



January 8, 2026
2:00 pm EST

Statement from Mayor Jim Cecere

As Mayor of the City of Geneva, my responsibility is to ensure that this matter involving Councilor Ahmad Whitfield is addressed lawfully, decisively, and in a manner that protects the integrity of City government and the public trust.

I also want to acknowledge the very real personal impact this situation has on Councilor Whitfield and, most importantly, on his family. My thoughts and prayers are with Ahmad, his wife and their five young children during what is undoubtedly an incredibly painful and uncertain time. Regardless of legal outcomes, they are facing a heavy emotional burden, and they deserve privacy, compassion, and respect. I sincerely hope that Ahmad finds the faith, strength, resolve, and clarity needed to confront this moment, take responsibility where appropriate, and seek a path forward that ultimately brings healing for himself and his family.

To provide background, just hours before last night's City Council meeting, I was informed of the arrest of Councilor Whitfield. Upon receiving that information, I immediately convened a meeting with the City Attorney, City Manager, and Chief of Police to review the situation. The City Council was then promptly notified and briefed on the matter. Councilor Whitfield is entitled to due process under the law and is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. That principle must be respected. At the same time, the seriousness of the charges, the circumstances surrounding this arrest, and the current status of Councilor Whitfield being incarcerated at present – and potentially ongoing – presents a challenge for the City of Geneva and for the effective functioning of the City Council.

As a result of his incarceration and the uncertainty of his future status, Councilor Whitfield is unable to discharge the duties of his office. This leaves the City of Geneva without full representation and prevents the City Council from operating as a fully functioning legislative body. That reality - independent of any legal outcome - represents a substantial disruption to City governance.

I will be calling on the City Council to act in accordance with the City of Geneva Code of Ethics by initiating an ethics review and investigation through the City's Board of Ethics.

Office of the Mayor

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The Code of Ethics provides a lawful process for reviewing the conduct of a sitting Council member and, following that process and any findings, allows for consideration and recommendation of appropriate disciplinary action consistent with applicable law. Any such action would be short of removal, as the City Charter does not provide a mechanism for removing an elected official under these circumstances.

It is important to be clear: an arrest or the filing of criminal charges does not, by itself, create a vacancy in elected office under the City Charter. However, New York State law is explicit that a felony conviction results in an automatic vacancy. Under New York State Public Officers Law §30(1)(e), a public office becomes vacant upon conviction of a felony, by operation of law and without further action by the City. Should a vacancy occur - whether through resignation or by operation of state law - the City Charter outlines the process by which the City Council fills that vacancy to ensure continuity of representation and governance.

For these reasons, and in the best interest of the City and its residents, I am asking Councilor Whitfield to consider resigning from the Geneva City Council. This request is not made lightly. I did inquire about the possibility of speaking directly with Councilor Whitfield, but current practice does not allow for this to occur. While resignation is a personal decision, doing so would expedite resolution of this matter, allow the City to restore full representation, and enable City government to move forward without continued disruption or distraction.

I take our ethical standards seriously. Just last night, this Council reaffirmed its commitment to the highest standards of professional conduct by resolution and by signing a formal letter of commitment to uphold those standards and a professional code of conduct. I have complete faith in the remaining members of the City Council to honor those commitments, act with integrity, and continue to serve this community in the best interests of Geneva. The City of Geneva must move forward. We owe it to our residents to address this matter responsibly, to follow the law, and to put this behind us as quickly as possible so that City government can remain focused on the work ahead.

City government will continue to operate fully and professionally, and this matter will be handled with seriousness, transparency, and respect for the rule of law.

Sincerely,

James Cecere
Mayor, City of Geneva

Cc: Members of the Geneva City Council
David Hau, City Attorney
Amie Hendrix, City Manager
Nicole Tilotson, City Clerk
Victor Nelson, Chair, Board of Ethics