

**June Hirsh
101 West 12th Street 8M
New York, NY 10011**

Testimony before the Voter Assistance Advisory Committee
Calling all Voters! NYC Public Hearing on the 2016 Elections
December 6, 2016

Good evening. My name is June Hirsh. I live in Greenwich Village. I'm a long time independent activist, voter and leader with the New York City Independence Clubs.

There were THREE primaries held in New York this year, the Presidential Primary in April, the Congressional Primary in June and the State primary in September. I was barred from voting in all three of these elections.

By the time I walked into my voting site, at PS 41, 116 West 11th Street, there was nothing to vote for, none of the races were competitive. In fact, my State Senator, Deborah Glick, ran unopposed in the general election.

New York has one of the lowest voter turnouts in the country. And no wonder! Our elections are run and regulated on behalf of the elected officials and the parties! Not the voters!

We have overwhelmingly noncompetitive general elections. For example, of the 91 New York City seats in the New York State Assembly and Senate, 32 of the candidates ran UNOPPOSED in the general election. We have an incumbency return rate that is over 97% here in NYC. This is not a democratic process. This is a fiefdom!

One major factor, in my opinion, that contributes to this noncompetitive environment is that our primaries are closed, locking out just over one million New York City voters like myself who are not registered into a major party. That is more than twice the number of registered Republicans in New York City! We pay for the primaries with our tax dollars, yet we're excluded from voting in these key elections. We are relegated to second-class citizenship. This is something that must change. We need an election system that does not demand that we enroll into a political party in order to be able to vote. We need a modernized election system that is in step with where the voters are at. Across the country, Americans are leaving the political parties, 43% of Americans now identify as independents. In New York, 27.8% of voters are registered independent of the two major parties, with many more feeling coerced into having to register into a

party to be able to vote. Our election system needs to welcome our full participation and be open to all the voters in every round.

As part of your mandate to recommend legislative changes to improve New York City elections, I call on the Voter Assistance Advisory Committee to recommend that the City Council and Mayor put a charter revision before the voters of New York City to change our city elections to nonpartisan municipal elections that allow every voter to participate in the first round of voting.

Thank you for holding this hearing.