



**Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams
New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations
December 7, 2020**

My name is Eric Adams, and I am the Brooklyn Borough President, representing nearly 2.6 million people who call the borough of Brooklyn home. Thank you to Committee Chair Fernando Cabrera and the members of the Council Committee on Governmental Operations for the opportunity to testify today at the hearing on Oversight of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) in New York City Elections.

In November 2019, New York City voters adopted a new electoral system of RCV that allows voters to rank up to five candidates in order of preference, instead of casting a ballot for just one. I was proud to support this effort in the run-up to the 2019 referendum, and I remain a firm believer in RCV as a tool to empower communities and create a more fair and balanced electoral system. It has been proven to do so in Minneapolis, Maine, and elsewhere across the United States.

Let's be clear: This more fair and balanced electoral system does not just magically appear. It is the product of substantive education and outreach efforts to ensure that the public understands the system and its benefits. For example, in Minneapolis, the voters approved RCV for municipal elections in 2006. This endorsement of RCV put the city of Minneapolis on the path for implementation in November of 2009, three years after adoption of the system, with a test election in May 2009. This path also included robust voter outreach efforts, as well as reforms to how that city hand-counted the single and multiple seat offices to determine winners.

In short, the city of Minneapolis took this welcome and dramatic shift in elections seriously, inclusive of test elections and massive voter outreach efforts.

Unfortunately, and understandably, in light of a global pandemic of unprecedented proportions, this has not occurred in New York City, despite the proposed system's popularity. There have been no concerted outreach efforts to any population that has not already been intimately involved in the RCV process.

Now, just over six months out from the 2021 elections, the vast majority of the public remains unaware of this new electoral system, and neither the New York City Board of Elections (BOE) nor the New York City Campaign Finance Board (NYCCFB) have outlined a plan to educate the roughly 8 million New York City voters about RCV.

Education about this new system is particularly important when juxtaposed with recent efforts to implement a new system of early and absentee voting in New York State. While this new system was widely lauded, during the last election, we still saw uneven rates of equitable participation, as evidenced by long lines in communities of color and a dearth of resources in these same communities.

Culturally-competent voter education, which I have called for since early 2020, standing beside good government advocates, is even more important while we continue to live in a COVID-19 reality. Without a thoughtful and fully-funded voter education campaign, these inequalities will be exacerbated, and any education plan must target not only communities of color but also immigrant communities and those who speak English as a second language. We must ensure our democracy is representative of those who live within it and must doubly ensure that those communities most affected by COVID-19 have a strong and clear voice in selecting the leadership of the City in 2021, and beyond.

This education plan must also go above and beyond simple “online education” efforts and should ensure those who are not technologically savvy or who lack access to online programming, such as the estimated 1.64 million older adults in New York City, are engaged in a meaningful way. I have serious concerns that a chiefly online strategy will leave out hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who lack the digital literacy or reliable connectivity it takes to be sufficiently engaged.

In order to advance these education measures, it is imperative that New York City invest a comparable amount of resources to what was expended for the 2020 Census in a massive voter education campaign that includes TV, radio, mailings, and direct community outreach in order to connect all voters with New York City election policies and procedures. Earlier this year, I called for a \$10 million commitment to voter outreach and education related to RCV. That call has yet to be fulfilled, and the City should in fact explore an even larger investment to meet this challenge.

If we do not fully educate our population about its new electoral system, New York City will not fully benefit from the hypothesized increase in voter engagement. That prospect has yet to be proven, and I urge the BOE and NYCCFB to adopt my recommendations.