Debra L. Jones, Port Tobacco, MD

Public Comments Session Tues, 9/24/24 – Charter

Good evening commissioners.

My name is Debra Jones. Back in January, I spoke to you during Public Comments session about Charter. I shared that I had supported the effort in 2014, but that this time, certain events surrounding the current decision to pursue Charter had me concerned.

I ended by asking you to address those concerns and give me a reason to support Charter this time. You have not, and in fact, you raised more concerns for me since then. So despite the hard work and valiant efforts of the Charter Board citizen members, I will not be voting for Charter this time.

Why? It comes down to six (6) reasons:

1. Circumstances from the start:
   1. Commissioner-led, not citizen-led
   2. Very close in timing to the illegal vote to remove Administrator Belton, and the same 3 Commissioners that got us into that mess subsequently voting to pursue Charter.
   3. There was hardly any explanation why you thought Charter would be good for us, with only Commissioner Collins saying it’s an opportunity for us to go through a process.
   4. I am very much aware that I don’t know what I don’t know…I don’t what is going on behind the scenes.
2. The “rush.” All the Charter development was squeezed into a year to get it on November’s ballot. Better we had spent that year having informal community discussion and buy-in before diving headlong into a process with a deadline.
3. Blackmail. Charter is being held up as a means for increased accountability, yet we already have the authority to do certain things, but some of you won’t. Three of you, for example, voted twice against legislation to remove a Commissioner. So we can’t have that now, but we will if we pass your Charter. I don’t respond well to being blackmailed.
4. Cost AND disruption involved with such a big change. We are already in chaos. Remember when the HR employee committee came before you last November? I have never seen anything like that before. Which leads me to…
5. Our biggest issue is a people problem, and Charter is trying to fix it as a process problem. In November 2023, employees shared that certain members of the board are “not treating people like people,” and are “only out to protect themselves.” A significant process change in this current environment has the potential to AMPLIFY problems rather than fixing anything.
6. Finally, in reviewing the Charter, I found nothing compelling enough to surmount what I described already.

I sincerely appreciate the time, the work, the individual conversations and Q&A with members of the Charter Board and community. But because of the leadership by this board, I will not be voting for Charter this time.