



## CITY OF ATLANTA

55 TRINITY AVE, S.W.  
SUITE 2400  
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30303-0300

ANDRE DICKENS  
MAYOR

September 25, 2023

Dear Senator Warnock:

Thank you for your note and for our previous conversations over the last few weeks regarding the public safety training center.

I have attached to this letter direct responses to your questions written by the Office of the City Clerk. However, before we delve into the intricacies of this process, I think it is important to make clear some foundational positions, especially as it relates to the democratic process, public safety, and my vision for Atlanta.

Last year, 171 people were murdered in the city of Atlanta. 83% were African American males. The violence that gripped our city for the last few years created fear and uncertainty in the hearts and minds of our neighbors. And the people asked “Where is our justice? Where is our safety?”

At the same time, we witnessed the murder of George Floyd, and far too many others, and the country once again grappled with the harsh truth that too many people who looked like us were being killed by people sworn to protect us. And the people asked “Where is our justice? Where is our safety?”

As Mayor, I believe we must address both issues. We do not have to choose between justice and safety. As you and I concluded, safety is justice. We do not have to choose between making common-sense investments in our police, fire, and EMS workers and addressing the root causes of crime. We can, and will, and must do both.

I’ve set a goal to make Atlanta the best place in the country to raise a child. That means a safe city, a city that embraces innovation, a city with opportunity for all, and a city with effective government in which its people have a voice.

Driven by a spike in violent crime, the last Atlanta Mayoral election, less than two years ago, was dominated by public safety. Do we achieve public safety through more officers, or more training, or investing in addressing the root causes of crime? The answer to all of those is yes. We will always need well-trained officers who are available when needed, and we must also

simultaneously invest in reducing our need to respond to criminal activity by addressing its root causes. I posited then, as I do now, that public safety is part of everything the city touches. Do we feel safe in our homes and at our work? Do we have well-paying, secure jobs? Do our kids feel safe at school? Are we financially secure? All of these questions connect to public safety, which is why we are deliberately moving forward in all these areas.

People feel safe when they have a secure roof over their heads, which is why I have been a champion of affordable housing since my first year on City Council. I championed inclusionary zoning around the Beltline, and I've committed to creating/preserving 20,000 units of affordable housing in eight years, a goal we are well on our way to accomplishing. We've committed hundreds of millions of dollars toward affordable housing efforts. Through innovative collaboration, we paid off the back taxes for seniors and deployed funds for owner occupied rehab to ensure that people could remain in their homes. We are also investing in programs for those experiencing homelessness and working with our partners on council, have announced plans to develop small developments for rapid rehousing while including supportive services for those in need.

People feel safe when they have well-paying, secure jobs, which is why we are prioritizing workforce development through the creation of the first Atlanta Department of Labor. We are also investing in apprenticeship programs and training for our youth through activities like the Summer Youth Employment Program that to date, has hired nearly 8,000 young people and paid them all a living wage. Working with partners from across the city, we made 2023 the Year of the Youth in Atlanta. We have connected youth with mentors, raised \$20 million in Early Childhood Education, deployed \$1.5 million dollars to youth serving organizations that have served over 6,000 young people and have expanded our own city-led afterschool programs.

People feel safe when they have safe and secure methods of transportation. From sidewalks and roads to bike lanes and public transit, people want to know we are investing in infrastructure. This is why I created the Atlanta Department of Transportation to give these issues the attention they deserve. It's also why the city council and I put our \$750 million Moving Atlanta Forward infrastructure bond package to Atlanta's voters last spring, and they responded by overwhelmingly approving those projects. We are investing in safety for all who live, work, and play in Atlanta through our transportation and infrastructure efforts.

People feel safe when we get violent gangs off our streets, which is why we are worked closely with our partners in law enforcement and created the Repeat Offenders Tracking Unit, Court Watch and Operation Heatwave, a national model—invented by APD—to remove guns, gangs, and drugs from our streets.

People feel safe when they know we are investing in criminal justice reform and non-policing alternatives. We continue to increase our funding to the Police Alternatives and Diversion Initiative (PAD) and have broken ground on the City's first diversion center for non-violent offenders. We are working with APD to introduce co-responders and civilian response units and expand access to mental health support. Working with my colleagues on council, we helped lead the effort to pass a package of reforms which banned chokeholds, required de-escalation tactics, expanded the authority of the Citizen Review Board, and imposed a duty for other officers to intervene. I co-sponsored the legislation to "Ban the Box" in the City, and as Mayor, I've required

APD to engage in a top-to-bottom review of their policies and procedures to ensure we eliminate outdated, unnecessary, and unsafe procedures that create unnecessary interactions and friction between police and citizens they serve.

