

BOROUGH PRESIDENT GALE A. BREWER
TESTIMONY TO THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL
RELATIONS IN SUPPORT OF
CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 115 OF 2014
JUNE 9, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of New York City Council Resolution 0115-2014, introduced jointly by me and Councilmember Ben Kallos. This resolution is in support of legislation currently pending in Albany (S.4142 Lanza/A.2448 Rozic) and would amend the current statute by allowing Borough Presidents to appoint sixteen or seventeen year olds to serve on New York City community boards. This bill *does not require* such appointment; it simply allows for a more inclusive process at the discretion of the Borough President.

As the Manhattan Borough President, one of my responsibilities, as mandated by the New York City Charter, is the appointment of members to serve on our designated Community Boards. Community Boards have a variety of responsibilities that center on assessing the needs of their neighborhoods and addressing concerns and/or complaints raised by residents. My office, as well as those of the other Borough Presidents, therefore has an interest in seeking to appoint a diversity of individuals who reside, work, or who are actively involved in their communities to represent their districts.

Participation is completely voluntary, and the individuals who apply to serve on these boards—including youth—do so because they feel it is their civic duty and because they want to serve their neighbors. Currently, we are prevented from including youth as full participants on these boards. While sixteen and seventeen year olds can participate on youth committees, they are currently barred from serving as appointed Community Board members. At a time when we are struggling to combat youth disengagement and we are seeking to fund programs and activities that give our youth a place to grow and develop outside of the classroom, it seems counterintuitive for us to turn away youth who want to serve their communities in a more official capacity during their free time.

I have been fighting to lower the required age for Community Board appointments for years, having introduced the first resolution in 2008 when I served in the City Council. (Res 1348-2008 called on the State Legislature to lower the age). I hope this is the year we can finally provide the opportunity for Community Boards to include the important perspectives of youth as fully appointed Community Board members. I have worked with hundreds of interns over the years and have seen first-hand the meaningful role that young people can play in shaping policy and enhancing our neighborhoods. One of my former interns, Benjamin Howard-Cooper – whom you will hear from today - served on Community Board 7 as a young man before coming to work with me in my City Council office. He credits his time serving on CB 7 for inspiring him to pursue a career in public service, and he has gone on to a career in several city and state agencies. Based on my experience, I believe that young people like Benjamin Howard-Cooper can serve as fully appointed Community Board members as sixteen or seventeen year olds.

Allowing young people to become Community Board members would benefit the Boards by adding a youth perspective, diverse skills sets and by increasing the breadth of community representation. It would also promote civic participation among our youth. Studies have shown that early engagement leads to lifelong patterns of voting and continued civic participation.

Support for this proposal among elected officials, advocates, and Community Boards continues to grow. Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., and Staten Island Borough President James Oddo have joined me in calling for the passage of this important legislation in Albany, and 15 members of the City Council have signed on as co-sponsors of the resolution before the Committee today. The proposal also counts many youth advocacy and service organizations among its proponents, including: the Police Athletic League, the Boy and Girl Scout Councils of NYC, the Children's Aid Society, Goddard Riverside Community Center, Washington Heights Youth Council, Rockaway Youth Task Force, and Generation Citizen - just to name a few. Many other cities have already lowered the age required of similar civil bodies, including San Francisco and Philadelphia.

Both the young people who are selected to serve and the communities those boards represent would benefit from this legislation, and we urge the State Legislature to enact this important bill that would allow us to broaden the perspectives on our Community Boards and encourage civic involvement by our youth. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.