

Misty Maza

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Testimony In Support of CRB Ordinance Revisions November 15, 2023

Jean Jenkins, CRB Board Member
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To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Legislation Committee:

I write this letter in support of the proposed changes to the Civilian Review Board (CRB) Ordinance. The CRB works to monitor and independently investigate any civilian complaints of police misconduct against a police officer employed by a police department empowered to act with municipal police powers in the City of New Haven. The Ordinance was originally approved in 2019 and over the past 4 years some key areas of improvement have been identified by the Board. These include changes to the definition of Quorum, adding language that clarifies the length of time for investigations and reviews of civilian complaints, improved access to case files, and changes that would streamline board membership processes.

Specifically, I support the proposed changes to the quorum definition to be in line with the City's standard of half the seated board +1. Not having quorum can cause significant disruptions and limit the Board's ability to vote on key issues, including deciding which complaint cases to review.

When members have chosen to resign, it causes the abrupt vacancy of board seats and the challenges it poses can stall action of subcommittees or the entire board. We propose to solve this in two ways, first by having a notice to vacate a seat set of a 60 day clock rather than take effect immediately. The other is to allow citizens to self-identify their interest in the board without waiting for 90 days to see if the Community Management Team will nominate a person first. This smoother nomination process will hopefully create a plethora of qualified and interested individuals for the mayor and Alders to then add to the membership. Self-selection, rather than appointment, may also improve the longevity of members as they are driven to participate.

I am also in support of changes that reduce the Board's presently limited access to Internal Affairs. We are only able to see redacted files until an investigation is deemed "complete" by IA, which has taken up to 18 months in rare cases, but routinely can take 90-129 days. This limited access undermines the Board's ability to review and contribute to community-police relationships by examining these cases in a timely fashion. The length of time it takes for cases to be seen by the Board may be deterring people from reporting issues. The last thing we want is a growing sentiment of the community that IA or the CRB are minimizing or ignoring their opinions and concerns.

The Civilian Review Board Ordinance took a lot of work on behalf of Alders, community advocates and organizers, and the police department to come up with something that all parties could agree to. Reopening this document is not easy, but these changes are important and I hope you will support the revisions that the Board has voted to put forward.

Respectfully submitted by,
Jean Jenkins
Civilian Review Board | New Haven, CT