And finally, people feel safe when we invest in the training of all our public safety officials: firefighters, EMS, E-911 operators, and police officers. Over the past few months, the Public Safety Training Center Task Force worked to lay the foundation to ensure restorative practices were at the center of how we trained our public safety personnel.

The group focused on several areas, including the curriculum and instruction for the center. Training our officer in de-escalation techniques, racial sensitivity training, and other 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing methods were at the center of many of their recommendations and I look forward to implementing them with urgency. This is why I have continued to support the Public Safety Training Center as one part of our public safety strategy.

I believe this center will be the classroom space that redefines how we approach policing and maintains the readiness of our first responders to address the challenges they face.

Last year, the Atlanta Police Department alone responded to 748,000 calls for service from our residents, business owners, and visitors. That's nearly 750,000 reasons having well-trained first responders is so important to the safety and security of all who call our city home.

Since taking office 21 months ago, my Administration has been incredibly focused on implementing the efforts outlined above. The results speak for themselves: a 21% reduction in violent crime so far this year. It is dangerous for politicians, particularly members of our party, to forget that the first job of government is public safety. We should invest in our public safety personnel **and** invest in our communities; we know that the answer isn't either/or, like provocateurs would have the public believe, it is both/and.

With respect to the referendum, as we've discussed over the past few weeks, all Atlantans, regardless of their position on the Public Safety Training Center, should have an opportunity to have their voice heard, and I will strive to ensure that the City make every effort to treat those seeking a referendum with fairness and respect. We will err on the side of ensuring that Atlanta voters who desire to bring this issue to a vote will have that opportunity. We also have an obligation to all Atlanta voters to protect the integrity of the process and to be good stewards of their tax dollars.

While I will leave the answers to your specific questions to subsequent pages, I will address one main point here. This is not an election. Not yet. People are not and have not been asked to vote. We cannot allow people from either end of the political spectrum to conflate this effort with an election. Standing in front of your local grocery store to collect signatures from customers who may be residents, while commendable, is vastly different from registering to vote and casting a ballot.

Equating the petition process to voter suppression minimizes actual instances of voter suppression. This petition process provides an option for those who disagree with the decisions of their elected leaders, in this case a veto proof supermajority of the City Council who approved the

project twice, to have their voices heard. That process is difficult because it should only be used in extraordinary circumstances.

Gathering signatures from 15% of registered Atlanta voters in 60 days is the mandated threshold, and if that is met, then this question should and will be put to a vote. People have spoken, but we have a duty to review these petitions and ensure that it is Atlantans who are speaking for Atlanta.

The goal for this effort is a review process which respects all voters in Atlanta while ensuring the greatest opportunity for those to have their voice heard. I want a transparent and open process which will create the gold standard of review while protecting the people's ability to hold government accountable.

Every line of the petition will be available for all to review. Through an extensive cure process, the clerk and their team will err on the side of including a signatory in the count of those requesting a vote. These decisions will set precedent, and it is incumbent upon us to ensure that the process is fair for all Atlantans.

If one were to review ballot access petition procedures in other major jurisdictions, we believe one would conclude that the City's process to certify referendum initiatives is among the most inclusive, transparent, and progressive in the country. Atlanta's procedures have been designed to maximize the ability of residents to use the referendum process while ensuring that anti-democratic operators do not abuse the process.

I believe in this City. I believe in its people. I believe that Atlanta is and will continue to be a safe and prosperous city. The Public Safety Training Center is only one part of that effort. We cannot lose sight of the whole vision because of this debate. We have made so much progress in this City, and we are on the precipice of so much more. I will continue working to move Atlanta forward, and I know you will do the same.

Sincerely,



Andre Dickens  
Mayor  
City of Atlanta

Responses from Office of the City Clerk

1. Why did the City conclude that signature match procedures are necessary?
  - a. What legal authorities did the City rely on in making this decision?
  - b. What factual circumstances led the City to make this decision?
  - c. Did the City consider prior experience and litigation in Georgia regarding signature match practices, including its disproportionate effects on communities of color? If so, how were these considerations taken into account?
  - d. Did the City consult outside experts on signature match, including those involved in prior litigation in Georgia, when making this decision? If so, how were these considerations taken into account?
  - e. Did the City consult other jurisdictions or otherwise consider their experiences and practices for petition validation when making this decision? If so, how were these considerations taken into account?

