



August 9, 2023

Mr. William S. Duffey, Jr.
Chair
State Election Board
2 MLK Jr. Drive
Suite 802 Floyd West Tower
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Re: City of Milton elections

Dear Chairman Duffey and State Election Board Members:

As residents and registered voters in Milton, Georgia, we write to you with serious concerns regarding the planned administration of municipal elections by the City of Milton in the upcoming November elections.

Warnings from city officials, a review of public records, and independent media reporting make clear that the process of establishing City-administered elections has been rife with conflicts, self-dealing and questionable practices.

You are likely aware that multiple cities in Fulton County studied the possibility of running their own elections. However, only one—the city of Milton—has moved forward with those plans. This decision was based on recommendations from Milton’s Municipal Elections Feasibility Committee, which includes two Milton City Council Members eligible for re-election in November 2023.

The argument for self-administering elections appears to have been financial. However, such savings are a red herring, as Milton originally planned for just two polling places during the upcoming elections, compared to the eight polling places used in Milton municipal elections in previous elections administered by Fulton County. Further, despite claims from Milton City Council member Paul Moore that the move would save Milton “hundreds of thousands of dollars,” such savings could not be detailed or verified by council members or City staff during its last discussion of the matter on July 24, 2023.

Further, public records reveal significant pressure applied to city staff by Milton City Council Member Rick Mohrig on the issue of which elections consultant to hire to assist in the administration of Milton’s elections. In a series of April 2023 text messages, Council Member Mohrig repeatedly admonished the city manager, Steve Krokoff, who was also appointed as Milton’s elections superintendent, for failing to meet with and quickly hire Mr. Mohrig’s preferred consultant.

The city manager/elections superintendent's responsibility is to make contracting decisions and hire city staff. It is not the purview of the Milton City Council. However, such strictures did not limit the continued overreach by Mr. Mohrig. On April 23, Council Member Mohrig texted one of his city council colleagues on the consultant issue, saying, "I think we need to stand firm & [sic] need more of Council with us."¹

On April 24, Council Member Mohrig texted that same colleague and said, "I also think at least one Council Member or [Municipal Elections Feasibility] Committee member should participate in the interview [sic]. (I'm having a trust issue with some staff at this point.)"²

The City did ultimately hire Vernetta Nuriddin, the consultant being advocated for by Mr. Mohrig. But, so far, she has demonstrated a high degree of integrity for which we, as citizens, are grateful. Even prior to her hiring, Mr. Nuriddin noted that Mr. Mohrig's active lobbying for her was out of bounds. In an April 27, text message³ to Milton City Manager Steve Krokoff, Ms. Nuriddin said, "...I told him [Council Member Mohrig] today that incumbents cannot participate in the administration of their own elections. No way around that fact."⁴

Further, [in her first report to the Milton City Council last month](#), Ms. Nuriddin noted her concerns over potential violations of SB 202. Her report notes that SB 202, "clarified the role of the Elections Superintendent which includes selecting and preparing polling locations as well as conducting the city's elections."⁵

On May 1, the Milton City Council voted on an agenda item titled, "*Consideration of a resolution of the City of Milton, Georgia to identify the number of and location of the polling locations for the 2023 Milton municipal elections.*"

The City Council voted 4-3 to establish only two polling places, as well as specific locations for the polling places.⁶ In doing so, the City Council did not include a polling place in one of its three city council districts—where, ironically, the residing council member is eligible for re-election. In advocating for three polling locations, one in each city council district, Milton City Council Member Carol Cookerly said, "Every election is about access...For, what, \$5,000⁷, we can cover all our bases and we stand on the side of as much access as possible."

¹ [See Text messages, group A, page 2](#)

² [See Text messages, group A, page 2](#)

³ [See Text messages, group B, page 1](#)

⁴ Obviously, there is a general oversight and fiduciary responsibility that each member of the Milton City Council has to ensure fair and transparent elections. That is true regardless of whether or not they will be on a future ballot. Instead, the conduct Ms. Nuriddin may be referring to is the kind of hands-on lobbying for the hiring of specific staff and limiting of voter access that she appears to find violative of acceptable practice, principle and possibly of state statutes and municipal ordinance codes. And it seems her reference to "incumbents" means those on the City Council who are eligible to run in the election in question.

