

BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL



CHARTER REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE

*26-0172 – Charter Amendment
Charter Committee Recommendations*

Public Testimony

CITY OF BALTIMORE

Brandon M. Scott – Mayor
Zeke Cohen – Council President



Office of Council Services

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CHARTER REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE

The Honorable Ryan Dorsey
CHAIR

Attendance Sheet

4/27/2026

26-0172

Charter Amendment – Charter Committee Recommendations

NO PUBLIC TESTIMONY – Voting Session			Position:		Check if Baltimore City lobbyist*
FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	ORGANIZATION AND/OR CONTACT INFORMATION	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	
JOAN	FLOYD		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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* IF YOU ARE COMPENSATED OR INCUR EXPENSES IN CONNECTION WITH THIS BILL, YOU MAY BE REQUIRED BY LAW TO REGISTER WITH THE CITY ETHICS BOARD AS A LOBBYIST. REGISTRATION CAN BE DONE ONLINE AND IS A SIMPLE PROCESS. FOR INFORMATION VISIT: [HTTPS://ETHICS.BALTIMORECITY.GOV/](https://ethics.baltimorecity.gov/) OR CALL: (410) 396-7986

April 26, 2026

Dear City Officials:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the recommendations of the Charter Review Special Committee and the process used to develop them. As a resident of the Hanlon community, I write to express my opposition to City Council Bill 26-0172, which proposes multiple changes to the Baltimore City Charter to be presented as a single ballot question.

Although the Committee has stated that the Charter is the “People’s” document, the process used to develop these recommendations has relied less on the people and more on a limited group of Council members with a clear direction on shifting power within our government. Given the scope and impact of the proposed changes, the full Council—not a subset—should have been substantively engaged throughout the process, particularly where the recommendations directly affect the structure, authority, and workload of the Council itself.

Further, combining multiple Charter amendments into a single ballot question undermines transparency and limits meaningful public engagement. It restricts voters’ ability to evaluate each proposal on its merits and forces an “all-or-nothing” decision on complex and unrelated issues. The fallacies inherent in this approach are many.

In reaching its recommendations, the Committee has framed its work around critical questions: whether agencies collaborate effectively, whether accountability systems are strong, whether residents are meaningfully engaged, whether neighborhoods have equitable access to services, and whether government is transparent and responsive.

These are the correct questions. However, the answers are already well understood—and they do not require Charter amendments to resolve.

Baltimore’s challenge is not a lack of authority. It is a lack of consistent execution and sustained accountability. City agencies continue to operate in fragmented ways, both in mission and in practice. Capital planning remains insufficiently coordinated. A unified, citywide strategy—particularly for addressing conditions in underserved neighborhoods—remains absent. These conditions persist not because of limitations in the Charter, but because existing oversight mechanisms have not been consistently exercised.

A recent example is the Housing Options and Opportunities Act. Residents repeatedly requested written equity and fiscal analyses necessary to understand impacts and beneficiaries. These requests were not fulfilled. Despite clear authority to do so and numerous requests by community leaders, the City Council did not convene agency hearings to examine these issues. Instead, incomplete and unattributed information was accepted without meaningful scrutiny. This represents a failure of oversight—not a deficiency in the Charter.

Public engagement presents a similar concern. While the process has been described as “meaningfully inclusive,” its structure and execution do not support that conclusion. Participants were encouraged to attend but discouraged from reviewing the Charter itself. They were asked to respond to pre-developed recommendations with limited time for discussion. They were not provided prior meeting materials or minutes, limiting continuity and informed participation. In some cases, residents were discouraged from offering proposals and advised to defer their input to a future election cycle. This approach does not meet a reasonable—or acceptable—standard for meaningful public engagement.

Participation levels further underscore this concern. Across four in-person sessions, there were approximately 100 instances of attendance—likely including repeat participants—in a city of more than 570,000 residents. This level of engagement cannot reasonably be characterized as broad, representative, or sufficient to support structural changes of this magnitude.

