

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

-----X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON RULES, PRIVILEGES, AND ELECTIONS

-----X

June 9, 2010  
Start: 11:05 am  
Recess: 11:45 am

HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E:  
JOEL RIVERA  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Erik Martin Dilan  
Vincent J. Gentile  
James Vacca  
Elizabeth Crowley  
Inez E. Dickens  
Leroy G. Comrie, Jr.  
Lewis A. Fidler  
James S. Oddo  
Sara M. Gonzalez  
Karen Koslowitz  
Domenic M. Recchia, Jr.  
Albert Vann  
Christine C. Quinn

## A P P E A R A N C E S

## COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Robert Jackson

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Victoria Sammartino

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please.

3 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Good morning,  
4 ladies and gentlemen, my name is Joel Rivera, I am  
5 the Chair of the Committee in Rules, Privileges,  
6 and Elections. Before we begin, let me introduce  
7 the members who are here with us today. We have  
8 to my left Council Member Erik Dilan, Council  
9 Member Vincent Gentile, Council Member Jimmy  
10 Vacca, Council Member Elizabeth Crowley is to my  
11 right, and Council Member Inez Dickens. In front  
12 of us we have Council Member Leroy Comrie and  
13 Council Member Lew Fidler. Have I missed anyone?  
14 As of yet, no.

15 Today we have before us one  
16 candidate for our review, she is Victoria  
17 Sammartino, a resident of the Bronx is being  
18 recommended by the Council to the Mayor for  
19 appointment as a member of the Youth Board. If  
20 appointed, Ms. Sammartino will serve for an  
21 undefined term.

22 First I will briefly describe the  
23 functions of the Youth Board. The Youth Board  
24 serves as an advisory body to the Commissioner of  
25 the Department of Youth and Community Development

2 with respect to the development of programs and  
3 policies relating to the youth in the city of New  
4 York. The Board consists of 28 members appointed  
5 by the Mayor, 14 of whom are appointed upon  
6 recommendation of the Council. The Board must be  
7 representative of the community and include  
8 persons representing the areas of social services,  
9 health care, education, business industry, and  
10 neighbor. The Board meets quarterly and members  
11 serve without compensation.

12 Welcome, Ms. Sammartino, will you  
13 please raise your right hand to be sworn in?

14 COUNCIL CLERK: Do you swear or  
15 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
16 nothing but the truth?

17 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Yes.

18 COUNCIL CLERK: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you very  
20 much. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

21 [Off mic]

22 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Perfect.

23 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Okay. Good  
24 morning, I sit here before you today as the proud  
25 daughter of a retired civil servant, a lifelong

1  
2 resident of the Bronx, an alumni of the New York  
3 City public school system, and a product of many  
4 DYCD funded programs, including summer youth  
5 employment which offered me my first job 19 years  
6 ago this summer.

7 In short, New York City raised me  
8 well and when I left to attend Bennington College  
9 in Vermont, I took a New York City train map, a  
10 long distance phone card, and a desire to return  
11 home as an asset to my community.

12 While I was still in college I  
13 began a poetry workshop at the high school for  
14 adolescent girls on Rikers Island, it was called  
15 Rosewood High School at the time and has since  
16 merged with Island Academy High School. That  
17 workshop was a success and I was offered a full  
18 time teaching position, which I enthusiastically  
19 accepted. I had known from my very first visit to  
20 Rikers Island that I was meant to work with the  
21 adolescent girls there who reminded me of myself,  
22 of the girls I had grown up with, and of my  
23 younger sister who was their age at the time. And  
24 when I realized that I was not meant to be a full  
25 time educator, it was in part because I knew that

2 I had to go out into our beautiful, complicated  
3 city and figure out what had gone wrong for my  
4 students to be in jail in the first place and what  
5 services were available to them when they got out.  
6 I often heard myself say there's hope and I knew  
7 that I needed something more tangible than that to  
8 offer.

