

July 11, 2023

To: Clerk, City of Baltimore Board of Estimates

From: Lou Fields

Re: State of Opposition

Item # SB 23-12348, Peer Recovery Specialist, page 11

I am requesting to speak in person at the July 12, 2023, Board of Estimates meeting to state my opposition to the above item.

My reasons for opposing this item.

Council Member Zeke Cohen is requesting an exemption to enable him along with his staff to raise \$500,000 to \$1million to assist a city agency, the Enoch Pratt Free Library with their Peer Recovery Drug Addiction and Prevention Program.

Reasons for Opposition

1. This item is very troubling since this exemption if approved at the Councilman's request would authorize and position the unnecessary utilization of a sitting City of Baltimore Councilmember to become a million-dollar fundraiser for the Enoch Pratt Free Library (EPFL), which is City agency.
2. The EPFL has 3 dozen of the Baltimore Region's most successful and respected persons on its Board of Trustees and Directors; this includes a former Mayor, a former MD State Senator, Doctors, college president, notable attorneys, architects, and other extraordinarily successful people. Dr. Mycelle Farmer, chair of the EPFL Board of Trustees, at the December 14, 2022, Board meeting stated, "Through their great efforts the Board ensures that the Pratt Library system is one of the best institutions in the City of Baltimore."
3. It is unseemly that a Baltimore City Councilmember would be permitted to become a fundraiser for a city agency that the Councilman votes on this agency's budget yearly.
4. There is no PRESSING financial need for the Councilman to be engaged in this type of fundraisings activity for such a well-funded City agency.
5. EPFL annual budget. In FY 2022, the city allocated \$35.3 million to the EPFL. In FY 24 the city increased the EPFL budget by \$8.6 million to a grand total of \$44 million, the largest annual EPFL budget ever. The EPFL has 462 staff members. (Source: Baltimore City FY 2024 Budget, Volume 1, page 73-75).
6. On February 21, 2023, Mayor Brandon Scott awarded the Pratt Library \$11.4 million in American Rescue Plan funding. This year the Mayor's Office of Recovery Program allotted over \$4 million to help the EPFL with repairs. The Mayor also contributed \$3 million to assist the Pratt Library in its efforts to build a new library in Park Heights.
7. On April 1, 2023, at its annual gala, (Mr. Pratt Presents) the EPFL raised \$445,000 in one day.

8. EPFL sponsors include PNC Bank, Baum Family Foundation, BGE, Venable LLP Law firm, Hillman Communications, Brown Advisory, the Meyerhoffs, the law firm of Rosenberg, Martin & Greenberg, along with other prominent patrons of Baltimore.

9. This request is a blatant misuse of the public trust to permit an elected official to focus on fundraising for a \$44 million City agency and not use every available minute of his time, his staff time, and his office resources to help the Citizens of Baltimore in his position as an elected city official.

10. The district this Councilperson represents includes Fell's Point where in recent times, the Point has been the site of numerous shootings, murders, public drunkenness, and street brawls. This is certainly one part of the Councilman's that needs his attention.. The voters of 1st district elected the Councilman to use his time to enact good legislation that will help the citizens of his district and the citizens of Baltimore.

11. The approval by the members of the City's Board of Estimates is especially troubling to voters and citizens of Baltimore who are aware that this same councilperson who is seeking the exemption has already announced that he is a candidate for the President of the Baltimore City Council, a citywide position. On his campaign website, Councilman Cohen states "Baltimore deserves better; but first we must restore faith in our basic systems and renew trust in the leaders elected to deliver them." Yet his exemption request seeks to avoid adherence to City Code Article 5, Section 6-26 which prohibits solicitation and facilitation of a gift, howbeit that the council voted an exception in 2005 to permit certain solicitations. However, it should be based on need and not politics.

12. This is not what the citizens of Baltimore vote for, nor expect from a sitting City Councilmember. City voters expect and deserve elected officials who work on their behalf. Citizens believe the job of our Council members is to represent their district and help the Citizens of Baltimore. Voters want Councilmembers to spend their valuable time drafting, enacting, and passing good legislation and fighting against bad legislation to protect the interest of the citizens of Baltimore.

What happens when a citizen, a voter, a member of the Baltimore community seeks to speak or meet with the Councilman or his staff and their response is "We're busy working our million-dollar fundraising efforts on behalf of the EPFL, to assist them with their Peer Recovery Specialist Drug Intervention program."

As a citizen and voter in the City of Baltimore, I am in opposition to this exemption request and ask that the members of the Board of Estimates vote no to BOE agenda item SB 23-12348.

Submitted by

Lou Fields

Citizen for Integrity in City Elected Officials