

**Shafiq Abdussabur Statement to the 2023 Revision Commission**

February 9, 2023

*10. Reviewing the Mayor's request concerning residency requirements only apply to those of his appointees approved by the Board of Alders (those are the Fire Chief, Police Chief, the four coordinators, Chief Administrative Office, Controller, Community Services Administrator, and Economic Development Administrator) and the others not approved by the Board of Alders no longer be required to be resident electors; and,*

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To the 2023 Revision Commission,

Thank you to the president of the board, the honorable Tyisha Walker, to the Alders, and to the citizens of New Haven for giving me this opportunity to speak.

I would normally be happy to come before you as your former colleague, as a friend, as a father, and as a citizen of New Haven, exercising the sacred democratic principle of public testimony. A privilege we cherish in this great City of New Haven.

However, I am not happy to be here to discuss the current administration's proposal that we amend our City of New Haven's Charter to allow the mayor to appoint department heads to run the City of New Haven who aren't and have no interest in being citizens of New Haven.

We shouldn't be here talking about this today.

It should be unthinkable that the elected leader of our city of one hundred and thirty-five thousand people thinks he cannot find the right people to "Lead our City in our City." It should be amusing that an administration can tell us one week that New Haven has been named by the New York Times as one of the top fifty-two places in the world to visit and then tell us they can't pay someone a six-figure salary to move here. But today, the unthinkable has happened, and today I am not amused.

Just as a matter of dollars and cents, this proposal fails to live up to the fiduciary responsibility that this administration and this board owe to the taxpayers of New Haven. If just ten mayoral appointments with an average yearly salary of one hundred thousand dollars add up to one million, such a charter revision would send those tax dollars to pad the budgets of other municipalities and that money would be spent in the economy of other towns. One million dollars a year that, if spent locally, would account for anywhere from three to five million dollars in economic activity for our city through the local multiplier effect. Keeping these positions in New Haven would add up to five million dollars in salaries annually and potentially \$55 million dollars of local economic activity

over a ten-year period. This is all lost if this charter revision is approved. New Haven taxpayers will have to suffer this loss for the next ten years before taxpayers would get a chance to reverse this misguided change to the charter in the next charter reform.

I wish this were only a math problem that all I had to talk about was the clear and devastating numbers. However, this isn't a math problem. It is a problem of leadership.

As a lifelong resident of New Haven, I am shocked and appalled by the lack of connection, common sense, and basic respect for the citizens and the City of New Haven that this proposed change to the charter shows.

The people of New Haven deserve better than to be held in contempt.

I say no to sending these well-paying jobs to the suburbs, I say no to using our tax dollars to pad other municipalities' pockets, and I say no. I say no, no, no to sending the message to the young students in our public schools that this change to the charter would send to them. Telling them, they are not good enough and will never be good enough to lead our City of New Haven.

Telling them, they are not worthy of another sacred Democratic principle that the current charter enshrines. Citizens deserve to be governed not by outside forces but by their fellow citizens.

Not in my New Haven. Not now. Not today. The stakes are too high.

I call on the board to stand with me and tell our citizens, our children and our young adults that we will never give up on them, tell them that they are worthy and that the promise of the future of this City of New Haven is theirs. To tell them above all else that we see them, we believe in them, we hear them, we trust them, and that we cherish the role they play now and will play in the future to lead our democracy.

Thank you for your time and this opportunity to go on record in opposition to the current administration's proposed change to our charter.

***Shafiq Abdussabur***

***Candidate for the Office of the Mayor for the City of New Haven***

# New Haven Federation of Teachers

*An Affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers*

Local 933



AFL-CIO

**Leslie Blatteau**  
President

**Pat DeLucia**  
Executive Vice President

**Mia Breuler**  
Executive Secretary

**Mike Pantaleo**  
Treasurer

Public Testimony on City of New Haven Charter Revision  
February 9, 2023

Public education is one of the fundamental pillars of democracy in this country. And democratic oversight and community control of our city's schools are necessities if we are to protect and support public education in the years to come. Not only that but the civic engagement and civic education that come from democratic oversight and community control of our schools is a benefit to all of the stakeholders who are connected to our public education system.

