

# BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL



## CHARTER REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE

*LO25-0038*  
*Charter Review*

# Public Testimony

*February 5, 2026 - February 18, 2026*

**CITY OF BALTIMORE**

Brandon M. Scott – Mayor  
Zeke Cohen – Council President



**Office of Council Services**

Nancy Mead - Director  
100 Holliday Street, Room 415  
Baltimore, MD 21202

**CHARTER REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE**

**The Honorable Ryan Dorsey  
CHAIR**

**Attendance Sheet**

2/18/2026

LO25-0038  
Charter Review

<b>SIGN IN TO TESTIFY</b>			<b>Position:</b>		<b>Check if Baltimore City lobbyist*</b>
<b>FIRST NAME</b>	<b>LAST NAME</b>	<b>ORGANIZATION AND/OR CONTACT INFORMATION</b>	<b>SUPPORT</b>	<b>OPPOSE</b>	
ADAM	GOLDEN	ajgoldenunc@gmail.com 724-612-3012	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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

From: Mary Grant  
Date: Friday, January 30, 2026 at 12:26 PM  
To: charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov  
Subject: Protect Water, Sewer as Public Assets

Good afternoon,

Please find the attached letter from members of the Baltimore Right to Water Coalition urging the Charter Review Committee to protect the Baltimore water, wastewater and stormwater systems as publicly controlled assets, safeguard the unionized workforce, and strengthen city council oversight of contracting to promote safe, affordable water for every Baltimorean.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Mary Grant

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Mary Grant (she/her)  
Public Water for All Campaign Director  
Food & Water Watch

Councilman Ryan Dorsey, Chair  
Councilman John Bullock, Vice Chair  
Councilman Zac Blanchard

Councilman Jermaine Jones  
Councilwoman Odette Ramos

Charter Review Special Committee  
Baltimore City Council

January 30, 2026

## **Protect Water, Sewer as Public Assets**

Dear Council members Dorsey, Bullock, Blanchard, Jones and Ramos:

As you propose changes to the Baltimore City Charter, we urge you to protect the Baltimore water, wastewater and stormwater systems as publicly controlled assets, safeguard the unionized workforce, and strengthen city council oversight of contracting to promote safe, affordable water for every Baltimorean.

In 2018, Baltimore became the first major city in the United States to ban water privatization. Baltimore voters overwhelmingly approved Question E, a charter amendment, permanently prohibiting the privatization of the city's sewer and water systems, ensuring they remain publicly owned and operated. The amendment declared the “inalienability” of Baltimore’s water and sewer systems and exempted them from any city charter provisions related to franchising or operational rights. As this Committee seeks ideas from the public on how best to improve the City Charter, we want to ensure that this commission will continue to ban water privatization and ensure that the water and sewer system remains Baltimore City owned and operated.

Baltimore City’s water and sewer system provides water and wastewater services to approximately 1.8 million people in the greater Baltimore region. This includes communities in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and other areas in the greater Baltimore region. Baltimore’s water and sewer system is the largest asset that the city owns valued at \$5.4 billion in capital assets—which represents 47% of the city’s total capital assets. Any decisions - however small - that would alter the control of the water and sewer system from Baltimore could impact bond ratings, future credit ratings, and have implications on the financial health of the city. Such a critical asset to the city should be protected from any privatization or regionalization efforts and should remain a Baltimore City owned and operated utility.

We are also asking this Committee to ensure that the Department of Public Works (DPW), who operates the water and sewer system in Baltimore, remains committed to using unionized city employees to operate and manage the water system. As the Committee reviews changes to the procurement process, we urge you to strengthen the role of City Council in procurement and contract oversight, especially for any significant contract involving the water, sewer and stormwater systems. In 2020, the previous mayoral administration moved to outsource the Baltimore City metering system and fire 63 dedicated public workers in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. After strong public opposition, Mayor Scott abandoned that no-bid deal after assuming office.

At the minimum, the City Council should be required to vote on any such deal to help prevent harm to workers and residents. Lack of contract oversight and cost controls of other water system deals have led to repeated cost overruns, contributing to the city's water affordability crisis. For example, a meter installation deal had an initial cost of [\\$83.5 million](#) in 2013 that ballooned to [\\$145 million](#) by 2015. Similarly, in 2016, the Board of Estimates approved a change order that increased the cost of updating the water billing system by [70 percent](#). The City Council approval process will provide the public with more opportunities to weigh in on proposals and allow for greater due diligence before entering a major deal.

Baltimore residents voted overwhelmingly to amend the City Charter to prohibit private, for-profit ownership, operation or management of the water supply and wastewater system. As this Committee does the serious work of trying to improve the City Charter, we want to ensure that this commission understands that the water and sewer departments must remain under ownership, operation, and management as a city owned asset. Water is life: it is a human right and is essential for our health, for our food to grow, for our communities to function and thrive. We must protect this asset from any privatization efforts or any effort that will have a detrimental impact on Baltimore's financial health and residents' public health.