**All Atlantans should have an opportunity to have their voice heard. It is also incontrovertibly true that fraud in the process corrupts and devalues every Atlantant's right to participate. Some actors have wrongly conflated "signature match" used to suppress legitimate mail-in ballot voting with the process of making sure that all signatures on petitions were made by registered voters. However, the City's procedure does not involve, nor was it ever intended to involve, "exact match" or "signature match" as has been used to disenfranchise vote-by-mail voters. Our City should ensure it has a process that respects and protects the two core principles of enfranchisement and integrity. The City has taken that responsibility seriously, and now has a best-in-class process.**

**As to why the City believes examination of petition entries, potentially including signatures, is necessary, it is to protect the integrity of this process, which is uniquely susceptible to being hijacked by bad actors, unlike actual voting. Across America, there is vanishingly little evidence of fraud in connection with ballot access, including absentee ballots. However, there is widespread evidence of fraud in connection with petition collection efforts.<sup>1</sup>**

**That risk of petition fraud is particularly evident when, as has happened here, hundreds of thousands of dollars (or more) are spent by out of state interests to influence the process.<sup>2</sup> This was highlighted in 2022 when five Republican gubernatorial candidates**

---

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *All Things Considered: There's a Fraud Problem with Signature-gathering for Elections*, NPR (Apr. 3, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> See John Ruch, *Cox Scion's Defection Over "Cop City" Shines a Light on Media Conflicts, Old-Money Power*, Saporta Report (July 17, 2023). See also July 18, 2023 tweet by Fergie Chambers, a true and correct copy of which is attached as Exhibit A.

in Michigan—half of the field including the two front runners—were officially disqualified from appearing on the ballot because they submitted thousands of fraudulent signatures.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in Illinois, a QAnon affiliated petition effort to get a statewide slate on the ballot included thousands of fraudulent signatures.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, a 2023 effort using paid petition circulators – as were used in the Atlanta campaign – to get a GOP candidate onto a primary ballot in Colorado was found to involve thousands of fraudulent signatures.<sup>5</sup> In Florida, in 2022, petition circulators turned in thousands of illegally gathered, fraudulent petition pages.<sup>6</sup> Similar stories can be found in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, petition fraud is a nationwide issue, particularly when paid circulators from outside the area are being employed.

Sadly, during the current Training Center petition drive, several City employees' names appeared on the petition without their authorization or knowledge. We have received similar reports about Atlanta citizens who were contacted with claims that their names had been signed. It is incumbent upon the City to utilize a review procedure that will protect the rights of eligible voters while weeding out fraud.

As one step in designing its process, the City hired preeminent election protection attorneys. From overturning Georgia's system of packing Congressional districts to

---

<sup>3</sup> See Colin Jackson, *5 Republicans are off the Michigan gubernatorial ballot after signature fraud*, NPR (June 5, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> See Mitchell Armentrout, *Q-Anot? Far-right Conspiracy Theorists Knocked Off Illinois GOP Primary Ballot – But They Insist “We Are Not Done”*, Chicago Sun-Times (Apr. 22, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Janet Oravetz & Marshall Zelinger, *Six People Accused of Forging Signatures on Petition to Get Candidate on Primary Ballot*, 9News (June 20, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Jake Stofan, *Florida Secretary of State Weighs in on Petition Fraud Arrests*, ActionNewsJax.com (May 27, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Press Release, New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, *AG Platkin Announces Campaign Manager Faces Election Fraud Charges in Connection with False Voter Certifications Supporting Gubernatorial Candidate in 2021* (May 2, 2023); Press release, Pennsylvania Attorney General, *AG Shapiro Announces Charges Against Philadelphia Man for Orchestrating the Forgery of Signatures on Election Nomination Petitions in Municipal Primary Races* (Nov. 16, 2022); Press Release, Suffolk County District Attorney's Office, *Four Charged in Connection with Petition Fraud* (Dec. 4, 2018); Martin Wilbur, *Mt. Kisco Democratic Chair. Son Indicted for Forging Names on Petition*, The Examiner-News (Sept. 13, 2023).

