



June 13, 14

My name is Catherine Gray. I serve as Vice-President of the League of Women Voters of the City of New York (LWVNYC). The League of Women Voters is a multi-issue non-partisan political organization. We encourage informed and active participation in government. We work to increase understanding of major policy issues, and influence public policy through advocacy and education.

I am also the LWVNYC's representative to the New York Transparency Working Group, (TWG) which supports efforts to use technology to make New York City government more open and accountable, and to ensure that the public has easy access to the city's wealth of digital information.

Thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting us to testify.

The LWVNYC has continually supported the Open Data laws of NYC (Local Law 11 of 2012) with the goal of promoting more transparency in government to secure a better informed citizen.

All three of these bills will increase public access to information, encouraging more active, informed participation in government and providing for better understanding of major policy issues. The League of Women Voters of the City of New York enthusiastically supports these bills.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. 522, was originally signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on July 4, 1966, and went into effect the following year. Extraordinary advances in technology now make it possible to accomplish the full intent of the law, enabling citizens to become informed in a timely manner using a machine-readable formats along with their automatic updates.

Intro 0368 (FOIA) directly correlates to the League of Women Voters of NYC's goal of promoting active public participation in government, and is one of the most important initiatives in pursuit of government transparency. An Open Data portal will make it easier to achieve this .

The bill states that the information provided by a city agency pursuant to any special requirement "shall include, in addition to any other requirements of law, publication of all such information on the agency's website, in an open format, and publication to the "open data portal

LWV NYC Celebrating 95 years of promoting active and informed citizen participation in government

created in pursuant to chapter five of this title”. We hope the reference to “agency” in the bill as presently drafted, or any future revision, will include the New York City Board of Elections

The League of Women Voters of NYC would also like to have all data sets searchable at a minimum through the date of publication, relevant agency, keyword, and category; such as public hearings, procurement notices and changes in personnel.

In extending “online” access to the City Record, **Intro. 0363** makes this valuable document accessible to the public “in both a non-proprietary, machine-readable format and a human readable format” in a timely manner without barriers, such as the cost and time of travel to City and County Clerks offices to read/search information found in the City Record.

In requiring Public Notices to be posted online, **Intro 0367** provides another important vehicle for New Yorkers to use, and to gain easy access to meeting dates and changes in public programs and policies.

While the League of Women Voters of NYC supports all three of these bills, we are still concerned that without carefully constructed standardized categorizing and indexing system, usage of the data will be limited to only the most savvy computer users.

Right now the New York City Charter is online but I challenge New Yorkers to find it. If you google “New York City Charter”, or even if you enter it on the search page of www.NYC.gov, you will get the 2009 Charter which was used as a resource for the 2010 Charter Revision Commission. If you search and search you can find it under New York City laws but then you must look at it section by section. The New York City Charter is our constitution, our City’s most important document. The Charter is less than 200 pages, which is smaller than many regularly issued city reports. A transparent government has to have its most important document front and center – accessible in its entirety from the City’s home page.

That’s why I am so concerned about how these mega data sets are/will be handled. What is needed is a key word search, such as: title, type of data (maps, files, documents, annual reports, etc); person’s name, department, agency, date, category/subject, etc. This system must be based on “best practices” and must be standardized throughout the city. With this done, community boards, city staff, and the public will be able to locate and use the information in some 1100 data sets available now. As a former librarian, these data sets now seem to be arranged as if all the books and materials in the Library of Congress were dumped in the center of the room and one was told “The book is in there somewhere”, go and find it.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with in collaboration with the other good government groups on continuing to improve access to public information.

LWV NYC Celebrating 95 years of promoting active and informed citizen participation in government

Catherine Gray
Vice President LWV-NYC

LWV NYC Celebrating 95 years of promoting active and informed citizen participation in government

LWV NYC Celebrating 95 years of promoting active and informed citizen participation in government