With this in mind and in order to continue to nurture this democratic spirit of our city and our schools, the New Haven Federation of Teachers offer the following revisions to our city's Charter:

- In order to increase New Haven voters' direct impact on the Board of Education, we propose a shift from 2 elected members to 4 elected members on the Board. While some might argue that it is hard to recruit interested New Haven residents for the position of elected member of the Board of Education, we believe that more could be done to engage our residents and build their capacity for increased interest in this role. Not only that, but if our city is split into representative quadrants instead of two districts, the elected BOE would be much more able to build relationships with and represent their constituents, making the work more meaningful, more doable, and more attractive to interested candidates. In addition, we are concerned about the outsized influence the Mayor's appointees can potentially have on the Board and believe that more direct representation of the city's residents will better ensure that community concerns and proposed solutions are more intentionally considered.
- In order to ensure that the system of checks and balances operates as it is intended, and in line with best practice around the nation, we propose that the Mayor of New Haven no longer serve as a voting member of the Board of Education and serve as an *ex officio* member of board instead. While few will argue that the Mayor should use their position to influence and guide policy as it relates to our public education system, the 7 voting members of the Board of Education should be made up of New Haven residents without

the executive privilege of the Mayor's Office. When the Mayor has one of those 7 votes, it takes the power away from the people who can bring their ideas and experiences to the crucial work of governing our schools. It also upsets the separation of powers that serves to minimize the role of politics in decision-making about our schools.

## Re: Charter Review Public Hearing

Andrew Giering <andrew.giering@gmail.com>

Thu 2/9/2023 6:01 PM

To: Public Testimony <PublicTestimony@newhavenct.gov>

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Thank you! In case I can't stay until my name is called, here is a written copy of my intended remarks:

February 9, 2023

Dear New Haven Charter Review Commission,

Thank you for considering my suggestions for Charter Revision.

First, I enthusiastically support the proposal from my fellow safe streets advocates to create a Transportation Commission, and to remove the Traffic Authority from the Police Commission, where it does not belong. The mayor rightly appoints our police commissioners based on their expertise in policing, not because they have any expertise in transportation. With a Transportation Commission, we can be confident that the people who are making crucial decisions about street improvements are qualified to do so. The Transportation Commission should be charged with implementation of the Complete Streets Design Manual that was adopted in 2010. Adopting this measure would be particularly appropriate in the light of the drastic increase in traffic-related deaths in recent years.

I would also like to comment on the alders' charge that this Commission specifically consider lengthening the alders' terms from 2 years to 4 years. I oppose this measure. It is sensible that our local legislators are currently elected to 2-year terms, just as is the case with our state representatives, state senators, and U.S. Representatives. While lengthening the mayor's term would be consistent with other executive positions, including the Governor and President, lengthening the alders' terms would be out of step with how legislators are elected at the state and national level.

Lengthening the alders' terms to 4 years would also further entrench a Board of Alders that is already fully entrenched, due to incumbency advantage and the relatively small size of New Haven's wards. More often than not, alders run unopposed. Extending the alders' terms to 4 years would only make sense, in my view, if we also enacted term limits, perhaps limiting the alders to 8 or 12 consecutive years in office. However, increasing the length of their terms without implementing term limits would reduce alders' accountability to the residents who elect them while also limiting others' opportunity to serve. When I think about the considerable and beneficial influence that former alders have in New Haven's civic life, I can't help but think that we'd all be better off if there were more of them – more citizens who have paid their dues, learned how the sausage is made, and returned to private life where they can share their knowledge and insight with the community. Shorter terms and more frequent rotation on the Board will help keep our local government as transparent and democratic as possible. Longer terms and less turnover on the Board could lead to the opposite.

Thank you all very much for your consideration and for the public service that you have undertaken in serving on this Commission.

Sincerely,

Andrew Giering

43 Harbour Close

To the Members of the New Haven Charter Revision Commission – February 2023

Although I have lived in several other cities and towns - in my home state of New Jersey, in Massachusetts, and in California - I have been a resident of New Haven longer than anywhere else. As a concerned, active citizen I think I have an informed sense of at least some things that work better than others in municipal government. With that in mind I'd like to make the following recommendations for our once-a-decade opportunity to update the living document that is the New Haven City Charter.

