

June 27, 2023

Letter of Support for Referendum Campaign to Stop Cop City

We, the undersigned organizations, express our support for a referendum on the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, commonly known as “Cop City,” and giving Atlanta voters a choice on the future of their community.

For over two years, Atlantans across race, class, age, and neighborhood have organized to stop the destruction of at least 85 acres of forest land and the construction of the proposed police militarization facility.¹ In September 2021, over one thousand Atlanta residents offered 17 hours of public comment regarding the project, the majority of which opposed the facility.² In May and June of 2023, hundreds of residents offered over seven³ and fourteen hours,⁴ respectively, of public comment that overwhelmingly rejected the Cop City proposal.

Despite these historic⁵ demonstrations of public opposition by the people of Atlanta, their voices were ignored. On June 5, 2023 the Atlanta City Council voted to approve \$67 million in public funding for Cop City,⁶ despite years of promises that the facility would only cost the taxpayers \$30 million.⁷

Two days later, a coalition of individuals and organizations announced an initiative to put Cop City to a direct vote by the people of Atlanta.⁸ The right of the people to hold a referendum is enshrined in Atlanta’s City Charter and its laws.⁹ The effort will require gathering approximately 70,000 signatures in a 60 day period, and will offer residents a chance to repeal the land-lease ordinance that allows the facility to be built.¹⁰

As organizations committed to equity and access to democracy, we believe in an Atlanta that creates public safety through building community, connecting people with the resources they need to thrive, and honoring the voices of the people. Atlantans have courageously stood for this

¹ Aja Arnold, *Why Atlantans Are Pushing to Stop ‘Cop City,’* The Appeal (Dec. 8, 2021), <https://theappeal.org/atlanta-cop-city-police-training-facility/> (“renderings of the facility include a mock city for officers to train in, . . . new shooting ranges, burn tower sites, and more.”)

² *Id.*

³ Chamian Cruz, *Hundreds Rally Against ‘Cop City’ Ahead of Atlanta City Council Vote*, WABE (May 16, 2023), <https://www.wabe.org/hundreds-rally-against-cop-city-ahead-of-atlanta-city-council-vote/>.

⁴ Riley Bunch & Brian Eason, *City Council Passes Funding Legislation for Training Center*, Atlanta Journal-Constitution (June 6, 2023), <https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-news/city-council-passes-funding-legislation-for-training-center/H4Z4QYFECRDJBOLQ3YMW43GTCA/>.

⁵ Kristal Dixon & Thomas Wheatley, *Atlanta Council Approves Controversial “Cop City” After Heated Meeting*, Axios (June 6, 2023), <https://www.axios.com/2023/06/06/atlanta-cop-city-final-vote> (“[v]irtually all who spoke during the Council meeting — the longest in memory — opposed the project and urged officials to reject the public funding proposal.”)

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Riley Bunch & Brian Eason, *Training Center Costs Call Years of Promises into Question*, Atlanta Journal-Constitution (June 4, 2023), <https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-news/training-center-costs-call-years-of-promises-into-question/6LT2DM43Z5ERJDUWEICUYOH3CE/>.

⁸ R.J. Rico, *Atlanta Organizers Unveil Plan to Stop ‘Cop City’ at the Ballot Box*, Associated Press (June 7, 2023), <https://apnews.com/article/atlanta-police-training-cop-city-referendum-d605bfbo43f2e24c5749f441458acf5a>.

⁹ Atlanta, Ga., Charter § 2-501; Atlanta, Ga., Code of Ordinances § 66-37.

¹⁰ Rico, *supra* note 8.

vision of the future despite facing severe retaliation, and we condemn the manner in which organizers and activists have been targeted¹¹ and intimidated.¹²

We see our own communities' futures reflected in this struggle, and understand that the democratic values under attack in Atlanta have implications for the rest of the nation. We call upon the City of Atlanta to respect the referendum process, and to support the right of residents to weigh in directly on an issue of critical interest to the public.

¹¹ Rick Rojas & Sean Keenan, *Georgia Officials Target Bail Fund in Crackdown on 'Cop City' Protests*, N.Y. Times (June 2, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/02/us/cop-city-atlanta-protests.html>.

¹² Timothy Pratt, *Tents Slashed and Supplies Destroyed: 'Cop City' Activists Describe Police Intimidation*, The Guardian (Mar. 15, 2023), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/15/cop-city-police-intimidation-questionable-tactics>.