9 As I was resigning my teaching  
10 position, I asked if I could continue to come to  
11 teach a poetry workshop once a week and the  
12 principal at the time agreed. That weekly  
13 workshop would continue non-stop for the next nine  
14 years, during which I would found Voices Unbroken,  
15 a Bronx-based non-profit organization that is  
16 dedicated to providing underheard members of the  
17 community, primarily youth ages 14 to 21, with the  
18 tools and opportunity for creative self-  
19 expression. Through high quality creative writing  
20 workshops and group homes, residential treatment  
21 facilities, jails, juvenile detention centers, and  
22 various other alternative and transitional  
23 settings, Voices Unbroken nurtures the inherent  
24 need in all people to tell their stories and be  
25 heard. It is our belief that this telling of

2 stories and sharing of dreams leads to individual  
3 and community growth.

4           Voices Unbroken began as a small  
5 grassroots organization based in my studio  
6 apartment and I was fortunate enough to work for a  
7 variety of youth-serving organizations and  
8 agencies, many of them supported by DYCD, until we  
9 had the funding to hire me as a full time  
10 executive director. During those early years I  
11 had the privilege to work as a substitute teacher  
12 in various alternative high schools in the Bronx,  
13 a community organizer, a poet in residence in high  
14 schools and junior high schools for students with  
15 severe behavioral and learning disorders, an  
16 academic counselor for women coming out of prison,  
17 and a youth worker. I returned to the  
18 organizations that served me as a teenager and was  
19 hired to do a range of things, including  
20 curriculum development and facilitation of youth  
21 development groups.

22           In preparation for today's hearing,  
23 I have been reflecting on the experiences of  
24 Voices Unbroken's participants and on my own  
25 experience as a teenager and I remembered reciting



2 the Ephebic Oath alongside my fellow students at  
3 Townsend Harris High School. The Ephebic Oath  
4 originated in ancient Greece and the last line  
5 reads, "I shall not leave my city any less, but  
6 rather greater than I found it." Surely this is a  
7 tremendous challenge when one comes from as great  
8 a city as ours and yet, as we are all well aware,  
9 there is still much to be done.

10 Thank you for the work the City  
11 Council does to ensure that all of New York City's  
12 children have access to the services and  
13 opportunities they deserve and thank you for  
14 considering my appointment to the Youth Board.

15 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you very  
16 much, Victoria. We've been joined by Council  
17 Member Jimmy Oddo, Council Member Sara Gonzalez,  
18 and Council Member Karen Koslowitz, as well as  
19 Council Member Domenic Recchia and Council Member  
20 Al Vann as well.

21 Do any members of the committee  
22 have any questions? Council Member Vincent  
23 Gentile.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Thank you,  
25 Mr. Chairman. Ms. Sammartino--

2 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Yes.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: --it's  
4 amazing what you have done. I'm just curious is  
5 there any way to quantify the impact that you've  
6 had on the youth either through Voices Unbroken or  
7 your other activities?

8 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: That might be  
9 kind of difficult. I mean Voices Unbroken serves  
10 approximately 300 young people a year and the  
11 evaluation tools that we use are tracking how  
12 confident they are speaking in front of other  
13 people, how confident they are sharing their  
14 experience with others. I don't know, I mean we  
15 do do a lot of evaluation, but it is difficult to  
16 quantify.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: For  
18 example, for those who may have been to prison and  
19 have gotten out, have you tracked them to see if  
20 there's any recidivism among that group that you  
21 work with?

22 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Since the  
23 work we do is actually on Rikers Island, some of  
24 the young people will be convicted and will wind  
25 up doing state time, so it's difficult for us and

2 we don't have the capacity right now to track  
3 young people when they come home. But we do the  
4 workshops, many workshops we do on Rikers but we  
5 do also partner with youth serving organizations  
6 in the communities, some of which serve young  
7 people who are court-mandated to those programs,  
8 so we do sometimes stay in touch with young people  
9 that way. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Thank you very  
11 much. Any other questions? Council Member Lew  
12 Fidler.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: More of a  
14 comment than a question, as Chair of the Youth  
15 Services Committee, I certainly want to applaud  
16 your record and your willingness to serve on the  
17 Youth Board, we obviously need some more people  
18 and more people like you on the Youth Board. I  
19 did read your answers regarding runaway and  
20 homeless youth which is a particular interest of  
21 mine and just to invite you to participate in the  
22 informal task force that we have here at the  
23 Council on RHY, I think you would have a  
24 perspective to add to it and I think you'd also  
25 learn some as well that might serve you well on

2 the Youth Board. So if you would, leave your  
3 contact information with us, I'll get it to our  
4 Committee counsel and we'll invite you to our next  
5 task force meeting.

