



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Testimony to the
City Council Rules Committee on Appointment of Board of Elections Commissioners
September 17, 2014

Good afternoon, Chairs Lander and other members of the Rules, Privileges and Elections Committee. My name is Rachael Fauss, and I am the Policy and Research Manager of Citizens Union of the City of New York, a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. We work to ensure fair and open elections, honest and efficient government, and a civically-engaged public.

Citizens Union believes that the City Council is doing the right thing today by holding a public meeting to vet its potential appointments for the vacant commissioner positions at the City Board of Elections (Board). There was no such process in 2013 when the Council Republican Conference first exercised its ability to appoint commissioners where county chairs failed to meet the required deadline in its appointments, so today's hearing is an important step forward.

This follows past precedent of the Council to vet nominees from the County Chairs in a public meeting of the Rules Committee, with the added benefit now of public comment. The Council has also importantly expanded its vetting process through the use of a questionnaire assessing the potential nominee's views on important reform issues, which we look forward to examining more closely.

In assessing the potential nominees, Citizens Union would like to highlight the following issues for the Council's consideration:

- 1. Qualifications and Experience** – A primary consideration for the appointment of commissioners should be their experience in the areas of elections, public administration, voting rights, or other relevant community experience that speaks to their ability to successfully represent the interests of New York City's *Voters*,
- 2. Commitment to Reform** – Citizens Union and other advocates have provided the Council at past hearings detailed plans for administrative reforms at the Board of Elections, and is pleased that the City Council is examining these recommendations and those from the Department of Investigations in vetting candidates today. Among these recommendations, the following are worthy of special consideration:
 - a. Opening up hiring practices at the Board** – ensuring an open and merit-based process for filling vacant positions, posting job descriptions on the nyc.gov website, and not using referrals from commissioners as the sole source for hiring. Ideally, the Board should move toward a civil service model for hiring, as is done for approximately half of the staff of the State Board of Elections.

- b. Redesigning the ballot** – While having fewer languages on the ballot – a max of 3 – was a good step forward, more can be done administratively to make ballots easier to read for voters.
- c. Targeted poll worker recruitment, and improved training** – creating a municipal poll worker program through partnering with the administration, utilizing the city's workforce to plug gaps in coverage, particularly translators. Training should also better emphasize changes in procedures, and consumer-oriented assistance for voters.
- d. Modernization of voter registration** – making the process electronic to reduce errors and ease the process for voters with automatic updates to changes of addresses, and better working with city agencies to facilitate voter registration through Local Law 29.
- e. Transparency** – opening up the Board's data by voluntarily complying with the city's Open Data Law, and publishing information in an open and usable format about poll worker recruitment, voter registration applications received from city agencies, and vote tallies and enrollment information, building off of the new data they have release in their Annual Report, with the support of Citizens Union.
- f. Performance measurement** – in addition to releasing more data, the Board should set targets for performance, and integrate this information into the Mayor's Management Report, allowing the Council to utilize this information in the city budget adoption process.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment, and am available to answer any questions you have.

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

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I represent: LES DEM Club

Address: 34 Malrose St

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Name: Kate Doran

Address: 11 Polhemus Pl., Bklyn. NY 11215

I represent: League of Women Voters

Address: 4 W. 43rd St. of the City of N.Y.

NYC 10036

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Name: Rachael Fauss

Address: _____

I represent: Citizens Union

Address: 219 Broadway Suite 700

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Name: Alan Schurkin (PLEASE PRINT)

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Name: Bianka Perez (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 6013 Huxley Avenue Bronx, NY 10471

I represent: Nominee Bronx Commissioner

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