**disenfranchise urban voters nearly sixty years ago,<sup>8</sup> to fighting in 2020 to ensure Georgia used an enfranchise-protecting absentee ballot verification process on behalf of the Democratic Party of Georgia, the lawyers at Bondurant, Mixson & Elmore, LLP have decades of hard-won experience and a track record of protecting and enfranchising Georgia’s voters. The City also added a nationally recognized expert attorney in election law, Chris Sautter, who has been involved in ballot contests for dozens of major Democratic campaigns over his decades-long career. Mr. Sautter’s national experience has been invaluable. Finally, to conduct the actual verification process, the City has hired a team of experienced Democratic petition organizers from Chicago to leverage their knowledge of industry best-practices and significant experience in petition verification.**

**Indeed, the collective experience and progressive mindset of the City’s team has created a petition verification program with protections for Atlanta electors that exceeds Constitutional and statutory requirements. For example, while there is no constitutional requirement for a notice and cure process for a petition the City has developed and incorporated a robust notice and cure into its verification program, so as to ensure that every Atlanta elector who wishes to weigh in will have a fair opportunity to do so.**

2. To what extent, if any, has the City shared its reasoning as to why signature match procedures are necessary with concerned groups, advocates, and other members of the public? If not, why not?

**The City has been clear with all who ask that its core interests are in enfranchisement and integrity, and has had numerous conversations with numerous individuals and organizations about how to best achieve those goals, including several conversations with senior members of your staff. Despite that, some hostile voices have wrongly conflated “signature match” used to suppress legitimate mail-in ballot voting with the process of making sure that all signatures on petitions have been made by registered voters. However, notwithstanding claims to the contrary, the City’s procedure does not involve, nor was it ever intended to involve, “exact match” or “signature match” as has been used to disenfranchise vote-by-mail voters. The City has also made clear that it welcomes further opportunities for constructive dialogue.**

3. The City’s proposed procedure contemplates that individuals who are disqualified because they are not a registered elector in the City as of November 2021 may “come forward with evidence of their eligibility.” How, specifically, will this process work?
  - a. When will individuals be notified that they have been disqualified?
  - b. How will individuals be notified that they have been disqualified, e.g., phone, mail, electronically, etc.?
  - c. What information will individuals have to provide as evidence of their eligibility?

---

<sup>8</sup> See *Wesberry v. Sanders*, 376 U.S. 1 (1964) (applying *Baker v. Carr* to Congressional districts).

- d. What methods may they use to return that information, e.g., phone, mail, electronically, etc.?
- e. How long will they have to return that information?
- f. Will they be permitted assistance in returning that information?

**The City's process is straight forward and designed to protect the rights of all qualified voters as well as the public. First, a review of names will be made by checking voter registration rolls to determine how many signatures of registered voters appear on the submitted petitions. It is not uncommon for petitioners across the country to submit large numbers of petition entries of unqualified individuals. Here, that would be individuals who are either not registered to vote or not registered in the City of Atlanta at the relevant times. Unqualified individuals' names typically appear on petitions because a great deal of signature gathering occurs in public places, including street corners and outside of supermarkets or other commercial establishments where there are many people who are not registered to vote in Atlanta, or at all.**

**The City will make available a report showing which lines of which pages have been deemed invalid and identifying the reason(s) for such. Further, the City will make public a list of all voters who are qualified Atlanta voters in both 2021 and 2023 so that anyone who discovers their signature has not been counted and wishes to contest their status may do so by presenting evidence that they were in fact Atlanta electors at the relevant times. By statute, the verification process may only last 50 days, so anyone wishing to dispute their status will have a week to do so from when the list of ineligible entries is made public. The City will accept such information electronically as well as in person.**

4. The City states that a signature will be disqualified when "major elements [of the signature] deviate significantly from all examples on file."<sup>3</sup> How did the City arrive at this standard?
  - a. What training will reviewers receive on applying this standard?
  - b. Will the City make training materials and examples publicly available?
  - c. Will the City publicly confirm which government records will be used to match signatures?

**The City's decision regarding the standard to apply is informed by the evidence set forth above, its vendors' and counsels' decades of substantial experience with directly relevant issues, and a desire to ensure that a lenient standard of review is utilized, such that the City strikes the appropriate balance of interests here. The City is making every effort to make sure that those seeking a referendum are treated fairly and will err on the side of ensuring that Atlanta voters who desire to bring the issue to a vote are given that opportunity. The City also has an obligation to all Atlanta voters to protect the integrity of the process. The City has hired an experienced team to conduct this review (if necessary), as they do routinely in other jurisdictions, so no additional training is anticipated to be required.**

**Signatures will be reviewed by two reviewers, using available public records. A signature will only be flagged for notice and cure if both reviewers agree that it appears to be not**

