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May 31, 2024

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Majority Leader, New York State Senate
172 State Street, Room 330
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Carl E. Heastie
Speaker, New York State Assembly
Legislative Office Building 932
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Heastie:

In April 2022 the State Legislature amended the Open Meetings Law to allow public bodies to conduct public business in hybrid settings. Across Manhattan, boards have eagerly taken advantage of this change to the Open Meetings Law. As a result, public participation at these meetings, thanks to the flexibility it allows, have been far more inclusive and better attended, particularly for caregivers, young people, individuals with disabilities or illnesses, and more. This has been an exciting and positive step toward better empowering New Yorkers to participate in local decision-making processes.

We were very glad that the Legislature and Governor chose to extend this ability to June 2026, but additional changes are still required. We write today to ask that the Senate and Assembly vastly improve the current Open Meetings Law by passing S1647 (Hoylman)/A10276 (Bores) which would reduce the in-person quorum requirement.

While the 2022 amendment of Open Meetings Law has been a positive development overall, it has not been perfect. Aspects of the current law have proven extremely challenging for public bodies, particularly volunteer bodies like Community Education Councils and Community Boards, the latter of which the Manhattan Borough President's Office (MBPO) plays a role providing technical support. In December 2023, the MBPO held a public hearing on Open Meetings Law to collect testimony from New Yorkers on the benefits, challenges, and suggested amendments to the current law. The response was overwhelming, with the vast majority of participants asking for additional funding and support, as well as reductions in the number of individuals required to participate in person.

As currently written, the law requires that each board achieve quorum in-person, which puts considerable administrative strain on Community Boards, and requires board leadership to make determinations about who can and cannot participate remotely on their own. While we understand the importance of having a single location where the public, press and advocates can go to get information or answers to questions, requiring quorum in-person is an unnecessarily high threshold and risks preventing boards from being able to conduct business in a timely manner. The current in-person

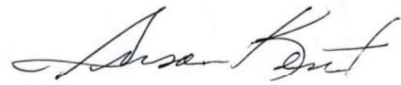
requirement adds the additional challenge of finding venues that can accommodate the size of quorum plus the public in a time when such spaces are scarce. This must be and can be easily fixed.

Across the city, we have heard how important and impactful the 2022 amendment to the Open Meetings Law was. It's imperative that we further tweak the law to ensure that every public meeting can be run in a hybrid format successfully, and resource boards to run them effectively. **We respectfully urge the passage of S1647 (Hoylman)/A10276 (Bores).**

Sincerely,



Mark Levine
Manhattan Borough President



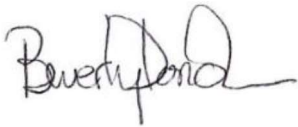
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Chair, Manhattan Community Board 6



Beverly Donohue
Chair, Manhattan Community Board 7



Victor Edwards
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Marquis A. Harrison
Chair, Manhattan Community Board 10



Xavier Santiago
Chair, Manhattan Community Board 11



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Chair, Manhattan Community Board 12