

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1012

The Honorable Andre Dickens  
Mayor, City of Atlanta  
55 Trinity Avenue S.E., Suite 2500  
Atlanta, GA 30303

September 15, 2023

Dear Mayor Dickens,

Thank you for engaging with me and my staff over recent weeks as the City of Atlanta (“the City”) has developed processes to verify petitions advocating for a referendum. As you know, there has been substantial litigation concerning a proposed referendum regarding the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, the timeline to submit petitions for this effort, and the obligation of the City to begin reviewing those petitions. I am closely monitoring the litigation positions that the City has taken in light of our shared commitment to ensuring the ability of voters to make their voices heard in their government. I urge the City to err on the side of giving people the ability to express their views, including by establishing clear and transparent deadlines regarding timelines and requirements and by using any discretion available to the City under the law to accept and count all lawfully collected signatures.

Regardless of how the courts resolve this specific matter, however, I understand that the City may continue to receive petitions in the future and may need to apply its petition verification processes in other settings. I want to take this opportunity to share some concerns about these general procedures and to urge the City to adopt measures that maximally ensure the ability of residents to make their voices heard in the referendum process and that enable all eligible signatures to be accepted.

Last month, the City released a series of documents outlining how it would evaluate petitions submitted for a referendum. Part of this process is a signature match, which has been the subject of extensive controversy and litigation in recent years. I was glad to see that the City has iteratively updated its process based on feedback provided by me, my staff, and those of other organizations with expertise in safeguarding our democracy. Some of the updates that I have been pleased to see include the City’s clarification that it would not employ an exact name match standard and its improved process for eligible individuals to address potential errors and sources of disqualification (“cure process”). However, I remain concerned about how the City decided to implement signature match, the City’s procedural transparency, and its ability to ensure that all eligible signatures are counted.

As a pastor, and a U.S. Senator, I have consistently fought to ensure that all voters—whether I agree with their position or not—have a voice in their democracy. This work has included opposing onerous voting restrictions that disproportionately harm communities of color and other already disadvantaged communities. It has also entailed leading voting rights legislation

that, if passed, could establish national baseline standards for how all Americans should be able to participate in the political and democratic process, including requirements for jurisdictions that choose to employ a signature match process in the electoral context.

I know that, as elected representatives and dedicated public servants, you and I share a commitment to ensuring that all eligible voters of Atlanta can exercise their right to participate in the political process. Given this commitment, I am concerned by the past application of signature match in Georgia that likely led to discrimination and potentially the disenfranchisement of eligible voters. I understand that several leading voting rights organizations in Georgia have raised concerns with you on this matter as well.<sup>1</sup>

In the spirit of ensuring the people of Georgia have a voice in their government, I respectfully request that the City provide greater clarity around its processes for verifying petition submissions and take whatever measures are necessary to ensure that all eligible signatures are counted. This should include, at minimum, more information about the process to notify signers who are disqualified for any reason and the process and timeline for curing those deficiencies.

I also urge the City to provide greater clarity about its deliberations, including the rationale for implementing its signature match procedures, and more opportunities for the residents of the City of Atlanta, including those organizing the petition for a referendum, to share their concerns about any procedures related to verifying petitions for a referendum.

Finally, I ask that the City respond to the questions below to assure the residents of Atlanta that the City is taking adequate safeguards to protect our democracy and the right to participate in the political process:

1. Why did the City conclude that signature match procedures are necessary?
  - a. What legal authorities did the City rely on in making this decision?
  - b. What factual circumstances led the City to make this decision?
  - c. Did the City consider prior experience and litigation in Georgia regarding signature match practices, including its disproportionate effects on communities of color? If so, how were these considerations taken into account?
  - d. Did the City consult outside experts on signature match, including those involved in prior litigation in Georgia, when making this decision? If so, how were these considerations taken into account?
  - e. Did the City consult other jurisdictions or otherwise consider their experiences and practices for petition validation when making this decision? If so, how were these considerations taken into account?
2. To what extent, if any, has the City shared its reasoning as to why signature match procedures are necessary with concerned groups, advocates, and other members of the public? If not, why not?
3. The City's proposed procedure contemplates that individuals who are disqualified because they are not a registered elector in the City as of November 2021 may "come forward with evidence of their eligibility."<sup>2</sup> How, specifically, will this process work?

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., <https://twitter.com/NewGAProject/status/1694176583265747248>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://citycouncil.atlantaga.gov/home/showdocument?id=13100&t=638291719317740591> at 3.

- a. When will individuals be notified that they have been disqualified?
  - b. How will individuals be notified that they have been disqualified, e.g., phone, mail, electronically, etc.?
  - c. What information will individuals have to provide as evidence of their eligibility?
  - d. What methods may they use to return that information, e.g., phone, mail, electronically, etc.?
  - e. How long will they have to return that information?
  - f. Will they be permitted assistance in returning that information?
4. The City states that a signature will be disqualified when “major elements [of the signature] deviate significantly from all examples on file.”<sup>3</sup> How did the City arrive at this standard?
    - a. What training will reviewers receive on applying this standard?
    - b. Will the City make training materials and examples publicly available?
    - c. Will the City publicly confirm which government records will be used to match signatures?
  5. The City has outlined a cure process for individuals who are disqualified on the basis of their signature match.
    - a. How long will an individual have to cure a signature mismatch?
    - b. Will individuals be permitted to return their attestation form by fax or to cure by phone?
    - c. Will the City allow those assisting individuals with the cure process to return attestation forms electronically (i.e., on the signers’ behalf)?
  6. Will the City establish a phone number or some other means of direct communication for general questions and support regarding the cure process?
  7. Will the City provide information about the verification process and cure process in multiple languages? If so, which languages?
  8. How will the City transparently inform and solicit feedback from concerned groups, advocates, and other members of the public about the verification process?

Thank you for your shared commitment to upholding the rights of every Georgian. I look forward to your response by September 25, 2023.

Sincerely,



Reverend Raphael Warnock  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 4.