6 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Thank you  
7 very much, thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Any other  
9 questions or statements? Seeing none, I just want  
10 to also state for the record that I've known  
11 Victoria for some time and she's done a phenomenal  
12 job with Voices Unbroken in the Bronx and, you  
13 know, that she's received City Council funding for  
14 her services and has represented the organization  
15 very well. So it's a pleasure--

16 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: --to have you  
18 a part of the board. At this point in time we'll  
19 call a vote.

20 WILLIAM MARTIN: William Martin,  
21 Committee Clerk, roll call on the Committee on  
22 Rules, Privileges, and Elections. Council Member  
23 Rivera.

24 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: I vote aye.

25 WILLIAM MARTIN: Comrie.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: I vote aye.

3 Congratulations, thank you for wanting to serve.

4 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Thank you.

5 WILLIAM MARTIN: Dilan.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DILAN: I vote aye,  
7 and congratulations to the nominee.

8 WILLIAM MARTIN: Fidler.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Aye.

10 WILLIAM MARTIN: Vann.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VANN: Aye.

12 WILLIAM MARTIN: Gentile.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: I vote  
14 aye, and a great congratulations.

15 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Thank you.

16 WILLIAM MARTIN: Dickens.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Thank you  
18 for your service and for your willingness to serve  
19 on the Youth Board, congratulations. And I vote  
20 aye.

21 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Thank you.

22 WILLIAM MARTIN: Vacca.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I vote aye  
24 and I wish you all the best.

25 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Thank you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Thank you  
3 for your service.

4 WILLIAM MARTIN: Crowley.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: I vote  
6 aye. Congratulations.

7 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Thank you.

8 WILLIAM MARTIN: Koslowitz.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KOSLOWITZ: Aye, and  
10 congratulations.

11 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Thank you.

12 WILLIAM MARTIN: Oddo.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: Yes.

14 WILLIAM MARTIN: By a vote of 11 in  
15 the affirmative, zero in the negative, and no  
16 abstentions, item is adopted. Council Members,  
17 please sign the Committee report.

18 [Long pause]

19 VICTORIA SAMMARTINO: Thank you  
20 very much.

21 [Long pause]

22 WILLIAM MARTIN: Speaker Quinn.

23 SPEAKER QUINN: I vote aye.

24 WILLIAM MARTIN: Vote now stands at  
25 12 in the affirmative.

2 [Long pause]

3 [Off mic]

4 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: We'll close it  
5 off. We'll close it off, right?

6 [Off mic]

7 [Pause]

8 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: We'll [off  
9 mic] it for five minutes.

10 MALE VOICE: I don't know where he  
11 is.

12 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: All right.

13 [Pause]

14 MALE VOICE: Did he commit to doing  
15 the first one--

16 [Pause]

17 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Okay. Okay,  
18 perfect. We're going to leave the vote open for  
19 about 15 minutes to allow for other members to  
20 come forward and vote.

21 [END TAPE 1 SIDE A]

22 [START TAPE 2 SIDE A]

23 WILLIAM MARTIN: Council Member  
24 Jackson.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Aye.

1 COMMITTEE ON RULES, PRIVILEGES, AND ELECTIONS 16

2 WILLIAM MARTIN: Final vote on the  
3 Committee on Rules is now 13 in the affirmative,  
4 zero in the negative, and no abstentions.

5 CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: This meeting's  
6 adjourned.



C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Tammy Wittman, certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature Tammy Wittman

Date June 23, 2010