

February 24, 2023

TO:

The Honorable Board President Aaron Peskin
The Honorable Committee Chairman Supervisor Matt Dorsey
The Honorable Supervisor Shamann Walton



CC:

Rules Committee Clerk Victor Young
1 Dr. Carlton B Goodlett Pl,
San Francisco, CA 94102

RE: Support of Vikrum Aiyer appointment to the Homelessness Oversight Commission

To the Honorable members of Board of Supervisors' Rules Committee –

As one of the founding members of the Neighborhood Business Alliance – [an organization focused on offering immigrant-owned, and BIPOC-owned businesses in the Tenderloin, SoMa and Mission monolingual services](#) – I am writing in unwavering support of Mr. Vikrum Aiyer's appointment to the newly enacted San Francisco Homelessness Oversight Commission.

I have known Vikrum in various capacities over the years through her active community engagement with the South Asian, Arabic, Yemeni and other North African communities in San Francisco; and amidst the pandemic my colleagues and I recruited Vikrum's support to assist families and local small businesses whose livelihoods were shaped by the Covid-emergency and the Covid-induced Homeless crisis.

Vikrum joined us in canvassing nearly 100 businesses. And in talking with local merchants, corner stores, and their families, we identified a grave gap in connecting South West Asian North African (or SWANA) businesses to the key resources necessary to ensure these frontline essential workers had access to basic needs and city services—both to navigate the pandemic, unlock funding opportunities that were flowing to other neighborhoods, and to have a voice in key decisions in the City & County. In that spirit Vikrum helped bring the SWANA Neighborhood Business Alliance to life, as a community based non-profit dedicated to offering culturally sensitive support services to the City's diverse immigrant, small businesses. Aiyer's advocacy and daily canvassing efforts connected small businesses in the Tenderloin and SoMa to multilingual City resources, equitable vaccine distribution networks; group purchasing pilot programs to offset supply chain disruptions; shelter information; resources to direct unhoused populations from their storefronts to nearby navigating centers; and small business grants.

Vikrum was always willing to spend time with local businesses, invest in community programs, start up inaugural programs (like the official Diwali Celebration) to drive commerce to the Tenderloin, while working well with other board members and the community to further promote the Neighborhood Business Alliances' Goals. In this work it was clear that Vikrum was always willing to be fair, independent-minded, and transparent in the ways we could help out local unhoused populations; struggling small business populations who were at risk of being unhoused; and residents. Vikrum also demonstrated a clear commitment to balancing the needs between ensuring we have accountable and effective homeless services, but with data-driven approaches that lift up the perspectives of the residents & business owners whose storefronts are often the nexus between the unhoused and commerce in downtown San Francisco.

As you evaluate nominees, the Neighborhood Business Alliances strongly asks you to support Vikrum. And to ask him how he views the challenges of the Community, instead of missteps of the past. There are few community members who are here simply for a broader call for service and duty. I believe given Vikrum's family's immigrant journey with humble beginnings, he is one of them.

Thank you for the consideration,
Miriam Zizounas
Neighborhood Business Alliance
<https://www.neighborhoodbusiness.org/>

Public Statement by Todd Elmer, in support of Vikrum Aiyer's nomination to serve on San Francisco's new commission to oversee the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing

March 2, 2023

Having chosen our beloved San Francisco as my home, heart and soul for much of the last 18 years, I was heartened to see that Vikrum Aiyer has been nominated to serve on the City's new oversight committee on homelessness, one of its single most complicated, intractable, and heartbreaking challenges.

I've come to deeply respect and appreciate Vikrum for more than 11 years now, first meeting him when we were both working closely together as Obama administration presidential appointees at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, where I served as Chief Communications Officer from 2012 – 2015. Working daily with him for those years as an invaluable colleague, and since being privileged to get to know him personally as we both moved back from DC to San Francisco after the Obama administration, I've seen Vikrum from every angle - whether professionally as a colleague, personally as a friend, as a fellow presidential appointee in DC, a private sector policy expert in SF, an SF community advocate, and on and on - for many years now. And so I've been able to personally see and deeply appreciate his incredible talent, brilliance, dedication to public service, his wisened and weathered judgment, and his passion for the City. And from those many years of DC and SF experience with him, I've rarely encountered a more deeply authentic and admirable heart for public and community service than I've come to know and admire in Vikrum.

