

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
CITY COUNCIL

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COUNCILWOMAN - 2nd DISTRICT

November 9, 2010

James Eisenhower, Esquire
Chairperson
Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority
1500 Walnut Street, 16th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Mr. Eisenhower:

On behalf of City Council, I am writing to endorse the concept of having the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority conduct a comprehensive, independent, and objective study of the City's Fire Department. The issue of how best to ensure fire safety for the citizens of Philadelphia is a complex and challenging one, requiring a top-to-bottom analysis of all components of the Fire Department – including, for example, deployment, management, and governance.

That said, I want to emphasize that my support for the proposed study is conditional: I believe it is essential that, in conducting this study, PICA must engage and involve IAFF Local 22 and the IAFF International Union in every phase of the study. The worst possible outcome of this endeavor would be a study that is rejected as biased by our City's firefighters and those who represent them. Accordingly, I believe that the IAFF must be at the table when the study's scope is designed, when an RFP is drafted, when responses to the RFP are reviewed, when the RFP is awarded, and when the study is actually conducted – in short, from inception to conclusion.

As we all know, the triggering event underlying this study is the Administration's current rolling brownout policy. I agree that the brownout policy is too controversial and too troubling to continue unexamined, that the matter is an urgent one, and that the proposed analysis of the Fire Department could help resolve the merits of this policy.

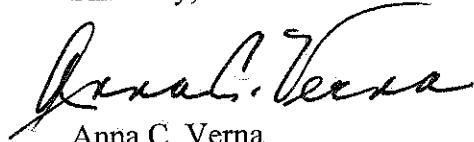
I would note, however, that the rolling brownout policy is a response to the City's overall financial condition, not simply to financial pressures on the Fire Department. For that reason, I would have preferred to see launched an even more comprehensive study encompassing all the service departments – police, health, human services, licenses and inspections, and parks and recreation, for example – to determine appropriate 21st-century levels of services throughout municipal government. Time and cost may preclude this study, but its value could not be overstated.

Finally, I would note that there is certainly solid precedent for turning to PICA today. I am mindful that in 2007, PICA published an independent assessment of key City facilities that was undertaken with the cooperation of the Administration at the time. That facilities assessment study, conducted by a group chosen through an RFP process, evaluated the physical conditions in City Hall and in police, fire, public health and prisons facilities. I understand that the project was well-done and helpful to the City.

As you know, however, PICA's facilities assessment study did not ask the questions that must be asked today. Indeed, as PICA's summary of that study explained, "While the study was designed to appraise the physical condition of facilities, it was not intended to analyze the importance or effectiveness of each building, or to question the City's location decisions. As a result, the assessment makes no judgment as to whether the City should close or otherwise discontinue operations at any facility."

I hope and trust that the proposed study of the Fire Department will address precisely these sorts of questions with relentless objectivity and an eye to protecting our citizens and our firefighters for decades to come.

Sincerely,



Anna C. Verna

ACV/dmc

cc: All Members of Council

Bill Gault, President, Local No. 22, I.A.F.F.

Everett A. Gillison, Esq., Deputy Mayor for Public Safety