



OFFICE OF
THE MAYOR

November 23, 2025

Dear Councilmember Abubaker,

I was surprised and very concerned by your recent public statement expressing disappointment in our Chief Administrative Officer.

Mr. Donald is the administrative leader of our organization, and under our City Charter, the Chief Administrative Officer serves “at the pleasure of the mayor.” (§5.01.1. *Chief administrative officer*). City Council cannot give binding direction to the CAO, or to anyone in our administration, except through the instrument of law: adopted City ordinances. On all other matters, the CAO takes direction from the Mayor.

Let me be extremely clear: I will always direct the CAO and our administration to follow established law—even in cases where Council adopts a policy contrary to our recommendation.

However, in this case, Council does not have the legal ability under our Charter to give binding direction to either the Mayor or the CAO on how to prepare the City’s annual budget proposal. Council is of course encouraged to provide input and advice, but it cannot, by our Charter, dictate the substance of the Mayor’s budget submission. (§5.05 *General duties; mayor*, and *Chapter 6, Budgets* of the Charter).

Your characterization to the media that our CAO might “defy the will [of council],” misconstrues Council’s authority laid out in our Charter: the CAO has the responsibility, under the direction of the Mayor, to develop and introduce the budget, while Council has the authority to review, amend and adopt the budget. Given how the Charter structures the responsibilities of our government, it is wholly inappropriate for you to criticize Mr. Donald for carrying out the responsibilities assigned to him by the Charter. (§ 5.05.1. *General duties; chief administrative officer*.)

It is normal and healthy for us to have differences of opinion on policy as we work together to meet our City’s needs, and I truly believe that respectful and robust discourse helps us achieve our collective goal of building a well-functioning government. As we established while working arm-in-arm together on the Budget Task Force, I am absolutely committed to getting substantive input from all Council members—and from the public—as we prepare the budget. This is one of



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THE MAYOR

the foundational recommendations that we embraced together on the Task Force, and as a result of that collaborative work, my Administration has:

1. Made several substantial adjustments to the budget development process to give Council more opportunity to provide front-end input
2. Moved up the submission date of the budget so Council may have more time to review the budget proposal prior to taking action
3. Designed an internal process to comply with the “side-by-side” budget ordinance recently adopted by Council
4. Started work on establishing a school funding formula in collaboration with Council and the School Board
5. Implemented a major overhaul of our nondepartmental grant process to promote fairness and accountability

We have made these changes because I deeply value partnership and collaboration.

It remains my hope and expectation to introduce a budget that both supports my vision and commitment to a Thriving Richmond and is well-aligned with the Council’s priorities. Nonetheless, that work, under our Charter, must be undertaken under the direction of the elected Mayor. That is what we intend to do, and we look forward to delivering a FY27 budget for Council’s consideration this upcoming March.

Finally, our team has taken note of several questions about the budget and budget process in your November 21 memorandum. Mr. Donald will provide Council members with answers to those questions by the close of business November 24.

Sincerely,

Danny TK Avula, MD, MPH
Mayor
City of Richmond