

Committee on Appropriations
October 14, 2015

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COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, October 14, 2015
10:05 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR., CHAIR
COUNCIL PRESIDENT DARRELL L. CLARKE
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN

BILL 150612 - An ordinance authorizing
transfers in appropriations for Fiscal Year
2016 within the General Fund from the City
Council to the Director of Finance -
Contribution to School District.

- - -

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2 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good
3 morning. This hearing is called to
4 order. This is a public hearing of the
5 Appropriations Committee on Bill No.
6 150612. My name is W. Wilson Goode, Jr.,
7 Chair of the Committee.

8 I note that a quorum is
9 present. Council President Darrell
10 Clarke is present, along with Committee
11 members Jannie Blackwell, Bobby Henon,
12 and Blondell Reynolds Brown.

13 The title of the Bill 150612,
14 authorizing transfers in appropriations
15 for Fiscal Year 2016 within the General
16 Fund from the City Council to the
17 Director of Finance - Contribution to the
18 School District.

19 The purpose of this hearing is
20 to act upon an agreement that was done
21 also pursuant to a resolution passed by
22 City Council in June. That agreement has
23 been executed. So we will move from our
24 public hearing directly into a meeting
25 and then return to the public hearing.

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2 The Chair recognizes
3 Councilwoman Blackwell for a motion on
4 Bill 150612.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
6 you, Mr. Chairman. I move that Bill
7 150612 be reported out of Committee with
8 a favorable recommendation and also a
9 recommendation for suspension of the
10 rules so as to permit first reading at
11 our next session of Council.

12 (Duly seconded.)

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: All in
14 favor?

15 (Aye.)

16 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Those
17 opposed?

18 (No response.)

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Bill No.
20 150612 is reported out of this Committee
21 with a favorable recommendation with
22 suspension of the rules to allow first
23 reading at our next Council session.

24 We will now move back into our
25 public hearing. Our first witness is Dr.

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2 Hite.

3 (Witness approached witness
4 table.)

5 DR. HITE: Good morning,
6 Chairman Goode, Council President Clarke,
7 members of the City Council Committee on
8 Appropriations. I'm Bill Hite,
9 Superintendent of the School District of
10 Philadelphia and here to speak on Bill
11 150612.

12 I want to thank City Council
13 for the opportunity to provide testimony
14 today and for Council's continued
15 willingness to champion Philadelphia
16 students and schools.

17 Over the past five years, City
18 Council has supported providing more than
19 300 million in additional revenue to
20 public schools.

21 Our current year budget
22 reflects an additional 70 million in
23 local revenue, including the 25 million
24 in real estate tax revenue that is the
25 subject of today's transfer ordinance

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2 hearing.

3 The additional local resources
4 City Council has supported have been
5 essential in stabilizing our school
6 system and beginning the deep work needed
7 to rebuild. Without the additional local
8 support for the current fiscal year, we
9 would not have been able to maintain
10 current programs and services. By
11 stepping up with critical, sustainable
12 resources, City Council is helping to
13 address the School District's structural
14 deficit.

15 Along with City Council members
16 and stakeholders across the city and
17 state, we continue to advocate for a
18 state budget that provides significant
19 additional education funding to
20 Philadelphia and to school districts
21 across Pennsylvania.

22 We have detailed plans,
23 primarily developed by principals and
24 their teams, for how to use the
25 additional resources we are seeking from

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2 the state. The additional state funds
3 will allow schools to offer and expand
4 important academic and social-emotional
5 programs and resources that support
6 student learning. These are things such
7 as art, music, advanced placement, and
8 credit recovery courses; supports for
9 more counseling, nursing services, and
10 tutoring programs and instructional
11 coaches. State resources will also
12 support providing teachers with resources
13 for instruction, including up-to-date
14 curricular materials, books, and
15 technology.

16 We remain optimistic that the
17 Governor and Legislature will come to
18 agreement on a state budget that reflects
19 the high priority citizens in this city
20 and across Pennsylvania place on public
21 education and their schools.

22 With your help, we have
23 steadied the financial situation of the
24 District. And we have much more to do to
25 achieve our overarching goal; that is,

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2 ensuring that all children have a great
3 public school close to where they live.
4 We are addressing longstanding, systemic
5 issues and building momentum in the
6 public schools, both District-run and
7 charter-run.

8 We know it will take time and a
9 collective effort to build a system of
10 great schools across Philadelphia. For
11 that reason, I am especially encouraged
12 about the Cooperation Agreement the
13 School District, School Reform
14 Commission, and City Council signed last
15 week.

