

Commissioner Jules Bailey

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June 30, 2016

Dear Chair Leonard and Members of the Charter Review Committee,

Thank you for your service to the voters of Multnomah County. As Skidmore fountain reminds us, good citizens are the riches of a city. You have put in long hours, and come up with a number of proposals that will give voters the opportunity to weigh in on the future of their county.

However, I urge you to reconsider the proposal regarding the creation of a county manager position. This proposal, as written, could have unintended consequences, and threatens to weaken the voice of those voters in our county whom we both serve.

In our representative democracy, voters have entrusted the Chair and Commissioners to make the right decisions for our community. If they do not feel we are acting in their best interest, they can use their vote to change that. The Chair and Commissioners are the only people in the county with budget authority who are accountable to the people.

By contrast, the creation of a county manager would bring forth an unneeded, costly, bureaucratic position that has no accountability to the voters. A county or city manager is often needed in smaller communities, where elected officials are part time, and there are fewer professionals in government. This is far from the case at Multnomah County, which makes us unique. Moving all administrative and budget tasks away from the Chair creates a process where the Board cannot weigh in on decisions in a timely manner and would limit the voice of our constituents when it matters most.

In my capacity as Commissioner, I am also troubled that within this structure my ability to discuss and resolve constituent issues at a department level would be diminished. A very important role of an elected official is being able to properly advocate and navigate the system for their constituents. This proposal likely would create new barriers instead of access.

At a time when the county is taking on unprecedented capital projects and initiatives, this would complicate work and processes already happening. Changing the structure we all work in would be time consuming, as well as extremely costly. I worry that this would undermine the work we have accomplished and the tough positions we have taken as a Board on issues such as homelessness and the Courthouse project.

We currently have a Chair and Chief Operating Officer who work collaboratively to manage the county very effectively. They actively seek and welcome input from the Board and work with departments to help provide our community with valuable services. Our current system works. A new county manager position would be risky, unnecessary, and undemocratic.

Thank you for your dedicated service on the Charter Review Committee. I very much appreciate your willingness to take into consideration my concerns.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jules Bailey', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Commissioner Jules Bailey
Multnomah County District 1