It's a very rare opportunity that San Francisco has before it today, and one that I hope it will wisely seize. Namely, to enlist someone like Vikrum to help with the City's toughest challenge – someone who has so many years of dedicated service and work for the greater good (both at the top national level and also at the local community level), who has impressed and earned the admiration of so many people (including from so many SF community leaders and homeless advocates around the city) who have worked alongside him in San Francisco and DC and seen firsthand the reasoned, effective, measured, pragmatic, and *kind* talents he so freely gives to his country and now home again in the City by the Bay.

So I was absolutely *elated* to learn of Mayor Breed's decision to nominate Vikrum to serve in this critical new role, where our city desperately needs precisely the kind of people and help that Vikrum embodies. And I was also *heartened* to learn that he was in fact willing to step back into the (often thankless and sometimes brutal) arena of public service. Those of us with long histories in public service like Vikrum (and then the many dedicated souls serving San Francisco on the Board of Supervisors, city agencies, and many selfless community advocates and organizers) of course know how painful and thankless and exhausting and *hard* public service in SF can sometimes be - learning that Vikrum is ready, willing, and able to step back into that arena again has given me a much-needed jolt of *hope* that our beloved SF may yet actually be finally able to realize some desperately-needed, quantifiable *progress* on our city's most critical, heartbreaking, and complicated challenge.

And so it also saddens me to see some politically-motivated voices attacking Vikrum for some isolated mistakes he made when was a young person in his 20s, admirably trying to serve his country when he could have instead immediately followed the shiny siren lights to the booming private sector world that so many others chase. (That unenviable and brutal balancing act is sadly too common and well known by countless other talented and dedicated young people who have tried to sustain careers and lives in public service.) As many have in the sometimes blinding lights of youth, Vikrum clearly cut some corners too close, made some mistakes, and he definitely stumbled and paid a deep price for doing so.

But one of the reasons I admire, respect, and appreciate him even *more today* than I did even before I knew about his stumble in DC all those years ago, was because what I believe what matters most is not *if* we ever stumble or make a mistake in life – I believe what matters most in life is *how* we handle it the aftermath when some sort of stumble inevitably happens. Vikrum has handled the steep consequences of his past stumble *exactly* as we should all hope to be able to do - he's never made excuses or denied responsibility for his mistakes. He stood up, owned his mistakes, made full restitution, paid deep and painful consequences to his personal and professional life because of that stumble - and yet I and so many others have watched him humbly *learn* from it all. I've come to admire the humility, grace, weathered wisdom, empathy, kindness, and resilience that I've seen him demonstrate consistently in the many years since that painful public stumble of his youth.

And so I'm deeply grateful to be able to share my perspectives and experience over many years with Vikrum throughout the inevitable highs and lows of public and community service, both in our nation's capital and also in our beloved San Francisco. Our shining city of shimmery fog and countless hills and so much heart and so much hope – we all actually and acutely *need* precisely the sort of brilliant, thoughtful, reasoned, empathetic, humbled, and kind person that Vikrum is in public service.

While some ivory tower fringe voices in SF may have the luxury of casually (and for cynical objectives) tossing aside the kind of incredible help that Vikrum's represents for the City. But the rest of the city, everyone else - and especially our most vulnerable friends and neighbors – *and they, none of us*, have that same luxury of casually tossing away such desperately needed help from such an admirable, dedicated, and talented person with such a strong show of support from so many community leaders and homeless advocates whose support will be critical to the progress that the new commission hopes to make.

And finally, speaking as someone who has been lucky to call Vikrum a friend and valued colleague in both SF and DC for many years now, I hope that no one in this too-often brutal arena of public service will cynically misrepresent my friend of many years as any sort of over-privileged, out of touch elite player. I've come to see Vikrum over time as a literal embodiment of the American Dream - a kid who grew up to middle class immigrant parents in Fremont, a geeky hometown kid who worked and studied hard and earned prominent spots helping his nation and serving the greater good. And now he's come back home and brought back all that experience and talent and work ethic and life lessons to our beloved San Francisco. Maybe sometimes the good guys *do* win. Maybe this time, we all *can*.

Thank you again for your own service to San Francisco. And thank you for allowing me this honor to share my experience with, and strong support for, Vikrum Aiyer and his nomination to be a valuable member of San Francisco's new oversight commission on homelessness.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Elmer', written in a cursive style.

Todd B. Elmer
March 2, 2023

Honorable Mayor Breed
Board of Supervisors

March 3, 2023

Re: The Homelessness Oversight Nominee

Dear Board,

I am writing in a personal capacity in support of Mr. Vikrum Aiyer's character and appointment to the newly enacted San Francisco Homelessness Oversight Commission. I worked with Vikrum in various capacities in the Obama Administration and he reported to me as Chief of Staff at the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO).

