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Multnomah County Commissioner

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Dear Charter Review Committee Members,

Thank you again for your service on the Multnomah County Charter Review Committee. I appreciate your time, commitment, and focus on serving our community.

As you approach your final meeting, I wanted to reiterate the concerns I've shared about proposed changes to the County Charter that would better be addressed in county code. As I mentioned in my previous testimony to this committee, including things in the charter can unintentionally tie the hands of future board members and make needed changes or modifications difficult and time consuming.

It is my opinion that the language around an ombudsman and the Good Governance Hotline are two such issues.

I strongly support the Good Governance Hotline and the creation of an ombuds office, but do not believe inserting them in the county charter is prudent or responsible over the long term. The hotline could change and evolve in the future to meet the needs of a changing community or to improve accessibility. The creation of an ombuds office is needed, but will require additional planning and scoping, and similarly could look different in the years ahead to best serve its purpose, but I am committed to its creation.

As we've seen with prior charter changes, implementing policy at the charter level can be fraught, and should only be done in general terms and with a long range timeline in mind. The process to change the charter is extensive and relies on voter approval for any recommended change. As you approach this final meeting, I hope you will keep that front of mind, and reconsider inclusion of these two measures. With six likely changes being referred to voters, as well as others for the City of Portland's charter review process, removing these two would also help voters better understand the other changes before them.

Again, thank you for your service and time. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson
Multnomah County, District 3