
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

HEARING NOTES

26-0190 - Charter Amendment - Procurement Reform
26-0191 - Charter Amendment - Budget, Veto, and Board of Estimates Reform
26-0192 - Charter Amendment - Minor Privileges Reform
26-0199 - Charter Amendment - Term Limits Repeal

Hearing Date: 5/20/2026
Hearing Start Time: 1:00 PM
Hearing End Time: 4:00 PM
Location: Du Burns Council Chamber / Webex
Total Estimated Attendance: 35

Committee Members in Attendance:

- **Chair** Ryan Dorsey
 - Zac Blanchard
 - Odette Ramos
 - **Vice Chair** John Bullock
 - Jermaine Jones
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MAJOR SPEAKERS

(This is NOT an attendance record.)

- Committee members
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NOTES

- Chair Dorsey called the committee to order
- Four bills today
- Three deal with content the committee has spent considerable time on
 - The new bills break apart several pieces of the original committee bill 26-0172
- The Committee discussed bill 26-0190
 - This bill removes procurement standards from the Charter
 - The law department approved the bill for form and legal sufficiency
- The Committee discussed bill 26-0191
 - This bill makes revisions to the budget process and incorporates everything else from 26-0172 except for procurement reforms and minor privileges
 - And incorporates amendments passed on second reader as well as several negotiated changes

- The mayor must deliver a veto to two meetings (or at least 14 days) and the council has 14 days (or at least two council meetings) to consider a vet override
 - The Department of law approved the bill
 - The public expressed disappointment that prior provisions including non-lapsing funds and conditional budgetary authority were removed from the bills
 - Councilman Blanchard noted that non-lapsing funds and conditional budgeting are important tools that the Council should have
- The Committee discussed bill 26-0192
 - The bill reflects amendments to the franchises article included in 26-0172
 - The bill limits the charter requirements of an onerous process for minor privileges
 - The Chair noted public comments reflecting that there should be a public process in the minor privileges process
 - He is confident that any replacing ordinance would include a public process
 - The Law department approves the bill
- The Committee discussed bill 26-0199
 - CM Dorsey noted that he introduced the bill because there are differing opinions on the bill, including when the issue is ripe
 - Enough people have enough interest that it is worth putting to the council
 - In a democracy, who gets to ask people's opinion and when? – Anyone, anytime
 - The term limits resolution was sponsored by someone outside the city
 - It is completely appropriate for the city's elected representatives to ask the same question as a non-resident
 - In a democracy, the fact that a decision was made, in no way means that a change of mind should not be considered later
 - Perhaps, with more public discourse, the public may decide differently
 - Why are term limits necessary and beneficial?
 - Term limits are not beneficial, particularly for legislative roles
 - We should be doing everything possible to maintain people's rights to vote for the representative of their choice, regardless of whether they have done it before
 - Good legislators get better over time
 - If legislators know they will be removed because of arbitrary limits, there is no incentive to become an expert on a topic
 - A city council should be more than just a stepping stone
 - It is a bad investment strategy for taxpayers
 - Investment in skills and knowledge should pay off over time by allowing them to be utilized
 - When people know they are on the way out of one job, they start considering what is next
 - People will use their elected office to become something else
 - CM Parker
 - This is a question of trust
 - Term limits are undemocratic, they take the right to choose away from residents
 - Main argument in favor is that term limits are needed to ensure new ideas and leaders are coming forward, rather than entrenchment

- But there has been considerable turnover in the city of Baltimore over recent elections
- Public financing and single-member districts provide residents with real choice
- This is not about term limits at the state or national level, this is about term limits here
 - we have small single-member districts
 - there is public financing to address the financing gap
 - city districts are not gerrymandered for partisan political purposes
- 94% turnover in city elected offices are not one or two off coincidences, they reflect pro-democracy reforms this body has taken
- 42.2% turnover since 2007
- In the last election cycle, 3 incumbents lost
 - In the entire state 4 out of 108 lost
- Voters don't need term limits to move on from incumbents who they don't want to represent them
- Finding and keeping a good mayor is very hard
 - Only 4 mayors in 100 years have been elected more than twice
 - Those mayors were kept for a reason
- CW Ramos expressed support for the bill
 - We saw this was put before the voters, we didn't do enough to educate voters on how bad that particular measure was, every 8 years, every elected goes, that will cause extreme chaos
 - CM Dorsey – either we throw everyone out after 8 years and have an entirely new city government, or we are throwing out some of those people because some people ran for open seats or beat incumbents as part of healthy turnover
 - We have enough time to run the campaign to pass the measure
- CM Jones
 - It takes a special type of person to be a council person
 - Term limits implies that there is a long list of people who want to be in these roles, there is not
- CM Blanchard
 - Has an amendment to keep term limits in place and change the Council limits to 3 terms
 - The sponsors make compelling arguments
 - The idea rests on the idea of whether the incumbency advantage is close to insurmountable
 - 8 largest counties in the state all have term limits
 - Most have limits on 3 consecutive 4-year terms for council people– 6 of 8
 - We are not the state or federal government, is there anything to be gleaned from other large counties
 - CM Dorsey – does not think of it as we are unique, just because everyone else is doing it, doesn't make it right
 - Term limits on legislative roles have those problems in those places
 - It is uniformly bad
 - CM Parker – agrees but there also is something unique here based on the data

- It is very easy to canvas and there has been lots of turnover
 - The magic of rowhome neighborhoods does make our democracy uniquely robust
 - CM Bullock – there is also something uniquely relevant to cities
 - Agrees two-terms is not enough for legislators
 - Term-limits are broadly popular
 - CM Dorsey – people have not been provided with enough information
 - CM Parker – a referendum is the best kind of poll
- CM Bullock
 - Why does this matter to a first and third term council members
 - CM Parker
 - Outside people messing with the city’s ability to elect its own leaders is offensive
 - The longer we delay, the more it looks self-serving
 - CM Dorsey
 - The public deserves a city council that will lead, regardless of the political sensitivity
- CM Blanchard notes that incumbency advantage discourages people from running
- CW Ramos noted that she is opposed to term limits period
 - The public knows when it is time for someone to go
- CM Bullock concurs with CW Ramos
 - Worth a discussion and even this amendment would be better than what we have right now
- Chair Dorsey agrees
- CM Jones agrees with CM Bullock and CW Ramos
- CM Bullock will likely abstain
- CM Ramos believes the bill should be voted on with recommendation
- CM Jones agrees with CW Ramos
- CM Blanchard does not support the bill in its current form

SEE FINAL VOTE RECORD IN BILL FILE

Hearing Packet in bill file? -----	☒ YES	☐ NO	☐ N/A
Attendance Sheet in bill file?-----	☒ YES	☐ NO	☐ N/A
Vote Record in bill file? -----	☒ YES	☐ NO	☐ N/A
Agency reports read? -----	☒ YES	☐ NO	☐ N/A
Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded? -----	☒ YES	☐ NO	☐ N/A
Certification of advertising/posting notices in the bill file?-----	☐ YES	☐ NO	☒ N/A
Evidence of notification to property owners in bill file? -----	☐ YES	☐ NO	☒ N/A

Notes by: Ethan Navarre
 Notes Date: 4/16/2026

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