

Reference #

15904119

Public Hearings

I am speaking/writing on (select one): / Hablo/Escribo sobre (seleccione uno):

25-0802: An ordinance changing the zoning classification for 2501 East 48th Avenue in Elyria Swansea. Una ordenanza que cambia la clasificación de zonificación para 2501 East 48th Avenue en Elyria Swansea.

First Name / Nombre

Elijah

Last Name / Apellido

Watson

I am a resident of: / Soy residente del:

District 9 / Distrito 9

I am... / Estoy...

AGAINST the item / en CONTRA del artículo

My testimony: / Mi testimonio:

Elijah Jamal Lee Watson Testimony for Bill 25-0802

My name is Elijah Jamal Lee Watson, and I worked as both a porter and line cook for Comal Heritage, a program operated under Focus Points Business and Training Center LLC, which is owned by Focus Points Family Resource Center. I was contracted by Focus Points twice as an independent “staff” contractor, despite working under conditions that reflected regular employment.

I am submitting this testimony in writing and for the public record in strong opposition to bill 25-0802.

While most of my work was within Comal Heritage, I also volunteered regularly with Huerta Urbana when needed, doing everything from planting and transplanting, to tilling soil, equipment repair, and general farm maintenance. I gave my time and labor freely because I believed in the mission—but in return, I was met with broken promises, exploitative practices, and emotional stress.

I speak not only for myself, but for the many others who, like me, gave everything they had and were left behind. This rezoning proposal does not meet the criteria of “public interest.” To the contrary, it rewards a nonprofit currently under investigation by the Denver Civil Wage Theft

Division, following more than ten formal claims of wage theft from staff and participants—many of whom were misclassified as independent contractors, denied fair pay, and kept in limbo without employment protections.

During my time at Focus Points, I worked 9 to 12 hours a day, six days a week. I was told I would be moved to part-time employment. The HR manager, Thelma Llanas, even contacted me to schedule the onboarding process. But without explanation, my contract was suddenly terminated. I was never brought on as a regular employee, despite being led to believe I would be.

This was not my only negative experience. When I worked at Comal Heritage previously, I witnessed frequent tension, arguments, and confusion among leadership. Supervisors often secluded themselves in a space we called the Annex and rarely engaged with staff. I live with autism, and I often struggled to make sense of what was happening. I just knew that what leadership said never matched what actually happened. It was confusing, disheartening, and damaging to my mental well-being.

I want to be clear: I now have a job where I am treated fairly. I know what is expected of me, and I am confident in my role. That clarity and respect was never offered to me at Focus Points FRC by leadership.

This is not an organization that prioritizes transparency, justice, or the people they claim to serve. They misrepresent their programs, their intentions, and the impact they have on the community. Approving this rezoning would only allow them to expand their reach while avoiding accountability for the harm they've caused.

Thank you for your time and for listening to those of us who have been called “beneficiaries,” but in reality, are victims of Focus Points FRC’s ongoing exploitation of poor and vulnerable people.

Respectfully,

Elijah Jamal Lee Watson

Finish Time

2025-08-04 11:28:45

Reference #

15904138

Public Hearings

I am speaking/writing on (select one): / Hablo/Escribo sobre (seleccione uno):

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First Name / Nombre

Andre Michel

Last Name / Apellido

Sohai

I am a resident of: / Soy residente del:

District 9 / Distrito 9

I am... / Estoy...

AGAINST the item / en CONTRA del artículo

My testimony: / Mi testimonio:

Andre Michel Sohai Testimony in Opposition to Bill 25-0802

My name is Andre Michel Sohai. I served as the Back-of-House Special Events and Transportation Specialist for Comal Heritage—one of the programs under Focus Points Business and Training Center LLC, a wholly owned entity of Focus Points Family Resource Center. My time with the organization spanned nearly four years, including over a year of volunteer service and another year where I was misclassified as an independent contractor.

I submit this testimony today in strong opposition to Bill 25-0802, which proposes the rezoning of Focus Points Family Resource Center's property. To approve this measure would be to greenlight an expansion of influence and resources to an organization that has consistently failed to act in the public's best interest.

