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To the Members of the Minneapolis Charter Commission:

Thank you for your consideration of the City Council's proposed charter amendment this past month. Our commitment, as expressed in the resolution passed by the City Council on June 12, 2020, is to transform the way we provide for community safety and respond to decades of failed reforms and deepening mistrust in the Minneapolis Police Department.

Our constituents have called for structural change using words like "defund" and "disband" to describe our current, broken system alongside aspirational language like "transform" and "reimagine" as we begin the work toward the system we believe is possible, in which everyone feels safe.

As elected representatives in a city demanding systemic change, we are proposing a charter amendment that allows us to meaningfully reimagine our city's approach to safety. We expect the transformed system to include law enforcement as part of a multi-faceted approach to public safety.

As you know, the charter amendment replaces the charter-mandated Police Department with a Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention. It also states that "the Council may maintain a division of protective law enforcement services, composed of licensed Minnesota Peace Officers, subject to the supervision of the department of community safety and violence prevention."

From a governing perspective, there are two reasons why we used the word "may" instead of "shall."

First, it ensures the possibility that the City could choose to contract with another jurisdiction for public safety services if it made sense to do so, as many other towns and cities do.

Second, amending the charter is both difficult and relatively rare. This language provides future policymakers the flexibility to achieve the city's public safety goals without prescribing the form that may take.

As elected officials currently in office, we envision a public safety system that includes law enforcement. We have intentionally created space for many months of community engagement and study to determine what functions armed, licensed police officers will and won't continue to serve, as part of a multi-pronged public safety approach. We expect the Division of Law Enforcement to be smaller, more specialized, and more focused than the current Minneapolis Police Department. There will be vigorous public debate about how big that force should be and the oversight and governance of force needed to authentically earn the public's trust.

Future public safety investments will build on work that has already begun. We have a mental health response model in cooperation with Hennepin County's COPE program and the newly created Office of Violence Prevention is expanding its program. We recognize that these efforts need a professional, well-trained law enforcement component as part of a holistic "Public Safety Continuum."

The proposed charter amendment puts Minneapolis on a new, responsible path forward. It has broad public support, as reflected in public testimony as well as public polling, with residents of all races and backgrounds, from across the city. Minneapolis is calling for transformation, and we have the opportunity to act.

The Minneapolis City Council is not asking you to put police abolition on the ballot, nor does the amendment propose this. We are asking you to let Minneapolis vote on a new framework for public safety that aligns with the State of Minnesota's Department of Public Safety. We believe this will be more effective in keeping all of our residents safer. It is a substantive change to the charter with significant public support, and it belongs on the ballot.

Thank you for your service on the Charter Commission, and for your timely and thoughtful work on this important topic under a demanding timeline.

Sincerely,

Council President Lisa Bender
Council Vice President Andrea Jenkins
Council Member Phillippe Cunningham
Council Member Jeremiah Ellison
Council Member Steve Fletcher