

Ms. Joanne Amitrano, CMC
Town Clerk, Town of Coventry
1670 Flat River Road, Coventry, Rhode Island 02816

Dear Ms. Amitrano, Town Clerk:

Adhering to Coventry's Home Rule Charter section 3.05, titled "Vacancy," I submit my resignation from my position as the District 3 Town Council representative, effective immediately. In addition, I am simultaneously resigning from my positions as Chairman of the Coventry Sewer Subcommittee, a member the Coventry Municipal Fire Commission, and a member of the Coventry Finance Committee.

After careful consideration, I have come to the decision that I am unable to continue in this role due to the following facts:

As I mentioned at the March 11th, 2025 meeting, and again at the March 25th, 2025 meeting, the current Town Solicitor contract has provisions in it that directly violate the Coventry Home Rule Town Charter, yet no action has been taken by this Council to rectify the violations.

Specifically, the most important violation relates to Section 3.08, titled "*Presiding Officer*," which states the following: "The Town Council shall elect from among its members a president and vice president, each of whom shall serve at the pleasure of the Town Council. The president shall preside at meetings of the Town Council. The president shall have the right to speak and vote as any other member. The vice-president shall act as president during the absence or temporary disability of the president. The Town Council shall be recognized as head of the town government for all ceremonial purposes and by the R.I. Governor for purposes of military law **but shall have no administrative duties.**" (**Emphasis added**).

It is important to note that per the Angell Law, LLC's engagement letter (the engagement letter related to Coventry's Town Solicitor) dated January 24, 2025, page 6 of 7 states Angell Law, LLC will "provide both redacted and unredacted billing (invoices, time specification and cost specifications) to the **Council President** via email for **review and approval**. It is the **President's** responsibility to provide **approved, redacted invoices** to the Finance Director for payment in a timely manner." (**Emphasis added**). It is also important to know that the Council President had an established relationship with the Solicitor **preceding her suggestion** to the prior Town Council that he become Coventry's Town Solicitor.

There is no question that reviewing and approving monthly invoices is a common **administrative duty**, often handled by a Certified Public Accountant, or a Finance Professional such as Coventry's Treasurer/Finance Director – **an actual employee of the town – and not a politician (i.e. the Town Council President)**. However, the current Solicitor contract prohibits Coventry's Treasurer/Finance Director from being able to review the **unredacted invoices** as required by Coventry's Home Rule Charter, Section 10.14 (e) which states: "pre-audit all bills, invoices, payrolls and other evidence of claims or charges against the town and see that budget appropriations are not exceeded by any disbursements in any department, office, or agency of the town, including the School Department". Ironically, while this standard operating procedure established - not by charter, but by the Solicitor's engagement letter – that the Council President is the only person in the Town of Coventry reviewing and approving the unredacted invoices, the Town Solicitor, per the audited FY2023 financial statements, was **over-budget by \$352,064**. The Legal Department's FY2024 approved budget was \$486,000, while actual FY2024 expenses per internal financial statements **ballooned to \$898,395**, resulting in the Legal Department being **over-budget again by an astronomical \$412,395**.

Equally as important to note is Coventry's Home Rule Charter section 3.04, titled "*Forfeiture of Office*," which states the following:

"A Council member shall forfeit office if the member (1) lacks, at any time during the term of office, any qualifications for the office prescribed by this Charter, or by law; (2) violates any express provision of this Charter; or (3) is convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude." (**Emphasis added**).

Clearly, the Council President remains on the Town Council, despite Coventry's Home Rule Charter section 3.04 demanding her forfeiture of office. The Council President is the only person in Coventry currently **reviewing and approving the unredacted invoices** from the Town Solicitor on a monthly basis for at least the past two years – per the current and former Angell Law, LLC engagement letters – an **administrative duty**, which violates Coventry's Home Rule Charter section 3.08; the consequence for violations is undeniably addressed in Charter section 3.04.

As previously indicated, I raised these issues at the March 11th, 2025, and March 25th, 2025, Town Council meetings, in public session for all to hear. I even proposed an amendment to the current Angell Law, LLC engagement letter to be voted on by the Town Council that simply stated "*If any parts of this contract violate Coventry's Town Charter, that language of the contract becomes null and void.*" However, Town Council Leadership decided that this amendment **should not be voted on** by the Town Council by denying my request for it to be in a section of the agenda where votes could be taken at the March 25th, 2025 meeting. Council Leadership then completely ignored my request from being placed on the April 8th, 2025 Town Council Agenda. **Every single Coventry resident should ask themselves why Council Leadership would not want this amendment to be voted on. The residents should also be demanding answers from the rest of the Council members as to why they have failed to take swift action to protect the Charter, the Town, and their constituents.**

It is also my opinion that Council Leadership believes their authority **far exceeds** the authority of all other Council members. Denying a duly elected Town Council member's agenda item requests, and believing only Council Leadership should be able to review **redacted** invoices from the Town Solicitor (please refer to the Angell Law, LLC engagement letter as well as proposed resolution 2025-33 discussed during the March 11th, 2025 Town Council Meeting), indicates that they believe that they have additional authority **not provided by Coventry's Town Charter**. The **only** additional authority that the Council President and Vice President have per Home Rule Charter Section 3.08 is "The president shall preside at meetings of the Town Council. The president shall have the right to speak and vote as any other member." In plain English, the **only** additional authority the Council President and Vice President have is that during any council meetings, when Council members raise their hands to speak, the President, or in the President's absence the Vice President, get to decide which council member gets to speak first, second, third, and so on for each council agenda topic during Town Council meetings. **Each Council member's vote holds the exact same weight, and the President and Vice President hold no special voting power.**

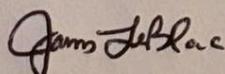
Let me be extremely clear - Coventry's Home Rule Charter is the document that outlines the **structure, powers, and functions** of Coventry's local government. Clearly, all of our local elected officials should follow it. It is precisely how Coventry's residents want their local government to operate – as proven by the legal process followed to change our Town's Charter – the residents must approve any future changes to Coventry's Home Rule Charter. For the past nine years, four and a half of which I have spent on Town Council, I tried my best to ensure it was being followed.

After participating in the March 25th, 2025 Town Council meeting and seeing how no other Council member other than Mr. Scott Copley (District 5) spoke on the issues raised regarding the Town Solicitor's engagement letter, and the violation of the Charter by the Town Council President, it was and is quite clear who on Council truly cares about following Coventry's Home Rule Charter. The silence by the rest of the Council members was deafening.

For all of these reasons listed above, as well as a litany of others not disclosed in this letter, I am resigning from the Coventry Town Council, the Coventry Sewer Subcommittee, the Coventry Municipal Fire Commission, and the Coventry Finance Committee effective today, Monday, April 7th, 2025. It has been an honor to serve the residents of District 3 since November 2020. I was also honored when I was elected by the prior Town Council to serve as Town Council Vice President, and also proudly served as Chairman of the Coventry Sewer Subcommittee.

As former President Reagan once stated, "We must reject that idea that every time a law's broken, society is guilty rather than the lawbreaker. **It is time to restore the American precept that each individual is accountable for his [or her] actions.**" Coventry is an amazing Town that has many qualified individuals that can pick up the torch and lead District 3 and the Town forward. I may no longer be on Town Council, but just like the five years **prior** to me being elected to serve on Town Council, I will stay involved and will certainly speak up and act whenever necessary on behalf of the residents of Coventry. I also am looking forward to being able to reallocate the time I was dedicating to the Town and Town Council to focus more on my family and my church.

Sincerely,



James E. LeBlanc