My experience was not unique but emblematic of deeper systemic issues. During my time at Focus Points:

I was subjected to racial slurs—including the n-word—by those who believed I wouldn't understand. Despite reporting this, there was no accountability or corrective action from leadership.

I donated up to 30 hours a week to Huerta Urbana without pay and was later misclassified as a contractor, despite performing full-time responsibilities equivalent to staff. This was not administrative oversight. It was a strategic effort to avoid paying fair wages, benefits, and legal protections.

I applied multiple times for internal advancement, even as I carried out responsibilities well beyond my job title. I was ignored, dismissed, and excluded—despite my qualifications and commitment.

My eventual employment came without proper protections, and I was denied even the dignity of a formal exit interview.

This pattern of exploitative labor practices is now under formal investigation. Focus Points Family Resource Center is the subject of over ten wage theft claims currently being reviewed by the Denver Civil Wage Theft Division. Most of these claims were filed by low-income individuals, immigrants, single parents, or non-English speakers—those most vulnerable to abuse.

Moreover, I am a co-filer in an active EEOC charge of discrimination against Focus Points. This includes allegations of racial harassment, age discrimination (I am 71 years old), retaliation for protected activity, and wrongful termination. These claims are supported by evidence, including the denial of due process, slurs used in both English and Spanish, and systemic silencing of dissent.

Focus Points publicly promotes programs like Comal Heritage and Huerta Urbana as models of equity and empowerment. Internally, however, these initiatives were operated with disregard for transparency, fairness, or community ownership. Staff and participants were elevated in marketing materials, only to be discarded behind the scenes.

Rezoning should serve the public good—not reward organizations currently under legal scrutiny for mistreatment of the very communities they claim to serve.

I speak not just for myself, but for the many others whose voices have been ignored, whose wages have been stolen, and whose trust has been betrayed. We are not bitter. We are truth-tellers. We gave our time, labor, and hearts to a mission that was weaponized against us. Now, we are simply asking for accountability.

Please do not allow this rezoning to proceed. Not until the organization has been held accountable and meaningful restitution has been made to those it has harmed.

Thank you for your time and service to the people of Denver.

Respectfully,

Andre Michel Sohail, former FOH Specialist & Special Events Coordinator

Finish Time

2025-08-04 11:30:42

Reference #

15904143

Public Hearings

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First Name / Nombre

Seynabou

Last Name / Apellido

Sohai

I am a resident of: / Soy residente del:

District 9 / Distrito 9

I am... / Estoy...

AGAINST the item / en CONTRA del artículo

My testimony: / Mi testimonio:

My name is Seynabou "LaTisha" Sohail, and I served as Senior Manager of Social Enterprise. In this role, I oversaw both Comal Heritage Food Incubator and Huerta Urbana, which were operated under Focus Points' Business and Training Center LLC—an entity wholly owned by Focus Points FRC.

Although I have faced intimidation, retaliation, and threats intended to deter me from speaking out, I will not be silenced. It is my duty—as a former leader within the organization and as someone who witnessed firsthand the harms committed—to speak truth on behalf of myself and the many others who have been exploited, silenced, and misrepresented by Focus Points and its affiliated entities.

This rezoning proposal does not meet the criteria outlined under "Public Interest." In fact, approving it would reward an organization currently under formal investigation by the Denver Auditor's Office Civil Wage Theft Division. As of this testimony, over ten claims of wage theft have been filed by both former staff and participants—many of whom were deliberately misclassified as 1099 independent contractors in direct violation of labor laws. These claims include unpaid wages, misrepresentation of employment terms, and exploitation of vulnerable community members under the guise of opportunity.

Recently, someone asked me, “When did things go left? Why did you decide to stay?” After some reflection, I realized it was quite simple. I’ve spent my entire life caring for others—whether it was walking my siblings to school as a latchkey kid, assisting patients in the medical field through treatment and end-of-life care, or dedicating over a decade to nonprofit work. Service is my nature. By the time I accepted the role as Huerta Urbana Manager at Focus Points Family Resource Center in May 2021, I had over 11 years of nonprofit leadership experience. I understood how chaotic the work could be, but I also knew what community stewardship was supposed to look like.

