

March 9, 2023

To: Members of New Haven 2023 Charter Revision Commission

RE: Proposal to expand The New Haven Health Commission to include community representatives and representatives addressing environmental justice and violence reduction as public health concerns

From: Anstress Farwell, Jose DeJesus, Christopher Ozyck, Sean Reeves

During the peak periods of the COVID pandemic, the New Haven Department of Health and the New Haven Health Commission have done outstanding work in response to this new and unprecedented emergency, while also maintaining a steady course in its core public health mission. That the public could have deep confidence in the New Haven Department of Health and the New Haven Health Commission was as much a contribution to public well-being as the work of analyzing vaccine options, creating vaccination plans, and providing timely and clear public information updates.

Our New Haven Department of Health and the New Haven Health Commission are known for innovation, and for having the ability to incorporate emerging public health models into practice. Perhaps the best known example of this is the prescient leadership the Department and Commission provided as the conceptual models for substance addiction shifted from being seen as a law enforcement issue to an understanding that it was a medical condition and public health emergency.

Other long-standing challenges to our community's well-being — the health impacts of violence, pollution, unsafe streets, and neighborhoods lacking urban assets to support well-being — are also issues which have evolved from being approached solely as police or civil engineering issues, to being understood as health issues. As Alonzo Plough of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has said, “the majority of health challenges are rooted in social and environmental determinants of health.” Embracing this profound conceptual shift in public health practice is essential to finding effective interventions and solutions to improve people's lives.

The work of the Charter Review Commission comes at a opportune moment in the evolution of public health practice. We have an opportunity to update the Charter provisions for the New Haven Board of Health to more fully meet our community's needs by incorporating additional community representation on the Board, and by adding seats for people with experience and expertise in two primary areas: Environmental Justice, and Violence Prevention.

Environmental Justice: New Haven residents bear the burden and health impacts caused by the high concentration of polluting operations, such as power plants, oil tank farms, waste treatment facilities, trash haulers, inter-State highways, parking garages, and the brownfields left behind by

the city's long industrial history. Minority residents live closest to these polluting operations and sites, and experience the largest health impacts. Asthma, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, obesity, and learning disorders are all correlated with environmental pollution. These profound and ubiquitous health impacts require a coordinated approach. Having an environmental justice specialist on the New Haven Board of Health would be a significant mechanism to support a strong and systematic plans for addressing environmental

Violence Prevention: New Haven has been a national leader in developing innovative approaches to violence prevention. Initiatives such as Project Longevity and Connecticut Against Gun Violence are based on an understanding that police work, on its own, does not address the causes of violence, and how violence can act as a contagion in our communities. Both Project Longevity and Connecticut Against Gun Violence work, like the police, from a deep knowledge of criminal networks, but understand it as a social epidemic, seek to intervene to stop the contagions of violence. Leaders in this work see that violence prevention is most challenging for people facing racism, where they are starving for resources, and when they are not prepared to compete in the economy. These painful burdens, combined with not having control of their lives, can lead to many health issues — anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, sleep disorders, and learning disabilities to name few. Although there are resources in New Haven established to address these complex health outcomes, better coordination of resources, such as access to mental health services, care for young child and families, would be some of many steps needed to address the social determinants of violence and its health impacts.

Currently, the Health Commission has five members, with a requirement that at least two be Medical Doctors with five years of experience as clinicians or as medical researchers. We propose maintaining these requirements, and expanding the Commission to nine members, including community representatives, people with public health expertise, and people who can bring expertise and experience on environmental justice, violence prevention, and perhaps also safe streets and healthy places. Expanded this way, the Health Commission would reflect and incorporate into its planning and deliberations those major social and environmental determinants of health which both the general public and health experts have recognized as important.

Creating health equity for New Haven residents requires a systematic and coordinated approach to public health. Having a Health Commission whose structure and membership supports a multi-disciplinary approach would help the Health Department establish strong plans and programs for public health, and help it find the resources necessary to carry out its plans.

Respectfully submitted:

Jose DeJesus, Anstress Farwell, Christopher Ozyck, Sean Reeves

Draft proposed changes in BOLD

ARTICLE VII. - APPOINTIVE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Sec. 3. - Boards and Commissions Established by the Charter

(2) Appointment and Membership 581 . The Board shall consist of **nine (9)** members.

