



September 11, 2016

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you had a rewarding and relaxing summer. This week's letter discusses diversity and equity in City government, the use of voter petitions to gain City Council hearings on pending legislation and ensuring adequate RIPTA bus service for the City's high school students.

This past February, the Providence Public Library hosted an exhibit portraying the 1965 civil rights march on Selma. The exhibit reminded visitors of the spirit of optimism and progress that marked the era, and which has been lost in the years that followed. The same half century has seen dramatic changes in the composition of the City's population, which has become considerably more diverse. To that end, the City Council formed a Special Commission on Diversity and Equity in City Employment in April with a charge to produce a report by October 10 measuring the diversity of the City's government work force and making recommendations for further action. Last Wednesday, the Commission reviewed a [draft report](#). The Commission will meet again on September 22 with the goal of reviewing and approving a final report.

During the current City Council term, I have introduced or co-sponsored legislation (1) [requiring the City's most powerful lobbying organization to register](#), (2) [ending "pension spiking" through which former Council members receive excessive pensions from City employment](#) and (3) [extending "open government" initiatives to meet current challenges](#). All of this legislation was referred to either the Ordinance or Finance Committees, whose chairs have emphatically refused to schedule hearings on any of them. Their decision to block legislation departs from the normative behavior followed by the other City Council committees this term, and all City Council committees last term. The other committee chairs hold prompt hearings because (a) they understand this to be part of their core responsibility as legislators, and (b) they share a norm of common courtesy with their fellow City Council members. The Home Rule Charter provides a check against this misuse of power by requiring committees to hold hearings on pending legislation when proponents present a petition signed by 50 qualified electors. While petitions are admittedly a blunt instrument, there is no other way to get these two committees to do their job. To this end, I am asking for your help to sign petitions to require hearings on pending legislation. If you are willing to do so, [please send me an email](#) and I will get you copies of petitions to sign.

Beginning last year, the School Department expanded the RIPTA bus pass program to high school students living 2 or more miles away from their school. As part of its Memorandum of Understanding with RIPTA, the School Department agreed to purchase a minimum of 2,500 "full price" monthly passes (more than \$1.5 million per year) in return for RIPTA's agreement to make reasonable efforts to add bus lines to accommodate the students. When school opened this year, students learned that RIPTA had eliminated two bus lines to Classical High School, causing disruptions. The Superintendent has contacted RIPTA, which has begun to address the situation. With that in mind, I introduced a [Resolution](#) for next Thursday's City Council meeting requiring RIPTA to meet its obligations; however, I would be pleased to withdraw it before then if this situation is resolved.

Sincerely,