Within days of employment, I discovered the program had no infrastructure: no farm, minimal curriculum, and a market opening in two weeks. The participants had been there nearly a year already—with no clear deliverables. That’s when things went left. But I didn’t walk away. Instead, my family and I gave everything—working 9 to 16 hours a day, nights and weekends. The farm thrived. Huerta Urbana grew. We kept the program afloat even when the organization “ran out” of money.

Later, I was promoted to Senior Manager of Social Enterprise, I inherited Comal Heritage after its entire staff quit within months of each other. I had already seen the cracks—staff breakdowns, participants reporting fights in the kitchen, curriculum that vanished, managers who hid in adjacent rooms to escape the chaos. When Comal was relocated to RiNo, I found that its permits were either expired or nonexistent or Comal was operating with permits under other businesses such as Taxi Commissary. Even by its closure in February 2025, permits were still “being worked on.”

Leadership had no clear answers.

I believed I had their trust. I confided in leadership and was confided in. I was pulled aside by the Executive Director to hear her concerns about hiring the new Director of Program Impact—not because of his qualifications, but because “he was a white man,” and she was “tired of white men in power.” I was told that a restaurant friend of hers said all Hispanic women gossip and are dramatic—used to justify a desire to “just be done with the Comal drama” and to express an annoyance with their emailed frustrations with Comal contract changes. She expressed relief in being able to speak with me about her feelings because I, like her, was different. My being a black woman was “free” to speak on culturally sensitive matters while her, a white woman, was restricted.

Behind closed doors, Comal was in a financial downward spiral. Focus Points FRC owes an estimated \$205,000 in loan funds that was once meant for a failed to launch third Social Enterprise, CoCuA, given in investment by three foundations and projected needing an additional \$77,000 just to close Comal. If Comal remained open, Focus Points would’ve had just 40–42 operating days by June 2025.

Still, I did the work. When participants left in protest over exploitative 1099 contracts—contracts I had raised concerns about for years—I helped staff absorb the full workload. While

leadership remained silent, my team and I worked 14–16-hour days, 7 days a week. When staff expressed burnout, the Executive Director said: “Salary means doing what it takes to get the job done.” Meanwhile, I started discovering claims made by participants to be true. For example, tips documented in earlier POS reports showed salaried leadership participating in the tip pool—illegal under labor law.

Even with our loyalty, the retaliation began. A cease-and-desist letter threatened me with a potential \$14 million lawsuit for speaking the truth. My personnel file has been withheld. My final paycheck remains in question. Emails blocked. Equipment seized. The very leader I once advocated for, Brendan Rempert—who praised my performance in February 2025—has remained silent, complicit in this cover-up.

Narratives are constructed. Not for justice—but for control. My termination was not just professional—it was a systemic attempt to silence. Approving this rezoning would hand over increased power and resources to an entity who is actively harming the very communities it claims to serve. That is not the public interest. That is negligence.

I urge you to carefully consider the weight of this decision—not based on polished presentations or carefully worded promises—but on the testimonies of those of us who lived and worked under their leadership and now carry the burden of advocating for those harmed. We are not beneficiaries of Focus Points. We are survivors of its exploitation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Finish Time

2025-08-04 11:45:24

Reference #

15904194

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First Name / Nombre

LaTisha

Last Name / Apellido

Sohai

I am a resident of: / Soy residente del:

District 9 / Distrito 9

I am... / Estoy...

AGAINST the item / en CONTRA del artículo

My testimony: / Mi testimonio:

We, the undersigned and concerned members of the Denver community, respectfully urge the City Council to pause any legislative support, rezoning approvals, financial partnerships, or grant disbursements to Focus Points Family Resource Center (FPFRC) until the organization resolves its outstanding issues with former staff, program participants, and community partners.

Despite its public-facing reputation, Focus Points has been the subject of substantiated concerns and lived allegations regarding:

Wage theft and worker misclassification

Racial discrimination, intimidation, and retaliation

Misuse of city, state, and philanthropic funds

Silencing of whistleblowers and suppression of internal dissent

Governance opacity and lack of community accountability

1. Legal and Municipal Precedent

According to the Colorado Revised Nonprofit Corporation Act (C.R.S. § 7-121-101 et seq.), charitable organizations must exercise transparency, fiduciary responsibility, and fair employment practices. Similarly, Denver's Human Rights Ordinance (D.R.M.C. § 28-91 et seq.) prohibits racial discrimination and retaliation in any workplace within the city. Violations of

these laws—especially when taxpayer dollars and public trust are involved—should be met with immediate inquiry and suspension of public support.

