

From: Yeabsera Agonfer <yeabsera.agonfer@yale.edu>
Sent: Thursday, February 26, 2026 7:18 PM
To: Public Testimony <PublicTestimony@newhavenct.gov>
Subject: Written Testimony for Best City to Start Policy

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To whom it may concern,

It's unfortunate that I couldn't be there in person to share this testimony, but I want to express how deeply I support the Best City to Start policy.

As an early stage founder of ChaCha Butter and as someone who has interned with CitySeed as a Food Business Account Manager, I've seen firsthand what it takes to start a food business in New Haven. Over the summer, I interviewed more than twenty local food ventures to understand their experiences navigating the process. One theme came up again and again: starting is overwhelming.

Entrepreneurs spoke about the high upfront permit fees, the catering license costs, food service certifications, and, for packaged goods founders, the additional food processor licenses required at the state level. Each requirement on its own makes sense. But layered together, they create a financial and psychological barrier that slows people down before they've even made their first sale.

For many early stage founders, especially those without generational wealth or outside capital, \$650 to \$1,000 in fees is not a small line item. It can mean delaying a launch, operating informally, or abandoning an idea altogether. That is lost creativity, lost tax revenue, and lost economic activity for our city.

I believe in the Best City to Start policy because it sends a clear message: New Haven wants you to begin. It lowers the cost of taking a risk on yourself. It allows entrepreneurs to invest that money back into ingredients, equipment, packaging, marketing, and hiring. It aligns fees with actual health risk while still maintaining strong safety standards.

More than that, it creates a culture of starters. When one business launches successfully, others follow. When barriers are lowered, innovation expands. That snowball effect strengthens our local economy, activates neighborhoods, and builds pride in the businesses rooted here. New Haven has the talent. We have the ideas. Policies like this make sure we do not stand in the way of our own potential.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Best,

Yeabsera Agonfer.
Co-Founder | ChaCha Butter
Funding Lead | Tsai CITY
Vice President | Black Graduate Network
Alumni Chair | Yale Black Seminarians

From: Katie Leavitt <sprucecoffeenhv@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 26, 2026 4:05 PM
To: Public Testimony <PublicTestimony@newhavenct.gov>
Subject: Best City to Start Written Testimony from Spruce Coffee

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Hello,

We are AJ Perez and Katherine Leavitt, co-owners of Spruce Coffee on State St. We opened Spruce Coffee a little over a year ago upon hearing that the coffee shop previously residing at that location was closing. The former coffee shop was a super important third space for the community, and we even traced back the inception of many of our own friendships to that shop. Because of this, we wanted to keep the venue open as an additional gathering space for socializing, studying, community projects, and support of the arts.

Having never owned a brick and mortar in the past, what we did not expect was all of the hurdles we'd have to overcome just to make our first dollar. In addition to the ones being mentioned in this policy campaign, the fees required at every step of acquiring licenses and permits were astronomical. It seems counterintuitive because as a new business (especially one that hasn't started generating revenue), liquid finances are not something readily available. While we understand the importance of capital, we also think many of the fees felt arbitrary - especially considering the lack of resources that these fees should technically be helping pay for (i.e. the lack of health inspectors in New Haven).

Despite the intense amount of fees the city imposes on new businesses, it seems like that money is being squandered. We say this because there should exist many more troubleshooting resources at every step of the startup phase, yet we were being jostled around from one city official to the next with very little direction. The online portals feel primitive, the information unhelpful, and we had to rely on people like Caroline and other business owners who had just recently finished muddling their way through the process themselves for guidance.

Small businesses prop up the local community, encourage an influx of homeowners/renters, provide a huge portion of revenue for city initiatives through our taxes, and help place a spotlight on the city for tourism. Why make it harder for us to make the city a better place? At Spruce Coffee, we stand with the Best City to Start Campaign, as well as any other initiatives to help make this process easier and more affordable for new businesses.

Thanks for your consideration,
AJ and Katie