(a) Terms. Members of the board shall be appointed by the Mayor for a term of five (5) years 582 . The Mayor shall appoint one (1) member every year from the first (1st) day of February, except in the year when two (2) members have completed their term of office in which year two (2) appointments shall be made 583 .(b)Qualifications 584 . At least two (2) of the members shall be doctors of medicine, from an accredited school of medicine, and who shall each have not less than five (5) years of experience in any or all of the following: Clinical medicine, public health administration, or college or university teaching in any of the branches of medical sciences. **One member shall have experience in Environmental Justice health practice or policy or advocacy. One member shall have experience in urban design and planning for public health, such as safe streets, green spaces, and reducing pollution. One member shall have experience in the practice, policy or advocacy of violence reduction.**

Resources:

*see Environmental Health News, "Who Should Be on the Allegheny County's new board of health?", Feb 2023, <https://www.ehn.org/pittsburgh-board-of-health-2659412811.html>

American Public Health Association, "Addressing Environmental Justice to Achieve Health Equity" Nov. 2019, <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2020/01/14/addressing-environmental-justice-to-achieve-health-equity>

American Association of Family Physicians, "Violence as a Public Health Concern" (2017), <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/violence-public-health-concern.html>

Centers for Disease Control, "The History of Violence as a Public Health Issue," ND, https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/history_violence-a.pdf

World Health Organization, Urban Health Initiative, <https://www.who.int/initiatives/urban-health-initiative>, see reports on urban planning, transportation, air and water quality: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003170>, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-HEP-ECH-AQH-2021.6>

Current New Haven Charter on Health Department and Health Commission:

https://library.municode.com/ct/new_haven/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TITONE_CONSISTS_FINAL_REPORT_CHARTER_REVISION_COMMISSION_PROPOSED_REVISD_CHARTER_TITICH_ARTVIIAPBOCO_S3BOCOESCH

ARTICLE VI. - THE CITY GOVERNMENT: DEPARTMENTS AND DEPARTMENT HEADS

Sec. 15. - Director of Public Health.

A.Appointment. The Director of Health shall be the Department Head of the department responsible for public health 437 . The Board of Public Health shall appoint the Director of Health in accordance with the provisions of § 3.A(7) of this Article 438 . The Director of Public Health shall be on the unclassified service 439 .B.Other Employees.(1)Generally 440 . With the approval and consent of the Board of Health, and subject to the articles of this Charter pertaining to personnel, the Director of Public Health shall appoint and remove all assistants and employees of the department, shall be responsible for the efficiency, discipline and good conduct of same, and for the care and custody of all property of the City belonging to or used by said department. (2)Registrar of Vital Statistics 441 . The Registrar of Vital Statistics shall be appointed by the Director of Public Health and shall be under the supervision of said director as shall be all assistants and employees of the department 442 . The Registrar of Vital Statistics shall perform those duties imposed by Law upon Registrars of Vital Statistics and shall reside in said City during such term of office 443 .(3)Salaries 444 . The director's and assistants' salaries shall be recommended by the board and provided for in the budget.C.General Powers and Duties 445 . The Director shall also:(1)Have and exercise in the City and over the navigable waters adjacent thereto all the jurisdiction and powers conferred and all the duties imposed upon City, town, or district health officers of this State in their respective jurisdictions by the General Statutes 446 . (2)Have the power and it shall be duty of the director to regulate the production, process and distribution of food stuffs in the City; to order the forthwith vacation of any land or building unfit for human habitation; and to abate nuisances after reasonable notice, at the expense of the owner or the person creating or maintaining same 447 .(3)Perform such other duties and take such other measures for the prevention of disease and the preservation of public health as provided by the Ordinances 448 .(4)Serve as secretary of the board ex officio, and attend its meetings 449 .(5)Keep the board apprised of the activities of the department, render an annual report to the board and the Mayor on or before the first of March of the succeeding year 450 . (6)May incur such expenditures which are deemed necessary, in case of serious medical emergencies and with the advice and consent of the Mayor, until the Board of Alders shall have taken action in the premises 451 .D.Duty of police to enforce health regulations, orders 452 . It is hereby made the duty of the Department of Police Service to render, upon the request of said director, such assistance in the enforcement of its bylaws, rules, regulations and orders as said request may require.

ARTICLE VII. - APPOINTIVE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Sec. 3. - Boards and Commissions Established by the Charter

I. Board of Public Health 578 .(1)Establishment. There shall be a Board of Public Health 579 . The Board of Public Health shall advise with the Director of Public Health on matters pertaining to the duties of office and to the conduct of the department 580 .(2)Appointment and Membership 581 . The Board shall consist of six (6) members.(a)Terms. Members of the board shall be appointed by the Mayor for a term of five (5) years 582 . The Mayor shall appoint one (1) member every year from the first (1 st) day of February, except in the year when two (2) members have completed their term of office in which year two (2) appointments shall be made 583 .(b)Qualifications 584 . At least two (2) of the members shall be doctors of medicine, from an accredited school of medicine, and who shall each have not less than five (5) years of experience in any or all of the following: Clinical medicine, public health administration, or college or university teaching in any of the branches of medical sciences.(c)Employees 585 . The department shall have such a number of professional and clerical assistants as said board shall prescribe.(3)Duties. On recommendation of the Director of Public Health it shall have the power to adopt such rules and regulations, not inconsistent with the General Statutes or the provisions of this Charter, as in its judgment the prevention of disease and the preservation of public health shall require 586 . Such rules and regulations shall be enforced in the same manner as City Ordinances, provided, however, no such rules or regulations shall be in full force and effect until Public Notice of the same on at least four (4) separate occasions 587 .