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## Human Rights Report Card: What Grade Did Your NYC Council Member Get?

Bridget Leahy | December 1, 2011 4:04 AM | Updated: Dec. 1, 2011 12:15PM



The Urban Justice Center's Human Rights Project issued letter grades to New York City Council members. Some, like Council Speaker Christine Quinn, didn't fare too well while others, like Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito, received an A+. MetroFocus/Kevon Greene

Remember the years when hiding your report card seemed like a good idea? And the (perhaps rarer) times when you wanted to run home and boast to your parents about your excellent grades? This year, it seems that [City Council Speaker Christine Quinn](#) falls into the former category, whereas her Council compatriot, [Melissa Mark-Viverito](#), has a grade worth crowing about.

[The Human Rights Project at the Urban Justice Center](#) recently released its annual [Human Rights Report Card](#) assessing New York City Council members' involvement in Human Rights legislation. The report used letter grades A through F to measure the extent to which they felt Council members had responded to some of the city's most critical social and economic inequities. *MetroFocus* reached out to all of the Council members for comment on their grades, but only Quinn's office responded (her statement is below).

Grades were based upon votes for or against human rights legislation introduced between September 2010 and August 2011. The legislation was divided into seven human rights categories: housing rights, workers' rights, criminal justice, disability rights, health, government accountability and voting rights. Each Council member was asked to fill out a questionnaire provided by the Human Rights Project so that they had the opportunity to define their legislative priorities and contributions. The scores from those categories were then averaged and each Council member was given a percentage rating on a 0-100 percent scale (100 percent being the best) and awarded a letter grade.

*MetroFocus* looked at the top three highest scorers, and those who flunked the test.

**The "good" students: The City Council members below all received an A+ grade.**



Council Member Mark-Viverito scored particularly well on laws dealing with government transparency. Photo courtesy of the City Council.

**Melissa Mark-Viverito (D), Manhattan Council District #8**

With a 90 percent overall approval rating, Mark-Viverito was ranked highest for consistently sponsoring and voting for legislation that promotes human rights. Notably, as the primary sponsor on laws dealing with hate crime and domestic violence data publication, Mark-Viverito received a 92 percent rating for legislation related to government accountability.



Council Member Letitia James scored well on workers' rights issues. Photo courtesy of the City Council.

**Letitia James (D), Brooklyn Council District #35**

James, who had an overall rating of 88 percent, earned particularly high rankings for her involvement with workers' rights. She was the primary sponsor of a bill requiring private employers to provide 12 work weeks of paid family leave and has been outspoken about the need for living wage jobs in the city.



Council Member Helen D. Foster scored well in the government accountability category. Photo courtesy of the City Council.

**Helen D. Foster (D) Bronx Council District #16**

Like Mark-Viverito, Foster ranked particularly high in the government accountability category. She was the primary sponsor on a bill that would abolish government policies that have a negative impact on minority groups. Foster received an 88 percent overall ranking.

**The “bad” students: The City Council members below all received a D+ grade.**



Council Member Vincent Ignizio did not complete the Human Rights Project's questionnaire. Photo courtesy of the City Council.

**Vincent Ignizio (R) Staten Island Council District #51**

Ignizio, who received a 12 percent overall rating, did not complete the Human Rights Project's questionnaire highlighting his legislative contributions, however the Urban Justice Center analyzed his voting history. Ignizio scored 0 percent in workers' rights, criminal justice, disability rights and voting rights. His highest score was a 33 percent in government accountability for co-sponsoring two education-related bills.



Council Member Christine Quinn received an overall rating of only 12 percent. Photo courtesy of the City Council.

**Christine C. Quinn (D) Manhattan Council District #3**

The City Council speaker did not fill out the questionnaire, according to the Human Rights Project. Like Ignizio, Quinn scored a 0 percent in workers' rights, criminal justice, disability rights and voting rights. She earned a 29 percent in government accountability for co-sponsoring [a bill ending deceptive practices at women's pregnancy centers](#). Quinn's overall score was 12 percent.

Quinn's office issued the following response to *MetroFocus*:

"The report card does not in any way reflect an accurate picture of Chris Quinn's human rights advocacy and achievements. Speaker Quinn is proud of the human rights legislation passed under her leadership, including a law that [ended unjust deportations from Rikers Island](#); another that requires the police department and the Department of Education to release data related suspensions and police activity in schools; and a third bill that strengthens religious freedoms for those engaging in religious observances in the workplace, just to name a few."



Council Member Vallone, like Quinn, only received a 12 percent approval rating. Photo courtesy of the City Council.

**Peter F. Vallone Jr. (D) Queens Council District #2**

Vallone Jr. did not complete his questionnaire either, but again the Human Rights Project analyzed his votes and gave him a rating. Vallone Jr. scored 0 percent in housing, workers rights', disability rights and voting rights. However, he did earn a 28 percent in government accountability for co-sponsoring a bill regulating food allergen disclosure in restaurants. Like Quinn and Ignizio, he earned a 12 percent overall rating.

### **And the worst grade, a D, goes to...**



Council Member James S. Oddo received low ratings in the housing and government accountability categories. Photo courtesy of the City Council.

#### **James S. Oddo (R) Staten Island Council District #50**

With a 10 percent overall rating, Oddo, who also did not fill out the questionnaire, ranked dead last. He received 0 percent in nearly every category except two: housing, 7 percent; and government accountability, 29 percent.

*MetroFocus Multimedia Editor John Farley and Sam Lewis contributed reporting.*