The timeline of the Committee’s actions is also concerning. The final public meeting was held on April 14, followed by a vote on recommendations less than 24 hours later. Such a timeline does not allow for reflection, analysis, or incorporation of public input in any substantive way.

The substance of the recommendations similarly lacks sufficient justification. Significant proposals—including changes to the composition of the Board of Estimates and modifications to contracting requirements—have not been supported by clear data, impact analyses, or demonstrated need. This also includes recommendations regarding the non-lapsing funds. Residents requested specific information, including evidence of systemic failure under the current framework, analyses of impacts on small and disadvantaged businesses, and clear accountability structures tied to budget and procurement changes.

These requests remain unanswered. At the same time, longstanding inequities in service delivery and representation across neighborhoods remain unaddressed, despite years of consistent public testimony.

Transparency, as cited by the Committee, must be demonstrated through practice. A transparent process would have included advance notice of the Committee’s formation, sufficient time for public preparation, and structured, district-level engagement prior to the development of recommendations. Requests for such engagement were acknowledged but not implemented.

Further, as stated previously, combining all proposed changes into a single ballot question not only impedes clarity and voter understanding, but also risks conflating distinct policy issues into a single decision point. This structure inherently limits informed consent and increases the likelihood of outcomes driven by incomplete or misunderstood information.

Taken together, these concerns reflect a process that has not met the standard required for revisions to a governing document of this significance.

Accordingly, the Council should not:

- Move Bill 26-0172 out of committee
- Advance it to the full Council
- Place any Charter amendments on the November ballot

Instead, the Council should:

- Provide a complete and publicly accessible record of all participants, both virtual and in person
- Release all community input, Committee-generated proposals, and amendments
- Publish all agency analyses and recommendations
- Conduct a comprehensive, public impact evaluation of all proposed Charter changes
- Establish an extended timeline that allows for meaningful, district-level engagement
- Hold public hearings that are deliberate, accessible, and structured to allow for substantive public input
- Include the recommendations from the Charter Review Committee led by former NAACP President Kobi Little
- Ensure that responsibility for chairing Council bills are dispersed among the Council with equity and transparency as critical considerations
- Require deliberations of this scope to be reviewed by the Council as a whole

The City Charter is among the most consequential governing documents of Baltimore. Amendments to it require a process that is demonstrably rigorous, transparent, and inclusive.

That standard has not been met.

For these reasons, further action on the proposed Charter amendments should be suspended until these deficiencies are fully addressed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Linda Batts

From: doneill1952

Sent: Sunday, April 26, 2026 8:20 PM

To: Testimony <Testimony@baltimorecity.gov>; Dorsey, Ryan (City Council) <ryan.dorsey@baltimorecity.gov>; Bullock, John (City Council) <John.Bullock@baltimorecity.gov>; Blanchard, Zachary (City Council) <zachary.blanchard@baltimorecity.gov>; Jones, Jermaine (City Council) <jermaine.jones@baltimorecity.gov>; Ramos, Odette (City Council) <Odette.Ramos@baltimorecity.gov>

Cc: Cohen, Zeke (City Council) <Zeke.Cohen@baltimorecity.gov>

Subject: Testimony Regarding CCB 26-0172

I am writing to express my opposition to CCB 26– 0172 moving forward at this time.

This bill proposes to make changes to the City Charter, which is referred to as the People’s Bill. But it is not being treated by this committee as if it is the principal bill protecting the rights of the citizens of Baltimore. Their focus seems to be primarily on the rights of the City Council and the Mayor.

Community Input

While, I have heard city politicians make passing reference in community meetings to the charter review that is underway now by the Charter Review Special Committee, there has been no discussion at the community level by elected officials of the actual changes being proposed.

Instead, there have been several “Listening Sessions,” two of which occurred after the bill was already drafted. Because of when this bill was drafted, you cannot pretend that those last 2 sessions led to the input provided by the community members who attended them actually being considered by the committee for incorporation into the final draft bill.

