

PUERTO RICAN LEGAL DEFENSE
& EDUCATION FUND, INC.
99 Hudson Street
New York, New York 10013
(212) 219-3360

April 1, 1988

Richard Ravitch
Chair, New York City Charter
Revision Commission
11 Park Place
New York, New York 10007

Dear Mr. Ravitch:

The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund has closely monitored the Charter Revision Commission. We have reviewed the four consultant reports on the implications of the Voting Rights Act and the report of the consultant to the Board of Estimate. We believe that all five of these reports have merit. However, we find that a weighted voting scheme for Borough Presidents on the Board of Estimate would raise serious voting rights questions and that a shift of power from the Board of Estimate to the Mayor would raise similar, if not more serious, questions. A shift of decision-making power from the Board of Estimate to the City Council presents none of these voting rights problems, especially if the Council is expanded to create more opportunities for the election of Latinos and Blacks. With this in mind, we make the following recommendations to you and the other Commission members.

We recommend that the City Council be expanded to at least 60 seats. This will increase both the accessibility and the accountability of these elected officials. It will enhance, as well, the opportunities for Latinos and other minorities to be elected.

Concomitant with the enhanced size, we recommend that the Council be given enhanced responsibility. Whether the professional city-wide evaluation of land use issues is made by the current City Planning Commission or by the proposed Land Management Board, the final decision-making authority should rest in the City Council. Without this power, the expansion of the Council is without significant import. In order for Latinos and other minorities to exercise their full electoral power, they must have power to decide land use issues which are central to the governance of this City. Any concern regarding the Council's ability to expeditiously act on land use proposals is resolvable by setting the same 60 day time limitation as the current Charter presently sets for the Board of Estimate. See, §197 c(f) New York City Charter.

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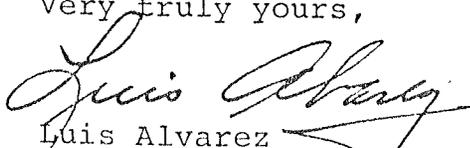
In the area of contracts and franchises, we recommend that these decisions be shared with the City Council. We agree with the recommendation that the budget include specific consideration of a contract line item in the budget. However, the decision to not competitively seek contractors and to whom the contract or franchise shall be awarded should not be left to the Mayor alone. We recommend that there be a five member Contract Board. The Mayor shall appoint two members and the Council shall appoint two. The fifth member shall be selected by the other four and shall be a member of another political party if all of the other four representatives are of the same political party. The members of the Contract Board shall be appointed for a term of years and removable only for cause. We also recommend that there be a Minority Business Enterprise program with a set percentage in the amount of the contracts and franchises awarded.

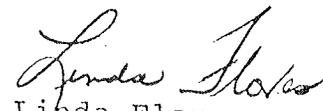
Finally, we concur with the recommendations pertaining to the budget. The Council as the sole legislative body should make all final decisions on the budget.

These proposals are not the only recommendations in regard to the revision of the Charter; however, they are of paramount importance. Any Charter revision that diminishes Latino electoral power through weighted voting on the Board of Estimate or through increasing the power of the mayor, as provided for in your current proposal, will raise serious questions under the Voting Rights Act. We believe that the proposals set forth above not only conform to the Voting Rights Act, but, moreover, best serve the interests of the City as a whole.

We would be pleased to discuss these proposals further with you or any member(s) of the Commission.

Very truly yours,


Luis Alvarez
Chairman of the Board


Linda Flores
President

cc: Members of the New York City Charter Commission

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