: Final  
10 vote is now five in the affirmative, zero in the  
11 negative, and no abstentions. Madam Chair, that is a  
12 full Committee.

13 CHAIRPERSON UNG: Thank you.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date January 23, 2023