- **TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION.** Create a new Charter-mandated Transportation Commission. Remove the existing state-mandated Traffic Authority function from the Police Commission and make it its own discrete entity. The Police Commission has other priorities in its portfolio and in the best interest of New Haven's previously-legislated Complete Streets commitments, a new independent Transportation Commission is called for. It should be populated with city officials, elected representatives, and members of the general public, particularly those with relevant transportation experience.
- **PARKS COMMISSION.** It turns out that the current New Haven Charter explicitly offers several Parks Commission members a lifetime appointment. No other city commission has lifetime appointments. I'm not sure what the origin is of a lifetime appointment to the Parks Commission, but it seems antithetical to the open and accessible government we all wish to see in New Haven.
- **MAYOR.** Change the Mayoral term to four years. It feels like as soon as New Haven completes one Mayoral election the current Mayor immediately has to start fundraising and campaigning again for the next election cycle. This is a burden on us citizens and I'm sure it's a burden on the Mayoral candidates. It certainly can't help but get in the way of getting the real work of the city done. Four years is also more in line with national standards.
- **BOARD OF ALDERS.** As I said I have lived in several different cities both larger and smaller than New Haven, and our 30 Alders is an extreme outlier. Many residents in New Haven may not realize that the norm for most other cities' Board of Alders or Town Council is closer to 10 members, a third the size of our current Board. Many of those other communities also have a certain percentage of their municipal representatives elected in an "At Large" fashion rather than exclusively at the neighborhood level. The most important issues of our time – education, poverty, policing, climate change – touch all part of the city and having a layer of holistic representation is a good idea. I think city government in New Haven would be more effective with fewer local elected representatives, several of them At Large, and all better paid. Pay them a living wage.

These are some of the important things I've been thinking about as we consider this opportunity to amend our Charter. Some of these issues have been percolating in my mind over the entire 10 years since the last Charter revision process. I ask that you consider my testimony with the same thoughtfulness that I've tried to present it.

Thank you,

Rob Rocke  
3 North Bank Street  
New Haven, CT 06511  
(rob.rocke@yale.edu)

## Testimony For Charter Review Commission

Kica Matos <Matos@nilc.org>

Thu 2/9/2023 5:55 PM

To: Public Testimony <PublicTestimony@newhavenct.gov>

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## Testimony for Charter Review Commission

My name is Kica Matos. I am a resident of the city of New Haven. I also serve as the Executive Vice President of Programs and Strategy at the National Immigration Law Center. I have been involved in advocacy on immigration and social justice issues in the city of New Haven for the last two decades.

The Charter of the City of New Haven does not currently allow for non-citizens to serve on City boards and commissions. I strongly urge that the Board of Alders change the Charter of the city to reverse this rule. Making it possible for non-citizens to serve on City boards and commissions will not only strengthen our democracy, but it will also advance a more inclusive vision of our city.

A charter revision will facilitate stronger representation from a broader swath of the city's residents in all of the city's 45 boards and commissions, including the Board of Education, the Youth Commission, and the Disabilities Commission. Not only will these bodies benefit from the many contributions that non-citizens will undoubtedly make, but it will also affirm in a tangible way the city's self-identification as a sanctuary city.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Kica



Kica Matos  
Executive Vice President  
Programs and Strategy  
National Immigration Law Center  
matos@nilc.org

Members of the Commission:

My name is Jim OConnell and I am a lifelong resident of New Haven and in fact I grew up just a few doors away from Commissioner Keyes.

I have been a full participant in the civic life of the City and have stood for election for several offices most recently being the district election for the Board of Education in 2021. I have also have had the privilege of running against Attorney Mednick several times, albeit unsuccessfully, for the Board of Alders. Currently, I am a member of the Democracy Fund Board

I mention these activities because I fear that possible changes to the City Charter mentioned in the press might have unintended consequences. Foremost among these is the possible lengthening of the term of the mayor. As you know, New Haven currently has the strongest of strong mayors. The mayor appoints all members of every City Board and Commission, with the approval of the Alders, with the exception of the two elected members of the Board of Education, the Proprietors of the Green and permanent members of the Board of Park Commissioners. Other municipalities have elected boards such as zoning boards, and fire commissions. While the City website is often out of date it appears that several Boards and Commissions have more members of the majority party than should be allowed per state statue. All of the members of the current Board of Alders and the mayor belong to the same political party it often seems that there is little oversight of the mayor. There is an old saying attributed to Lord Acton which states that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Given the current situation, I think that it is the voters of New Haven that serve as the best form of oversight for the mayor and their opportunities should not be diminished. While I might have to defer to Attorney Mednick on this matter, if indeed the commission recommends a 4-year term for the mayor, I would certainly advocate to include a recall provision.

