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THE COUNCIL OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

MELISSA MARK-VIVERITO

COUNCIL MEMBER, 8TH DISTRICT

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March 21, 2013

Susan Lerner
Executive Director
Common Cause/NY
74 Trinity Place, Suite 901
New York, NY 10006

Erin Markman
Policy and Research Coordinator
Human Rights Project
123 William Street, 16th Floor
New York, NY, 10038

Dear Ms. Lerner and Ms. Markman:

Thank you for your letter regarding rules reform in the New York City Council. Clearly the start of the next term presents an opportunity to explore changes to the Council rules, particularly in key areas which have been the subject of attention from the public, our city's good government organizations and the media. Most recently, the longstanding concerns about the Council rules have been underscored by the lack of progress in bringing the Paid Sick Time Act to a vote, something that I strongly support.

As you note in your letter, there have been a number of important reforms over the years to make the legislative process more open for Council Members, but some of those reforms, namely Sponsor's Privilege, have still not yet been tested. The differential allocation of member items is broadly perceived by Council Members and the public as a core factor that undermines members' independence.

As a member of the next City Council, I would very much welcome changes to the distribution of discretionary funding among Council Members. While the Council has made a number of critical reforms to the vetting of organizations, the disclosure of conflicts of interest and the reporting of allocations to the public, I believe the next step should be looking at the distribution of these funds among members. In particular, I would support the use of an objective set of criteria to determine what each Council Member should be allocated for member items and citywide initiatives, based on factors such as district need and population size. I believe that these changes will uphold the integrity of discretionary funds, which I believe are a critical way to reinvest in our communities, especially low-income communities of color like the one I represent. This process will become more

transparent to the public while also helping Council Members feel at greater ease with making independent decisions on legislation.

I would also be interested in exploring ways to reorganize the Council's committee structure to have only as many standing committees as are necessary to meet monthly, while creating smaller subcommittees that meet in an ad hoc basis. Doing so would allow the Council to redistribute its workload and focus on the most critical policy areas at a given time.

There are also additional transparency measures the Council could put in place to continue to make this body as open, transparent and accessible to the public as possible. The live streaming and instant archiving of public hearings was a major step forward, and I would strongly support a newer, more user friendly website, which would help constituents achieve a greater understanding of the legislative and budget process. This website could also become an expanded portal for participation in numerous Council efforts to help residents of our city feel more included and engaged in the work of the body.

Beyond the Council rules, it is also critically important that we look at a serious set of Charter reforms that will make the Council more equal partners with the mayor in the budget process and in setting policy. The annual "budget dance," in particular, is something that is frustrating to the public and inspires a level of cynicism about the functioning of our city government. I would advocate for expanded Council powers as they relate to the budget and efforts to work across City Hall to avoid this protracted public "dance" each year.

As you know, I am one of eight Council Members currently coordinating a Participatory Budgeting (PB) process in my district. I believe strongly in the openness and inclusivity of the PB and would like to see the Council extend participatory models of decision making into areas such as citywide budgeting, land use and policymaking. There are tremendous opportunities to make the Council an even stronger vehicle for public participation in government. For example, we could hold "field hearings," where we take the Council into local communities, on a more regular basis, and organize additional survey collection efforts to help give a direct voice to our constituents in informing policy. I would also support a level of assistance from central staff for all Council Members who choose to adopt a PB model for their districts, due to the amount of logistical coordination involved in that process.

I look forward to discussing these and other proposals further with you moving forward. Thank you again for the opportunity to share my position on these critical issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melissa Mark-Viverito". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Melissa Mark-Viverito
Council Member, District 8