

July 15, 2020

Minneapolis Charter Commissioners
City Clerk's Office
350 S. 5th St. Room 304
Minneapolis, MN 55414

CC: Members of the Minneapolis City Council and Mayor Frey

Dear Minneapolis Charter Commission Members:

All of us deserve to live in a community where we feel safe and our lives are valued. We deserve to live stable, happy, healthy lives in spaces where communities of color, particularly Black community members, are not targeted, harassed, brutalized, and murdered by our public servants.

Across Minneapolis, we are united by our resolve to defend Black lives. We love and care for Minneapolis, and we are committed to building a future that is anti-racist and safe for everyone. We request your support for allowing the public to vote on the City Council's proposed amendment to the City Charter because it is the proper role of our elected officials, as well as the Charter Commission, to hear the will of the people and act on our behalf.

In 2020, we have a moral duty and civic responsibility to act together.

We have not arrived at this moment suddenly or without ample plans in place to continue to build on. As community members and groups have long stated, the crisis of the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) is 150 years in the making. Yet, despite good-faith efforts to reform, years of evidence show us that the problems of the MPD are deeper than one mayor or police chief can solve. We understand and respect the responsibility the Mayor's office and Chief Arradondo have in continuing the efforts toward transformational change, particularly as it relates to barriers within the police federation.

More is needed and we all have a role to play. Through the ballot and a robust, participatory process, we can ensure viable community solutions have a path forward and remove barriers to change.

- We cannot tolerate the fact that police use-of-force is among the leading causes of death for young men of color, and Black people, including Black women, girls, queer, trans and non-binary folks, people with disabilities, American Indians, immigrants, and Latinx community members.

- We cannot ignore that the University of Minnesota, the Minneapolis Park Board, the Minneapolis School Board, the Walker, Minneapolis Institute of Art, and countless private businesses have lost faith and trust in the MPD and ended their contracts.
- We cannot accept the fact that in the past three years MPD's use-of-force has cost the people of Minneapolis \$24 million in legal settlements. Instead of funding our lives, our public resources are being squandered.

The people of Minneapolis have the moral duty and civic responsibility to organize and enact change—through our government—to defend Black lives and make decisions for the common good.

We can begin to repair past harm—as one city—and use every tool we have to ensure viable solutions are on the table in the coming months. By signaling their support for an amendment to our City Charter through a ballot initiative, city councilors are acting to ensure our voices are heard:

- We deserve public oversight over policies and city budgets related to our safety.
- We deserve a meaningful community process to re-imagine health and safety, without encountering the barrier of outdated language in the City Charter.
- We deserve a City Charter that does not block our local elected officials from carrying out the will of the people.

Voters must have the ability to weigh in on a Charter amendment to give the people of Minneapolis the pathway to reclaim power over how public safety is achieved. The current Charter enshrines the Police Department, restricting how the City supports public safety by setting a formula that dictates a minimum level of staffing. The Charter also currently places sole control over the Police Department in the hands of the Mayor. Neither of these barriers exist for other City departments.

It is our democratic right to ensure proper oversight and accountability from our public departments. The demands for change in public oversight are not new, and they should not wait: we deserve greater oversight over public departments that we pay for, as several city councilors have pushed for.

Finally, the best community solutions must be viable, without barriers embedded in the City Charter. A meaningful community process to re-imagine healthy, safe communities cannot wait. Without the chance to amend the City Charter this year, the best community solutions may not even be viable to implement.

The work to engage Minneapolis residents and stakeholders in a path forward has already begun —and it must include a 2020 ballot initiative. The City Charter belongs to the people, and we deserve a chance to exercise our democratic voice.

As a member of the Charter Commission, we respectfully ask for your support for expedited approval of the Charter Amendment language so that Minneapolisians can exercise their voice on this most important issue in the upcoming November election.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Minnesota

Awood

Barbershops & Black Congregation Cooperative

Black Visions Collective

Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL)

Community Power

CWA Minnesota State Council

Filipinx for Immigrant Rights & Racial Justice MN

Gender Justice

Honor the Earth

Inquilinxs Unidxs por Justicia

ISAIAH

Jewish Community Action

Jewish Voice for Peace-Twin Cities

Land Stewardship Project

MN Immigrant Movement

MN350

Muslim Coalition

OutFront Minnesota

Reclaim the Block

ReleaseMN8

Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment

ROC-MN

SEIU Healthcare Minnesota

SEIU Local 26

SEIU Local 284

Sierra Club North Star Chapter

TakeAction Minnesota

Twin Cities Democratic Socialists of America

Unidos MN
Voices for Racial Justice