It is the runs for the Board of Education however that have truly served me to encourage you to support a fully elected Board of Education in New Haven. I am a long time teacher in some of the urban school districts in Connecticut and I believe that New Haven is the only municipality or region in the entire state that does not have a fully elected Board of Ed. Last year I spoke to voters throughout my district as I was canvassing and heard many complaints concerning the schools in New Haven. People complained about the lack of public input with the Board of Ed and this appears to be continuing up to this date with Board meetings being exclusively by "zoom." It appears that recent information concerning the incredibly low academic achievements of students in the district justifies this call. However, this does not imply that all students are underperforming. Recently, I took some students in the school where I teach to a statewide science program and a student from New Haven presented a superior project. Elected Board of Education members will be responsive to the children, parents and voters of the City and will not be subjected to the political pressure that comes with being appointed by the mayor.

While there might be other areas in the current Charter that might be in need of updates these are the two most pressing issues that I think should be addressed.

Thank you for your consideration of these points.

Sincerely,

Jim OConnell  
12 Kenter Place, New Haven



### **New Haven Charter Revision 2023**

I have long regarded our City government as a mix of a long-outdated nineteenth century elitist model and mid-twentieth century "machine" politics. The many recent improvements in democratic participation have not always been accompanied by the much higher level of transparency we clearly need. Charter Revision, equally with updating the Plan of Conservation and Development, is the time set aside for basic community building.

1. My first comment is about process. The Commission should take the time to hold multiple sets of public in-person sessions, first exploring everyone's recommendations for priority subject areas. A limited number of subject areas should be chosen, and a separate approval process and vote for each. Once priority subject areas have been identified times for drafting and submitting proposals and for making all available to the public for review should precede separate public hearings for each subject area.

2. In the last charter revision it was democratic input which led the City to both elected members of the Board of Education and creation of a Civilian Review Board of Police. This time I think a priority is to reconstruct governance of Parks and Open Spaces.

3. The current Charter provisions on Parks and Recreation are a hodgepodge, much of it long outdated. We need a section affirming that all parks and open spaces are one Department and not a part of any other Department.

As COVID and climate change have made clear, very large numbers of people find city parks vital to health, education and recreation, and that New Haven had been blessed with a large and varied number of parks. Parks are open and extensively used every day. Stewardship and maintenance are core responsibilities of all of us, individually and collectively. The Charter reflects none of that. The result is that during much of my 50+ years as a New Havener, Parks have been underfunded, poorly organized and often left unmanaged. Illegal dumping and homelessness mar our parks. The forest canopy, the most important component for us in responding to climate change, has suffered major loss from high winds. But through all of modern day stresses, more and more diverse subsets of people (and dogs, bicycles, birds, etc.) meet, greet and care for parks and their adjacent neighborhoods than did before. The Charter needs to contain a governance structure for Parks, Recreation and Trees that reflects these realities.

I suggest repeal of the provision on Park Commissioners' appointment and terms and replacing it with a 9 person governing board, requiring representation from different neighborhoods and also with term limits. And I would recommend that the Charter require all records and archives be in a single location, open for public review, that meetings be held in person and televised.

I would be happy to consult further as this process goes, deliberately, forward.

Frank Cochran. [fbcochran@comcast.net](mailto:fbcochran@comcast.net)

433 Edgewood Avenue

New Haven, Ct 06511-4051

To: Charter Revision Commission

From: Stephanie FitzGerald, 433 Edgewood Avenue, New Haven

I am testifying about three topics.

According to the Charter last revised and approved in 2013, I understand there to be two distinct, independent, departments: Parks, Recreation and Trees, and Public Works. Since then Mayor Elicker moved recreation out of Parks, Recreation and Trees to the Youth Services Department renaming it Youth and Recreation Department, and combined Parks and Trees with Public Works with the Director from Public Works, and the Deputy from Parks. I don't know about the Mayor's authority for doing this, but I support an independent Parks Department with equal standing to Public Works. Our parks are too important an asset to New Haven not to have their own department.

My second topic has to do with the Parks Commission.

- Do they now work with two entities – Youth and Recreation, and Parks and Public Works? As the group that works with the department heads to form park policies, do now have to work with these different departments?
- And why is it that the 8 member Parks Commission have three of those 8 appointed for life? I support time-limited appointments for all 8. Even the Pope and Supreme Court judges shouldn't be in those positions for their lifetimes.

And third:

The mayor should serve for four year terms. I would like my New Haven mayor to spend more time and energy doing the job, and less time campaigning and raising funds..

Thank you for your attention.