
February 20, 2019

Dear Members of the Special Committee on Governance,

Re: GV 1.3 Request for Report on Implementation of Term Limits

Progress Toronto is a not-for-profit that advocates and organizes for a more democratic, socially just, and progressive city. When we launched in April 2018, we planned to support dozens of first time candidates, focussing on candidates from historically underrepresented communities, running for office in open seats across our city.

Whether we are under the 47 ward system or the 25 ward system, the advantages that incumbency brings to electoral politics create a significant barrier to new voices seeking to represent communities in our city.

We understand that the question of term limits is really a question about the power of incumbency and how best to level the playing field for new candidates.

Term limits are one means—arguably the most acute with the greatest implications for the electorate (denying a voter the choice to re-elect someone). However, term limits do not always remove the power of incumbency. We can see this when candidates run for City Council after previously serving an area as a school board trustee, a Member of Provincial Parliament, or Member of Parliament. And as name recognition is one part of the power of incumbency, we also see this when family members run for office.

While you study the use of term limits, we ask that you also consider a suite of other options that will help level the playing field for new candidates.

We believe the best approach is to (1) first examine the barriers that incumbency presents; and then (2) follow that with possible policies and programs that work to address them. There are a number of programs from cities around the world that Toronto can consider. Some of the barriers presented to new candidates due to the power of incumbency include (but are not limited to): name recognition, access to funding, access to people with influence and power, knowledge of campaigning, familiarity with city hall, and past service provided to residents.

We also cannot ignore that systemic discrimination (hate, Islamophobia, sexism, anti-Black racism, and homophobia, to name a few) and economic barriers for the working class (is there a single renter currently elected to City Council?) must also be addressed through a deeper and more courageous commitment by City Council to social housing, poverty reduction, access to

child care subsidies, and many of the other programs in need of investment. More equal countries have more diverse representation. **Running for office should not be limited to those privileged enough to make the leap.**

Once the barriers presented by the power of incumbency are examined, a thorough study of policies and programs should be considered. Some examples include the *New York Public Funds Matching Program*, where the City matches donations received by candidates. In the last election the City provided \$6 to every \$1 a candidate raised. This may sound like a lot, but with candidates subject to the same spending limits, this might cost less than the current amount the City provides through the rebate program. The City could also consider reviving its *Civics 101* course, further investing in mentorship programs for underrepresented communities (to have access to politicians), requiring additional nomination signatures to register (to have a less crowded ballot and encourage community work beforehand), making running for office more accessible by putting additional costs outside the limit (e.g. child care costs), and examining spending limits.

Further, a renewed commitment to increasing voter turnout would also help new voters elect new candidates. While the City does not believe it has the power to enumerate, it could ensure every household receives information about where and when eligible voters in their poll vote (a poll-specific Information Card) whether or not the City has them on the voters list. This, alongside renewed voter outreach efforts, could help since many eligible voters are left off the voters list.

Therefore, we ask that you consider amending the current recommendation to add:

2. That the Special Committee on Governance also request the City Manager report back to the Committee by the first quarter of 2020 on:
 - a) the barriers faced by new candidates due to incumbent candidates, identified in consultation with past candidates;
 - b) possible programs and policies that could be implemented by the City to address these barriers, including but not limited to an examination of donation programs, civics 101 training, mentorship programs, the nomination process, and costs that could be considered outside the limit for which a candidate could fundraise;
 - c) additional voter outreach methods and ways to increase voter turnout, especially in those areas of the city where turnout is lowest; and
 - d) an opinion on what can be implemented by the City and what requires legislative change.

Thank you for your consideration,

Michal Hay
Executive Director
Progress Toronto