Sincerely,

1199SEIU

Community Development Clinic, University of Baltimore School of Law

Food & Water Watch

Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS)

NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF)

On behalf of the Baltimore Right to Water Coalition

From: Nate Golden  
Sent: Saturday, February 14, 2026 12:23 PM  
To: Charter Review Committee (City Council) <charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov>  
Subject: Proposed Budget Amendments

To the Charter Review Committee,

We shared these thoughts for the last meeting but conversations about the budget were tabled to this upcoming meeting so I just wanted to reshared these proposals.

The budget timeline and process have been an important topic of discussion for the charter review committee and I am writing to you to advocate for a few reforms that will make the budget more democratic and responsive to the people of Baltimore.

First, I believe that the budget process should more closely resemble that of the federal government and that the budget should be initiated in the legislature. Under the current process, budget decisions are not debated publicly and thus the people of the city do not get to witness important financial decisions. If the budget was negotiated in the City Council, it would be a much more transparent process.

Second, we should abolish the Board of Estimates and replace it with a more modern structure of government. The fiscal authority should be absorbed by the Mayor and City Council and budget bills should go through the same process as any other piece of legislation.

Finally, we should provide the City Council with adequate budget staff to assist in the budget or budget amendment process.

I hope the committee will seriously consider these reforms.

Best,  
Nate Golden

From: Matt Rigsby

Sent: Saturday, February 14, 2026 1:42 PM

To: Charter Review Committee (City Council) <charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov>

Subject: City Council Needs Budget Staff

To whom it may concern,

Currently the city budget process is initiated with the Mayor's office and the Board of Estimates, but the city council should be more centrally involved. It is important that council members are able to propose bills that have fiscal implications—many initiatives related to city services and infrastructure require funding. At the federal level, Congress has the CBO; at the state level the Legislature has the Department of Legislative Services; however, there is no analog at the city level here in Baltimore. All of the city's budget experts are housed in the Department of Finance, which reports to the Mayor.

In order to be adequately involved, the City Council needs budget staff to analyze proposed amendments, provide the council with detailed information on agency spending patterns, and support questions and concerns that come up related to fiscal matters. In the process of modernizing the city charter, I urge you to consider establishing a permanent budgetary and financial staff that reports to the city council.

Sincerely,

Matt Rigsby  
Resident of District 1

From: Kelsey Williams

Sent: Saturday, February 14, 2026 12:21 PM

To: Charter Review Committee (City Council) <charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov>

Subject: Supplemental Appropriations

Dear Charter Review Committee,

I am writing to you to encourage you to consider changing the process for supplemental appropriations. Currently, supplemental appropriations must be initiated by the Board of Estimates, which is controlled by the Mayor. At the same time, supplemental appropriations are largely being used to fill in holes from agencies, who are under the Mayor's command. This system leads to an inefficient use of City funds and allows agencies to overspend without consequence. A smarter system would require that supplemental appropriations pass as ordinary legislation and can be initiated by the executive or any legislator. This would allow for greater public debate and transparency over supplemental appropriations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Kelsey Williams

Resident, Baltimore City District 1

From: Thea K

Sent: Monday, February 16, 2026 11:27 AM

To: Charter Review Committee (City Council) <charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov>

Subject: Considering budget reforms

To the Charter Review Committee,

It is not often that you get to write to legislators asking them to give themselves more power but that is exactly what I am writing to you about. The current budget making process in Baltimore is out of step with democratic governance. The City Council of Baltimore has insufficient fiscal authority to adequately legislate.

I am writing to you to advocate for the following reforms:

- Initiate the budget in the City Council where it will be a more transparent process debated in the public eye and pass the budget as ordinary legislation.
- Eliminate the Board of Estimates and give its procurement authority to the existing division within the Department of Finance. Allow the City Council to set a threshold of which contracts must go through the Council.
- Create a budget staff for the City Council.

Thank you for your consideration.

Signed,

Thea Kammerling

From: Lily Wells

Sent: Monday, February 16, 2026 11:52 AM

To: Charter Review Committee (City Council) <charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov>

Subject: Changes to the Budget Timeline are Insufficient

To whom it may concern,

I am a Baltimore City resident living in zip code 21211, and I'm concerned about the processes behind City budget allocations. The 2020 charter amendment that allowed the City Council to reallocate funds within the budget has not led to significant budget amendments. Since the Council gained this new authority, it has only reallocated 0.14 percent of funds, despite Council Members often questioning agency spending and other line items.

One of the greatest challenges the Council faces in exercising its budget authority is the rushed budget timeline. As a response, this committee is considering reforms to amend the timeline to give the council more time to make budget amendments. While these changes would be a positive step in the right direction, they would be insufficient.

The strong mayor system will always mean that proposing significant changes to the budget will be politically risky. In tandem with changes in the budget timeline, the Council should propose charter amendments that give the Council actual fiscal authority and initiate the budget within the Council.

Best,

Lily Wells, MA, MSW, IMH-E®  
she/they