Moreover, under federal labor statutes (Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. § 201 et seq.), organizations cannot misclassify employees or withhold wages—particularly in programs subsidized by city or federal workforce development grants. Focus Points’ former staff have come forward with documentation supporting these very concerns.

2. Rebuilding Trust and Accountability in Nonprofit Oversight

Despite a growing body of literature on nonprofit governance, a persistent gap remains; how unethical practices harm—not help—communities of color. Former employees and program participants at Focus Points have detailed disturbing patterns: racialized exclusion, inequitable treatment, exploitative labor practices, and retaliation against those who spoke up.

These experiences are not isolated. They fit into a broader and deeply concerning pattern that disproportionately targets Black and Brown leaders and community members when they dare to challenge the status quo. In far too many institutions—nonprofits, businesses, universities—when a person of color leads with clarity and moral courage, the institutional playbook of control is activated.

“When someone from a historically marginalized community rises to leadership and refuses to be deferential, the machinery of ‘process’ is quietly activated. An investigation is launched. A narrative is constructed. And what follows is rarely about justice—it’s about control.”

This weaponization of process—internal reviews, outside law firms, and silent boards—mirrors what has happened nationally to courageous equity-driven leaders like Regent Wanda James (CU Boulder), Dr. Claudine Gay (Harvard), Dr. Frances Contreras (UC Irvine), and Nikole Hannah-Jones (UNC). These figures, like those at Focus Points, faced retaliation not for wrongdoing but for being “too bold,” “too visible,” or simply “too Black or Brown” in their truth-telling and transformative leadership.

When leaders of color question spending priorities, hiring inequities, or racist practices, they are not met with dialogue—they are met with investigations cloaked in legitimacy. They are silenced, isolated, and ultimately removed, all under the guise of “process.”

This isn’t just a pattern of retaliation—it’s institutional mobbing, a well-documented phenomenon with distinct phases:

Targeting – Subtle character judgments and labels about being “not a fit.”

Isolation – Gossip spreads, colleagues distance themselves, leadership remains silent.

Escalation – The target is blamed, shunned, and portrayed as flawed.

Attrition – The scapegoat burns out, is terminated, or forced to resign. The mob denies wrongdoing.

This systemic behavior is not personal—it is political. It is about protecting power.

3. Our Community’s Ask

We respectfully request the following actions by Council:

Freeze all approvals, rezonings, or contracts related to Focus Points until:

Former workers and program participants receive equitable resolution or settlement

A public, third-party audit is conducted, including interviews with whistleblowers and affected individuals

The organization adopts and demonstrates transparent, community-led governance reforms

Require Focus Points to submit a Community Accountability Report, documenting:

Resolved claims of labor violations or discrimination

Reinvestment strategies into harmed communities

Anti-retaliation and whistleblower protection policies

4. Conclusion: A Matter of Equity, Not Optics

To rebuild trust, nonprofits must be held to the same standards as any public-facing institution.

But we must also name what is too often left unsaid: the cost of speaking truth while Black or Brown in these systems is higher, the tolerance for missteps lower, and the consequences disproportionately severe.

This cycle—wherein equity-driven leadership is punished under the guise of process—must end.

Our city cannot continue to reward institutions that harm while claiming to help. To do so is to violate the public trust and abandon our collective values of justice and accountability.

We urge you to stand with the community. Vote no on Bill 25-0802. Demand transparency. And help build a community where equity isn't punished—it's protected.

Respectfully,

Seynabou Sohail, former Senior Manager of Social Enterprise @ Focus Points FRC

Andre Michel Sohail, former BOH Special Events and Transportation Specialist @ FPFRC

Elijah Jamal Lee Watson, former Porter and Line Cook @ Comal Heritage

Finish Time

2025-08-04 11:50:30