



Testimony on SB690

Thank you Chair West, Vice-Chair Nichols and distinguished members of the committee for giving me an opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Macey Davis, and I am the Executive Vice President of Government Affairs for the Real Estate Council in Dallas. I also serve as Chair of the Real Estate Councils of Texas, a statewide coalition representing the commercial real estate industry. Our coalition consists of real estate leaders and professionals in from Austin Dallas, Ft. Worth, Houston and San Antonio and we have identified SB690 as one of our priorities for the 81st legislative session.

Like Mr. Douglas said, you may be wondering why we are so interested in this bill. He alluded to what has happened in Austin over the past decade, as voters continue to reject these charter amendments put forth through citizen-initiated petitions.

On May 9, Dallas citizens head to the polls to vote on Proposition 2, which is a proposed charter amendment that would require the City of Dallas to post public notice and potentially be forced to hold a public election before approving more than \$1 million in subsidies to private developers of hotels, condominiums and retail facilities.

If Proposition 2 passes on May 9, it will destroy future economic development for the City of Dallas by delaying and deterring large-scale development projects and by placing the City of Dallas at a competitive disadvantage compared to neighboring cities. The ripple effect of passing Prop. 2 will have far-reaching consequences even beyond Dallas proper.

Only 20,000 signatures were needed to get this charter amendment on the May 9th ballot. This low threshold has many Dallas citizens scratching their heads wondering why it is easier to force a vote on an amendment to the city's charter than to force a vote on a referendum or a new city ordinance.

A city charter can be compared to the U.S Constitution in terms of function. As Dallas Council Member Angela Hunt stated, "the city charter is our highest and most important document in Dallas." She emphasizes that it *should* be more difficult to amend the city charter than to pass an ordinance. Even under Federal law, it is far more difficult to amend the U.S. Constitution than it is to pass legislation.

We're not asking for a higher standard to petition for charter amendments compared to a referendum. We're simply asking for more equality in the system. While there is no universal standard for a petition threshold to govern all voter-initiated elections, it is clear that the current charter amendment level is far too low.

SB 690 would bring that threshold up to one that accurately reflects the will of the public and demonstrates a strong level of grassroots support to justify calling an election.

On behalf of The Real Estate Council of Dallas and the Real Estate Councils of Texas, I appreciate the opportunity speak to you today and I look forward to any questions you may have.