New Haven Federation of Teachers

An Affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers

Local 933 AFL-CIO

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Public Testimony on City of New Haven Charter Revision
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Public education is one of the fundamental pillars of democracy in this country. And democratic oversight and community control of our city's schools are necessities if we are to protect and support public education in the years to come. Not only that, but the civic engagement and civic education that come from democratic oversight and community control of our schools is a benefit to all of the stakeholders who are connected to our public education system.

With this in mind and in order to continue to nurture this democratic spirit of our city and our schools, the New Haven Federation of Teachers offer the following revisions to our city's Charter:

- In order to increase New Haven voters' direct impact on the Board of Education, we propose a shift from 2 elected members to 4 elected members on the Board. While some might argue that it is hard to recruit interested New Haven residents for the position of elected member of the Board of Education, we believe that more could be done to engage our residents and build their capacity for increased interest in this role. Not only that, but if our city is split into representative quadrants instead of two districts, the elected BOE would be much more able to build relationships with and represent their constituents, making the work more meaningful, more doable, and more attractive to interested candidates. In addition, we are concerned about the outsized influence the Mayor's appointees can potentially have on the Board and believe that more direct representation of the city's residents will better ensure that community concerns and proposed solutions are more intentionally considered.

- In order to ensure that the system of checks and balances operates as it is intended, and in line with best practice around the nation, we propose that the Mayor of New Haven no longer serve as a voting member of the Board of Education and serve as an ex officio member of board instead. While few will argue that the Mayor should use their position to influence and guide policy as it relates to our public education system, the 7 voting members of the Board of Education should be made up of New Haven residents without
the executive privilege of the Mayor’s Office. When the Mayor has one of those 7 votes, it takes the power away from the people who can bring their ideas and experiences to the crucial work of governing our schools. It also upsets the separation of powers that serves to minimize the role of politics in decision-making about our schools.