**genuine. If either reviewer believes that it could reasonably be the signature of the elector, it will be accepted.**

- **The reviewers will use all readily available signature examples for individual electors, so that the reviewers should have multiple examples of a person’s signature, including how it has changed over time. Because different records are available for different voters, it is not categorically possible to identify, in advance, which records will be used in each individual instance.**
  - **The review will not require exact match of names. For example, Jane Q. Doe will not be selected for a potential cure if she signed the petition Jane Doe.**
  - **The standard for whether a signature will be flagged for notice and cure will be whether the reviewers unanimously believe there is evidence that the signature appears inauthentic when compared to all available specimens.**
  - **The reviewers will look to see if the major elements of the signature – both the size, shape, and orientation of the signature as a whole and the size, shape, and orientation of particular characters - could be that of the elector. An exact match with one of the multiple specimens is not required. A signature will not be flagged for notice and cure unless all reviewers unanimously agree the major elements deviate significantly from all examples on file.**
  - **Finally, the City recognizes that many signatures will be made when voters are rushed. Such “imperfect” signatures will be accepted and counted. However, there will be names on the petitions for which there is no signature, or the signatures are truly indecipherable despite checking all available signature examples for that voter and reviewed by multiple people. In those cases, the individual will be contacted by mail and, if a telephone number is available, by phone. These voters will be provided opportunities to provide a readable signature by mail, online, or in-person. In addition, the organizers of the petition drive will receive a list of voters in this category so that they can contact those individuals and assist them in providing a readable signature. The City will make every effort to count these as valid entries.**
5. The City has outlined a cure process for individuals who are disqualified on the basis of their signature match.
- a. How long will an individual have to cure a signature mismatch?
  - b. Will individuals be permitted to return their attestation form by fax or to cure by phone?
  - c. Will the City allow those assisting individuals with the cure process to return attestation forms electronically (i.e., on the signers’ behalf)?

**As set forth in the City’s September 1 guidance on this topic:**

- **To ensure transparency and facilitate the cure process, the review team will publish a list of any signors whose signatures have been flagged for cure on Monday and**

**Thursday after the Signature Verification Phase of review has begun. This additional step in the process was put in place to ensure that no one's intent to sign the petition is frustrated during this important process.**

- **Within three (3) business days of posting any elector's name on such list, the review team will send that elector whose signature was flagged for cure a letter and call them (if a number is available).**
  - **A person will be permitted to return an attestation via mail, in person at City Hall, or electronically, i.e., by scanning it and emailing it back to the City.**
  - **The City will also accept attestations that are picked up from electors and returned to City Hall for them by third parties.**
6. Will the City establish a phone number or some other means of direct communication for general questions and support regarding the cure process?

**Yes.**

7. Will the City provide information about the verification process and cure process in multiple languages? If so, which languages?

**The City will provide information about the process in English and Spanish. Additionally, Mayor Andre Dickens is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination in the receipt of any City services on the basis of race, ethnicity, country of origin, or language.**

**The City's Language Access Plan, known as iSpeakATL, offers free, timely, and efficient language services to the City's Limited English Proficient (LEP) population. Constituents will be able to receive excellent service from the City no matter what language they speak. Further information about iSpeakATL can be accessed via the following website:**

**<https://www.welcomingatlanta.com/ispeakatl/>**

8. How will the City transparently inform and solicit feedback from concerned groups, advocates, and other members of the public about the verification process?

**The City has received input and feedback from numerous organizations and individuals, including multiple conversations with you and senior members of your staff, and has made clear that it welcomes further opportunities for constructive dialogue.**



Settings

← Post

Fergie Chambers #StopCopCity

The battle to #StopCopCity & move forward the United Front of organizing for the people of ATL has only just begun

Having just detached from my family's company, our cadre is now making our first major strategic "give," with \$600k split between @CommunityMvt & @ATLSolFund

12:56 PM · Jul 18, 2023 · 35.7K Views

73 Reposts 10 Quotes 359 Likes 15 Bookmarks



New to Twitter?

Sign up with Google

Sign up with Apple

Create account

By signing up, you agree to the Terms of Privacy Policy, including Cookie Use.

Relevant people

Fergie Chambers #... @jccfergie
Gen Sec, Berkshire Com MMA, Media. Sp
Class Traitorship
Inquiries: info@babochki.c

Trends are unavailable.

Terms of Service Privacy Policy Cool Accessibility Ads info More ...

Don't miss what's happening

People on Twitter are the first to know

Login Sign