A related issue is how those listening sessions were held. Instead of a single Townhall session where every participant had the chance to hear and build upon comments made by their fellow citizens, we were segregated into discreet groups cut off from others. There was no attempt to capture the points raised in each group and bring these to the group to discuss as a whole before adjourning, so you got disjointed and disconnected comments, with no attempt to consolidate that input and come up with overall input and suggestions from the entire group. This had the effect of watering down our input.

And, based on the timeline provided at the committee’s 03/18 meeting, it is clear that the legislation was already being drafted and finalized by the meeting that I attended on 03/25. Given that fact, you cannot realistically claim that the input any of us provided at the 03/25 and

04/08 listening sessions constituted an actual effort on the part of the committee to obtain input to shape the bill from the community.

Changes to Timelines

With regard to the actual proposals, I am opposed to any that reduce timelines for the public providing input on any actions. Any proposals that reduce timelines for City Council or mayorial actions will do that.

In the hearings i have attended, I have heard a lot of talk about what kind of timeframes the Mayor and City Council need. I heard zero discussion about what timeframes citizen need to be properly informed and have reasonable time to respond. This IS the People's Bill and any effort to reduce the time we have to participate as involved citizens hurts the democratic process in Baltimore and should be rejected.

Budget Proposals

I have extensive Federal government budget experience having formulated, justified and managed a billion dollar annual budget for a large Federal agency. Based on that experience;

- 1). I am opposed to removing the current cap for contingency funding. Instead, a new cap should be specified. Any other approach is simply writing a blank check for what can become a slush fund without proper oversight and controls. Voters need to know exactly what they are voting for, and that means that a new cap must be specified in the charter.
- 2). I support creating the possibility for non-lapsing funds to be created under very limited and clearly specified conditions. I oversaw the facilities budget for my Agency and non-lapsing funds are requisite for large construction projects. But these should be allowed only very rarely and under strict guidelines.
- 3). I believe you are also considering establishing earmarks for the funding of certain specified budget items. I strongly support these. In a recent discussion about a possible legislative change, we were told that increased fees would go to pay for a specific service. Without the ability to earmark the increase for those fees for that use, that promise cannot be fulfilled, so this simply becomes another way for the city to add to its general fund, which we oppose.

Contract Proposal

I also have extensive experience developing the technical requirements for multimillion dollar Federal contracts, which were awarded using a "best value" evaluation process. My duties included developing the weighted evaluation and submission criteria and leading the technical

evaluation team. Because of this experience, I am well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of both evaluation processes - low bid, versus best value.

While I think that best value is a better evaluation criterium, I am seriously concerned that changing to this approach will not solve the problems you are describing of bidders gaming the system by submitting unrealistically low bids, which you are accepting.

Any contract evaluation process you use **MUST** include an evaluation for cost realism, and your evaluating team and Contract Officers **MUST** be empowered to throw out bids that are unrealistic. Without that change, no approach you use is going to yield bids that are accurate. And the problem you are describing with using low bid is a lack of this cost realism analysis taking place.

Additionally, the best value selection approach **REQUIRES** a structured evaluation process that does **NOT** permit awards to higher bids that do not clearly show **WHY** they should be chosen over lower/lowest bid.

The situation you are describing, where there is neither a cost realism evaluation nor a process for showing why a higher bid is a better choice, does not exist at this time. You need to go back to the drawing board and develop guidelines for evaluating bids under a best value system. And those guidelines must include how to evaluate for cost realism. Until you have done that, there is too much danger of allowing higher bids to be selected for all the wrong reasons, so I do not think you are ready for this change at this time and I oppose it until the processes required to ensure that higher bids are not chosen based on personal relationships and other improper considerations have been developed.

Summary

Because of the limited opportunity for communities to be informed about and provide input on these proposed changes, I ask that you hold off on a vote in this committee on these proposed charter changes until you can do proper outreach for community input. And once that input is received, I ask that you properly incorporate it into the proposed bill before taking a final vote at the committee level.

Thank you for considering my input.

Deb O'Neill