Vikrum came to work every day with an unwavering dedication to public service; led with empathy; and worked hard to enact national policies on behalf of the Administration's innovation agenda. That track record of his contributions and ability to help me and the USPTO leadership run a large federal agency cannot be denied.

In 2016, I learned that Vikrum was not following our Agency's Transportation Services policy regarding the use of taxi's for commuting to work. I promptly notified both the Commerce Department Inspector General and Vikrum. Mr. Aiyer immediately ceased this behavior and offered full restitution to the USPTO for all improper charges (which he paid).

Understandably, I was disappointed in Mr. Aiyer's judgement in 2016. Integrity and the protection of our governing bodies should always be top of mind for all positions of public trust. I urge you, however, to focus on his ability to manage, work with colleagues, and run programs - not his early missteps. In the last six years Vikrum has worked hard to rebuild trust and work with organizations and youth on ways he can use his own experience to educate new classes of younger, aspiring public servants.

I believe that Vikrum learned from his mistakes and has built a compelling body of work since leaving the USPTO that is focused on showing up for others, building national programs, and investing in San Francisco. Mr. Vikrum Aiyer is exactly who we want in public service.

Best Regards,

Russell Slifer

Former Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Deputy Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office

Donald S. Falk
1307 Northside Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94702

February 27, 2023

The Honorable Board President Aaron Peskin
The Honorable Committee Chairman Supervisor Matt Dorsey
The Honorable Supervisor Asha Safai
The Honorable Supervisor Shamann Walton

CC: Rules Committee Clerk Victor Young

1 Dr. Carlton B Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Via email

RE: Support of Vikrum Aiyer appointment to the Homelessness Oversight Commission

To the Honorable members of the Board of Supervisors' Rules Committee:

I am writing now to offer my personal support of Mr. Vikrum Aiyer's appointment to the San Francisco Homelessness Oversight Commission.

As you know, I worked for many years for Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation (TNDC), serving the last 16 of them, through September 30, 2021, as Chief Executive Officer. I was initially introduced to Vikrum in 2020 by a mutual friend who described to me Vikrum's interest in developing a better understanding of the Tenderloin, affordable housing and homelessness. Vikrum himself began our first conversation by stating his desire to understand through the eyes of a practitioner the neighborhood and how San Francisco's affordable housing and homelessness systems operated and impacted both housed and unhoused Tenderloin people. Thus began a series of a half-dozen walking tours and conversations about affordable housing and homelessness in San Francisco.

I spent time with Vikrum mapping out the opportunities and challenges that non-profit housing groups face in partnering with City agencies, and he spent time working to understand everything from master lease agreements to service funding dynamics to the way public-private funding models could impact the efficacy of outcomes.

I would not have continued to invest time in Vikrum had I not found him to be curious, receptive, insightful and humble. Though not highly-versed in these issues at that time, he was clearly a very knowledgeable person, evidenced by the increasing sophistication of the questions he asked and his clearly having read and absorbed various reference pieces I shared with him. I was impressed by the sincerity, work ethic, and empathy Vikrum demonstrated as he worked to get to know the community, both in engaging with me and in his description of his work canvassing Tenderloin-based immigrant merchants with the Neighborhood Business Alliance.

Over my years at TNDC, I was part of an organization that ultimately managed and provided services to people in 45 properties containing some 4500 affordable homes, nearly 1000 of which include housing set aside for people coming out of homelessness. In my view, San Francisco has model programs but not a model homelessness system. With improvements to that system, we can make better use of the resources we have while earning the trust to secure the additional ones we need in order to reach functional zero.

The Homelessness Oversight Commission can play a vital role in engendering that, just as it can serve to inhibit it, depending on who occupies those seats. I believe we need independent thinkers who will use data-driven approaches to assess what's working and what can be improved, and to help build a stronger partnership with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing.

I believe Vikrum will bring that independent, clear-eyed perspective. From my experience of him, he won't be afraid to speak honestly about the past and what can guide us for the future. He can enter the process with a beginner's mind and a dispassionate eye towards programmatic metrics, in lieu of political tribalism. And I think his multi sector experience spanning large federal initiatives, private programs, and nonprofits well positions him to recognize that tackling our homelessness problem requires a whole-of community approach.

I am aware of Vikrum's past transgressions and the widespread condemnation it has engendered. In my interactions with him, I never once perceived anything other than a high level of sincerity, honesty and humility. For me, he has consistently presented as authentic; in doing so, he earned my trust and respect.

As you evaluate nominees, I humbly ask you to support Vikrum.

Thank you for the consideration,



Donald S. Falk