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**The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan**

**Testimony of Community Board 8 Manhattan Chair Russell Squire
Regarding Authorizing the Use of Videoconferencing in the Open Meeting Law
Before the Senate Investigations and Government Operations Committee and Assembly
Governmental Operations Committee
March 1, 2023**

My name is Russell Squire, and I am the Chair of Community Board 8 Manhattan and submitting this testimony on behalf of the board.

The expansion of remote conferencing during the Covid-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact, including on public meetings like community board meetings. Adapting to the challenges of the pandemic has demonstrated the feasibility of remote meetings, which in many cases have expanded the public's access to, and ability to participate in, these meetings. At the same time, in-person meetings still have certain advantages to remote meetings and are preferred by many. Hybrid meetings provide some of the benefits of both of those formats, but also some of the drawbacks.

The legislature should give community boards discretion and latitude to pick the meeting format that works best for them. We have seen that all of these formats can work; it should be left to individual community boards to employ them in the ways that work best for those boards. Different types of meetings invariably will work better or be preferred by different community boards (and even different committees within boards). No blanket statewide or even citywide mandate can account for these preferences.

Community boards should be allowed to make their own decisions on the critical question of how they will conduct their meetings. Flexibility is particularly warranted for community boards, made up as they are of volunteers meeting in their spare time to serve their neighborhoods. Permitting each board to choose which of its meetings will be remote, in-person, or hybrid will best promote the effective running of these vital local institutions.

Sincerely,

Russell Squire

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