

Dear Government Accountability Subcommittee,

The Office of Community Involvement is aware of Auditor McGuirk's proposed charter amendment to allow the auditor to establish a Community Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC) for the Auditor's Office. As the office responsible for overseeing the CBAC program, we would like to provide you with some background information on CBACs, as well as our office's perspective on the proposed changes as your subcommittee decides on whether to approve the auditor's proposal and forward it to the full MCCRC.

The CBAC program is established in County Code, the laws passed by the Board of Commissioners. Code establishes a CBAC for each county department, and a CBAC for the county's non-departmental programs. Each committee is made up of seven community members appointed by the Board, and is responsible for reviewing their department's proposed budget for the next year and making recommendations to county leadership. CBACs are one of the key ways that the county receives community input on its budget priorities. Our office is responsible for conducting outreach and recruiting new members, organizing new member orientation, setting program deadlines, and supporting committee members and department staff with implementation of the program.

The Auditor's Office currently falls under the Non-Departmental CBAC - non-departmental includes programs and countywide functions that do not belong to a particular department, including the offices of the chair and county commissioners and the offices of the County Attorney, Communications, Government Relations, Sustainability, Diversity & Equity, Community Involvement, and Emergency Management, as well as a few other functions.

In her proposal, Auditor McGuirk noted that the Non-Departmental CBAC has not consistently met with her office each year. She has also expressed concern to our office that because the Non-D CBAC reviews budgets for so many offices, the committee is not able to focus its attention on the Auditor's Office.

While we understand the auditor's concerns, we would like to share our reservations about the auditor's proposal. A CBAC focused solely on the Auditor's Office would be reviewing and making recommendations on a much smaller budget than the typical CBAC. Using figures from next year's proposed

budget, CBACs examine budgets ranging from \$45 million to \$896 million. Even if the MCCRC proposes and voters adopt the auditor's proposal for a 1% budget floor, the office's budget would be under \$7 million according to her estimates. Our office wants to support engagement efforts that use community member time well, and a standalone Auditor's Office CBAC would be reviewing a much more limited range of programs and services than other committees.

Currently, CBACs are established by a vote of the Board of Commissioners amending county code. Giving the auditor the authority to establish their own CBAC would be an outlier, and presumably a future auditor could dissolve a CBAC that a prior auditor chose to establish. Our office has worked in collaboration with the current auditor on a number of engagement efforts, but future auditors may not prioritize community engagement in the same way.

Finally, we believe there are other avenues to address some of the Auditor's concerns, including having the Non-Departmental CBAC meet annually with all of the elected officials within their scope. The committee will also have more capacity to review office budgets going forward - this current fiscal year (ending June 2022) is the last year that the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS) will fall under the Non-Departmental CBAC. JOHS recently became a county department and will establish its own CBAC next year. In recent years, the JOHS budget has made up almost half of the Non-Departmental budget. In general, we'd prefer to address the concerns at a policy and program level, rather than elevating to the level of the Charter with its inherent lack of flexibility.

All that said, we don't have a high level of concern about this proposal, and should the Charter be amended to allow the auditor to establish a CBAC for their office, we will support their staff to do so. We hope this additional context and perspective will be helpful in your deliberations and would be happy to answer any questions from the subcommittee or the full MCCRC at a meeting or in writing.

Thank you for all of your work,

Dani Bernstein, Director
Multnomah County Office of Community Involvement