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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer  
Independent Quadrennial Advisory Commission  
November 24, 2015**

I am Gale A. Brewer, currently the Manhattan Borough President, but prior to this I served 12 years in the City Council -- four as chair of the Committee on Government Operations.

The Independent Quadrennial Advisory Commission (the "Commission") is required by the New York City Charter ("Charter") to be called every four years to review the compensation of elected officials in New York City.

There has not been a Commission called since 2006, making this the longest period without a review of salaries. Unfortunately, following this Charter requirement has been the exception rather than the rule, and in the last 15 years this is only the second salary commission. This is bad for everyone. I understand that it was politically difficult to call a salary commission in the wake of the September 11th attacks or in the midst of a great recession, but continued failure on the part of Mayors to follow the law is more likely to result in distortions when a commission is finally empaneled. And I believe it makes your jobs much more difficult.

Section 3-601 of the Charter mandates the Commission consider at least the following factors: the duties and responsibilities of each position; current salaries; the length of time since the last change; any change in the cost of living; salary compression for other city officers and employees; and trends for similar positions in government and the private sector.

Nationally since 2007, the cost of living has increased approximately 15 percent. According to a recent *Crain's* report,<sup>1</sup> New York City wages have risen approximately 10 percent between the middle of 2009 and mid-2014, with the first substantial increases occurring since the beginning of 2014.

During this same period, in 2011, when the last Commission was supposed to be empaneled by Mayor Bloomberg, hundreds of thousands of City workers were working without contracts. The inflation rate for 2010 was 1.6 percent and for the prior year was negative 0.4 percent and there was concern over deflation. Real wages were declining and unemployment was at or near 10 percent. So it is unclear, what, if any, raises a pay raise commission would have recommended. I believe it is fair to say they would not have been large.

Further support for a 15 percent increase over the nine year period is found in the managerial pay raises given over this time period. According to a *New York Times* report, in 2009 Mayor Bloomberg gave a 4 percent managerial pay increase retroactive to 2008 and a 4 percent increase for 2009.<sup>ii</sup> Then, recently Mayor de Blasio gave city managers a total of a 7 percent increase from 2011 to 2015, for a total of 15 percent.<sup>iii</sup>

A look at the 5 largest cities in the U.S. appears to indicate that modest raises should be recommended. The Mayors of Los Angeles and Houston both earn more than New York City's mayor and New York City has the lowest City Council salaries of all five cities except Houston. The elected official salaries for those cities are listed below.

City	Mayor	Comptroller	Council	D.A.	Borough President	Public Advocate
New York	\$225,000	\$185,000	\$112,500	\$190,000	\$160,000	\$165,000
Los Angeles <sup>iv</sup>	\$245,753	\$207,945	\$189,041	\$317,685 <sup>v</sup>	N/A	N/A
Chicago <sup>vi</sup>	\$216,210	\$133,545	\$117,333	\$192,789 <sup>vii</sup>	N/A	N/A
Philadelphia <sup>viii</sup>	\$217,820	\$133,329	\$129,373	\$172,791 <sup>ix</sup>	N/A	N/A
Houston <sup>x</sup>	\$234,000	\$156,000	\$ 62,400	\$170,810	N/A	N/A

So given the criteria established by the Charter, it would appear that modest increases of about 15 percent are in order for all offices, for the period covering the last 9 years. Given a 15 percent increase, Council Members would make \$129,375 and the Mayor would earn \$258,750.

I also do not believe these salary increases should take effect immediately upon passage of legislation. The 2006 Commission stated that "limiting the ability of government officials to raise their own salaries and receive them immediately would improve the integrity of government and public confidence in it." I believe this commission should strongly urge the Mayor to do two things: First, commit now to empanel another pay raise commission in 2019; and second, to introduce legislation that contains an effective date of January 1, 2018 -- the first day of the next term of office for all New York City elected offices. This will put the City back in compliance with the Charter and allow smaller raises to occur more regularly. In times of economic turmoil this would allow Commissions to decline to recommend raises -- as very well may have occurred after September 11th or the financial crisis. As for myself, I ran for Borough President two years ago knowing the salary and if I do accept any pay raise, will only do so if reelected to office, regardless of the wording of any legislation. At that point my constituents will be able to judge the job I have done and decide whether or not I am worth the salary.

Finally, while it is the City Charter and not the salary levels that make the job of City Council Member part time and allow for stipends or "lulus," I have long taken the position that the job of Council Member is and should be treated as full time job and that lulus should be abolished.

Currently, in addition to their salaries of \$112,500, the vast majority of Council Members receive stipends ranging from \$5000 to \$25,000. The vast majority get stipends of \$8,000 or \$15,000. I think “lulus” have become a way of giving all but the least favored Council Members additional compensation.

I also believe that declaring the job to be full time will provide significant public benefit – it will underscore the idea that Council Members work for the taxpayers who pay their salaries. If the Council enacts rules prohibiting lulus and requiring full time schedules, then a local law should provide for an additional \$20,000 a year or just under a 20 percent salary adjustment. This would be in addition to the 15 percent increase for all offices but would require the elimination of lulus and a change to full-time status. This adjustment should sunset if the rules are ever repealed. The City Charter should eventually be changed to reflect this.

Thank you for the invitation to share my thoughts with you and thank you for your service on this Commission. As unpopular as any decision you make may be, it is important that we have a commission made up of citizens such as you dedicated to serving their city but not employed by government making these recommendations.

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<sup>i</sup> *Crain's New York*, For the first time in years, wage hikes in NYC are big enough to make a difference,” Aaron Elstein, April 12, 2015.

<sup>ii</sup> “Comptroller criticizes Bloomberg over Raises, *The New York Times*, Michael Barbaro, July 13, 2009.

<sup>iii</sup> NYC Citywide Administrative Services, Memorandum, Mayor’s Personnel Order Nos. 2015/1 and 2015/2. If the 2016 managerial raise is included which is effective September 1, 2016 the total managerial pay increase rises to 18 percent.

<sup>iv</sup> City of Los Angeles Interdepartmental Correspondence, August 26, 2015, Salary Increases for Elected Officials, stating the new salaries for elected officials in Los Angeles effective July 1, 2015 due to increases in salaries for Superior Court Judges to which elected officials’ salaries are tied by law.

<sup>v</sup> <http://ceo.lacounty.gov/forms/06%20Salary%20Tenure.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> [http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dhr/dataset/current\\_employeenamessalariesandpositiontitles.html](http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dhr/dataset/current_employeenamessalariesandpositiontitles.html). Alderman salaries appear to vary by a few thousand dollars but appear to range up to \$117,333.

<sup>vii</sup> BallotPedia (this number is likely outdated as most information appeared to be from 2010-2012).

<sup>viii</sup> City Council, Mayor’s and Controller’s salaries provided by the Philadelphia City Council Human Resources Department, November 24, 2015.

<sup>ix</sup> Found in City of Philadelphia Budget Detail.

<sup>x</sup> Office of the Houston City Controller, November 24, 2015. Houston elected officials’ salaries are tied to District Judges who are currently paid \$156,000. The Mayor makes 1.5 times that of judges, the Controller’s salary is equal to that of a Judge and Council Members make 40 percent of judges.