

Testimony of Susan Lerner  
Executive Director of Common Cause/New York  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Technology in Government

Submitted testimony regarding legislative proposal Intro 533-A of 2008,  
“A Local Law to amend the New York city charter, in relation to  
requiring that all public meetings be webcast.”

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New York City Council

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Regarding legislative proposal Intro 533-A of 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. I am Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/NY. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization founded here in New York in 1970 by John Gardner as a vehicle for citizens to make their voices heard in the political process. We work at the national, state and municipal level, as the peoples' lobby, for honest, open and accountable government, as well as encouraging citizen participation in democracy.

Common Cause/NY strongly supports Proposed Initiative 533-A. Requiring all City meetings subject to the Open Meeting law to be webcast is an obvious step in fostering greater transparency for our City government and fosters citizen participation. We commend the chair and the co-sponsors of this important bill for its introduction and we look forward to its passage and implementation as soon as possible.

New York City is one of the leading communication centers of the world. Yet, paradoxically, we have fallen behind in the use of communication technology by our City government to make its affairs more transparent and to provide high levels of relevant and easily accessible information to its residents. The continuing expansion of the City's website and the implementation of 311 are very positive developments. Int 533-A is the obvious next step.

We hope that the implementation of webcasting all meetings will be followed by other innovations successfully implemented in cities across the country: providing copies of all relevant documents that will be discussed at meetings in portable document form (pdf) on the website along with the agendas sometimes now provided and providing a standardized email method for City residents to comment on items discussed at the hearings they can now access through the City website are just 2 suggestions. We look forward to working with the chair and the members of the Technology in Government Committee to continue to modernize and expand the information technology used by the City to encourage residents to be more informed and engaged in the City's governance and affairs.