



BOSTON CITY COUNCILOR
LYDIA EDWARDS
DISTRICT ONE

April 28, 2021

Clerk Maureen Feeney
1 City Hall Square
Room 601
Boston, MA 02201

Re: Written Request Pursuant to G.L. c. 43b §10, to Amend the Charter of the City of Boston by Submission of a Question for Approval by the Voters

Dear Clerk Feeney,

Last year residents of the City of Boston raised the desire for a more interactive and responsive budgetary process. As you know, the budgetary authorities of the City of Boston are established through the charter of the City of Boston. Currently, the charter constrains the ability of members of the public to advance changes that would increase or otherwise reallocate public investments. Despite vociferous advocacy, members of the public have a muted influence on the city's budgetary process, and members of the local legislative body that represents them may not directly originate, add or reallocate budgetary orders or items to reflect public feedback.

As such, I am proposing a change to the charter of the City of Boston for public referendum. I believe it is incumbent on the municipal elected officials of the City of Boston to collaboratively advance this amendment and offer an opportunity for the voters of Boston to better inform future budgetary decisions. To reiterate, this change simply advances the question so that the voters may decide.

Pursuant to the provisions of **G.L. c. 43b §10**, the change I am submitting would amend the City Charter only as to the municipal budget, which defines the structure for creation and approval of the municipal budget and the relative authorities of the mayor and council, to read as follows:

Creation and Approval of the Municipal Budget. The mayor and city council of the City of Boston shall hold budgetary powers together, with the power to modify in whole or in part an appropriation order or an item within an appropriation order, amend the budget for Boston Public Schools consistent with the Acts of 1936, c. 224, s.2, amended by Acts of 1986, c. 701, s. 5, and further amended by Acts of 1987, c. 613, s. 2 [section 75] of this charter, clarify budgetary procedures and take such other actions as are necessary to amend, approve or disapprove the annual budget for the City, excepting the powers to originate an appropriation order, which shall be reserved for the mayor. To further public engagement and democratic involvement in city spending, the City of Boston shall create by City ordinance an independent Office of Participatory Budgeting with an external oversight board, to create and oversee an equitable and binding decision-making process open to all Boston residents by Fiscal Year 2024, consistent with G.L. c. 44, § 53. The mayor, not later than the second Wednesday in April of each year, shall submit to the city council the annual budget of the current expenses of the city and county for the forthcoming fiscal year, and the mayor may submit thereafter such supplementary appropriation orders as they may deem necessary. Not later than the second Wednesday in June, the city council shall take definite action on the annual budget, by adopting, amending or rejecting it, provided that the amended version shall not be for a higher total budget than originally proposed. In the event of their failure to act on a budget submitted by the mayor, the items and the appropriation orders in the budget as recommended by the mayor shall be in effect as if formally adopted by the city council and approved by the mayor. The mayor shall have seven days from the time of a budgetary vote of the council to approve or return said budget to the council, and in the event of the failure of the mayor to act on a budget approved by the council, the budget shall be in effect as approved by the council. The mayor may modify a budget approved by the council by returning it to said council with amendments to any line item provided that a vote of two-thirds of the council shall be sufficient to override any budgetary amendments, in whole or in part, or an overall budgetary veto by the mayor. It shall be the duty of the city and the county officials when requested by the mayor, to submit to the mayor forthwith in such detail as the mayor may require estimates for the next fiscal year of the expenditures of the department or office under their charge, which estimates shall be transmitted to the city council; provided, however, that the mayor shall neither submit, nor thereafter reduce, the appropriations for the city council at or to a level below that which existed for the previous fiscal year, nor shall the city council reduce the appropriations for the mayor's office below that which existed for the previous fiscal year.

This change would allow for the council to respond to public feedback with actions other than simply rejecting the budget. It would formally establish and allow for expansion of the participatory budgeting process within the city's appropriation orders. Currently, the city's participatory budgeting process is informal, limited and only available to youth engaged by the Mayor's office. It also allows the council to offer more extensive oversight of the budget for Boston Public Schools.


This charter change would preserve the primary budgetary function of the Mayor to originate a

budget. It would preserve the requirement that the council act in a timely fashion. The change would *not* impact the budgetary authority or obligations of the Boston School Committee to originate the budget for Boston Public Schools and exercise the Committee's leadership in outlining school priorities.

In addition to enhancing discussions of any new proposed or desired spending, this change would give the city council more nimble tools in responding to budget cuts in the time of fiscal austerity, and allow for public deliberation on what services could or should be reduced without lasting harm.

Thank you for advancing this public conversation in the City of Boston. I look forward to further discussion.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lydia Edwards". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Lydia Edwards
Boston City Councilor, District One



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

In the Year Two Thousand and Twenty One

Order of Councilor Lydia Edwards: That under the provisions of Chapter 43B of the Massachusetts General Laws, including Sections 10 and 19 of said Chapter, Article 89 of the Massachusetts Constitution, and any other applicable provision of law, Councilor Lydia Edwards proposes, by written request to the Clerk of the City of Boston, the following amendment to the budgetary authorities outlined in Acts of 1909, c. 486, s. 3, amended by Acts of 1974, c. 276, s. 53, amended by Acts of 1982, c. 190, s. 15, and further amended by Acts of 1986, c. 701, s. 2 [Section 48] of the Boston City Charter, which would amend the existing text of said section, and submits such amendment for approval by the voters of the City of Boston:

Creation and Approval of the Municipal Budget. The mayor and city council of the City of Boston shall hold budgetary powers together, with the power to modify in whole or in part an appropriation order or an item within an appropriation order, amend the budget for Boston Public Schools consistent with the Acts of 1936, c. 224, s.2, amended by Acts of 1986, c. 701, s. 5, and further amended by Acts of 1987, c. 613, s. 2 [section 75] of this charter, clarify budgetary procedures and take such other actions as are necessary to amend, approve or disapprove the annual budget for the City, excepting the powers to originate an appropriation order, which shall be reserved for the mayor. To further public engagement and democratic involvement in city spending, the City of Boston shall create by City ordinance an independent Office of Participatory Budgeting with an external oversight board, to create and oversee an equitable and binding decision-making process open to all Boston residents by Fiscal Year 2024, consistent with G.L. c. 44, § 53. The mayor, not later than the second Wednesday in April of each year, shall submit to the city council the annual budget of the current expenses of the city and county for the forthcoming fiscal year, and the mayor may submit thereafter such supplementary appropriation orders as they may deem necessary. Not later than the second Wednesday in June,

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File on: 4/28/2021