⁵ Ms. Nuriddin is referring to O.C.G.A. 21-2-70.

⁶ On July 24, 2023, the Milton City Council voted unanimously to add a third polling location, with two members eligible for re-election in 2023, reversing themselves from their May 1, 2023 vote.

⁷ The projected cost of adding a third polling location.

Inexplicably, the City Council voted not to put a polling location in what Milton Mayor Peyton Jamison called, “the highest density area in Milton.”

In reporting on that vote, Ms. Nuriddin, Milton’s elections consultant said in her July 2023 report, “I believe that the council erred when two incumbents on the November ballot⁸ were empowered to close Election Day polls in areas with high concentrations of people of color...An election contest could be made by a losing candidate on the grounds of misconduct, fraud or irregularity by any primary or election official or officials sufficient to change or place in doubt the result, O.C.G.A. 21-2-522” (emphasis in original document)

It is clear that the administration of municipal elections—and by extension the designation of the location and number of polling places—are duties that rest solely with the elections superintendent and not the city council, whose members have an inherent conflict of interest.

Indeed, at least one member of the Milton City Council, as well as the elections superintendent, have expressed real concern about election interference.

During a May 1 Milton City Council meeting, Council Member Cookerly said, “I just don’t believe in asking someone to run something then tell them how to do it. Let’s just ease up and let him run it with access.”

Then, at a July 24 Milton City Council meeting, she said, “I think our staff, [city manager/elections superintendent] Mr. Krokoff, Ms. Lowitt, Ms. Inglis, if they were unencumbered, could do a bang-up job. But there have been some encumbrances.”

Mr. Krokoff seems to agree with Council Member Cookerly. At the same July 24 meeting, he said, “...as you know and some of what I’ve communicated to you all, trust and legitimacy are a critical piece. They’re more important than the financial piece at the end of the day. And it’s important that *if* we move forward, we can maintain that level of trust and legitimacy with our community...The gap that Councilmember Cookerly talked about between perception and reality is of concern to me as the city manager. We would need to bridge that gap *pretty quick* to be able to gain back the trust and maintain the level of legitimacy we need with our citizens. So, it would mean some changes going forward. If that is something the council was interested in doing.” (emphasis added)

The public records, Council Member Cookerly comments and Milton’s elections consultant have made clear that this process has been, at best, mismanaged—and, at worst, could be unethical and in violation of state statutes.

⁸ Ms. Nuriddin is referring to Council Members Paul Moore and Rick Mohrig who voted against the motion for three polling locations, and voted for a motion which limited the number of polling locations to two. Both Moore and Mohrig, while currently undeclared, are eligible to run for re-election in 2023.

While our strong preference would be that Milton run its own elections, the City Council has lost the ability to avoid a real and perceived conflict of interest in the administration of our elections. We believe the city manager's hands are tied by at least two members of the City Council who seem to disregard the city manager's specific and separate role in administering municipal elections as elections superintendent. We believe only the State Election Board has the ability to ensure the fairness and transparency citizens of Milton deserve.

We are now just 49 days from the deadline to notify voters of polling location changes and just 69 days from the deadline to have absentee ballots ready for voting. Can changes be made quickly enough to save honest, ethical and transparent elections in Milton?

Our hope is that the State Election Board can answer that question.

We are grateful for your review of our concerns and the critical role you play in ensuring election fairness in our state.

Sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is a stylized, cursive 'A' followed by a horizontal line, representing Adam Hollingsworth. The signature on the right is a more elaborate cursive script that reads 'Tony Palazzo', representing Tony Palazzo.

Adam Hollingsworth

Tony Palazzo

cc: Members, State Board of Elections

Attachments:

[Text messages, group A](#)

[Text messages, group B](#)