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Statement of Inez E. Dickens Majority Whip – New York City Council Campaign Finance Board Hearings on 2009 Elections

Thank you to Father Joseph Parkes, Chairman of the Campaign Finance Board, and Executive Director Amy LoPrest for the opportunity to address this important public hearing on the Campaign Finance Board and the 2009 elections.

In general, the CFB did a good job during this election cycle. However, I would like to share a number of concerns that I encountered during my campaign this fall that should be addressed to make the next election cycle the fairest and most easily carried out ever.

First, we must all recognize that elections in the Internet age are carried out in a much different way than in the past. Local elections, in the past waged within the communities where they were to take place, are no longer truly local. Information is more easily passed, connections more easily made and coalitions are more easily built. This has meant a great deal of positive change in New York City elections, leveling the playing field for many candidates. This also means that challengers and incumbents alike must raise sufficient funds to ensure their message is received and accomplishments publicized. A local election in present times also means that donor bases are more easily transferred and new donors are more easily located.

This leads to my first concern. The CFB, the Administration and the City Council have taken steps over the past few years to further “level” this playing field. However, with inexpensive technology and incumbent donor bases so readily available, it very often feels as if the CFB has taken steps to not just level the playing field but to ensure that a challenger has every opportunity to unseat an incumbent. I experienced this in my own race.

In addition, incumbents that do not spend the maximum amount and have matching funds left in their campaign accounts after the election is over should be allowed to roll over these funds into a political action committee. This would help not just incumbents, but even first time challengers. Even if a candidate lost an election, with money left over,

that candidate could have a base for the following election cycle or to help support other candidates in other races. Doing this would effectively strengthen the democratic process from the bottom up, since challengers have much more to gain from public funding than incumbents traditionally do.

I thank the Board for this opportunity and for your willingness to listen to my concerns. I look forward to working with you over the next term to continue making New York City a beacon throughout this nation and the world for democracy and proper electoral processes.