16 Thank you for your ongoing
17 support. I'm happy to answer any
18 questions from the Committee members.

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
20 for your testimony, Dr. Hite.

21 The Chair recognizes Council
22 President Clarke for comments and/or
23 questions.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
25 morning.

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2 DR. HITE: Good morning.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

4 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

5 First of all, Dr. Hite, thank
6 you for your continued service to the
7 children of the City of Philadelphia and
8 your commitment as a public servant.
9 Probably one of the most significant
10 roles that one can play is educating our
11 young people. And I want to thank
12 Commissioner Neff in addition, and you've
13 been doing a good job, Commissioner, as
14 the Chair.

15 As you reference in your
16 testimony -- and, again, I want to thank
17 all the participants in pulling together
18 the document that allowed us to create
19 the Intergovernmental Cooperation
20 Agreement. I think it clearly creates a
21 blueprint for us to move forward in an
22 accurate, transparent, and participatory
23 way, unprecedented, particularly as it
24 relates to the ability for this
25 legislative body to be a part of ensuring

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2 that from a fiscal side, we are at a

3 level that we won't have the annual

4 school crisis as it relates to funding.

5 And I want to thank you so much for being

6 a signatory to that, along with my

7 colleague Councilwoman Blackwell.

8 But the simple matter is is

9 that it is just that, it is a start, and

10 we don't want anybody to think that

11 somehow we signed a document and

12 everything is going to be okay. We will

13 be moving quickly into formalizing not

14 only that document but the process to

15 ensure that individuals not just in this

16 legislative body but the public

17 at-large -- and I want to thank you again

18 for indicating that you will in fact make

19 those documents public, so it gives

20 everybody a sense of what's going on from

21 a fiscal perspective.

22 Clearly, the first thing that

23 we need to do, separate and aside from

24 this \$25 million, is talk about the

25 structural challenges associated with the

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2 School District that were not created by
3 any of you all. The predecessors created
4 a level of debt that has, frankly
5 speaking, put us in a significant hole,
6 and I think we need to aggressively move
7 towards addressing that, both the state
8 and the City.

9 There are other issues, as you
10 can recall in the conclusion of the
11 budget hearing, that were, at least from
12 our perspective, left somewhat unresolved
13 with respect to the operational side,
14 which is not a part of the agreement that
15 we signed, but we continue to have
16 concerns as it relates to the workforce
17 and the proposed privatization of some of
18 that workforce. Clearly, and I think
19 everyone would acknowledge, that on the
20 substitute teachers, we did not end up in
21 a place that any of us were comfortable
22 with, and that continues to be a problem.

23 We know that the issue with
24 respect to the nurses is still out there.
25 At some point we will get to some

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2 conclusion on that, but, again, as we
3 indicated at that point, we did have some
4 significant reservations about that. And
5 there are a couple of other issues which
6 I referenced at the signing.

7 I believe in order to have the
8 level of consistency and sustainability,
9 we got to get a contract. We got to get
10 a contract, because we need to understand
11 what the baseline expenditures are, and
12 that will be determined by the contract
13 between the Administration and its
14 workforce. And the sooner, frankly
15 speaking, we get that, the better, and
16 not only from a fiscal perspective, but
17 in terms of having a working relationship
18 with the workers that one should have.
19 We had our own five-year dust-up on the
20 City level for quite a number of years
21 and it created the level of acrimony that
22 none of us felt good about. And,
23 fortunately, we ultimately got a
24 contract, and I see it's reflected in
25 this municipal workforce's willingness

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2 and interest in providing -- continuing
3 to provide the services.

4 The second thing is our
5 aggressive push towards community
6 schools. I think that it's clear that
7 all the work that these members have done
8 in putting together a document that puts
9 us in a position that the first response
10 to a challenge will not be to stick our
11 hands in the taxpayers' pockets, because
12 there are opportunities for external
13 resources that will enhance our ability
14 to have the appropriate healthcare
15 services and teacher development and all
16 of the things that I want to commend the
17 presidents of the three universities,
18 major -- largest universities. I don't
19 want to say major -- for participating in
20 the substantive conversation and making
21 the informal commitment to ensuring that
22 we do that.

23 So we look forward. From my
24 personal experience -- I won't get into a
25 significant number of detailed

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2 conversations today about the issues that
3 we raised over the last budget hearing,
4 because now we are -- after signing that
5 document, we now can get to the nuts and
6 bolts of the fiscal challenges that are
7 faced with the School District and will
8 be an integral part of coming up with a
9 resolution to those.

10 So I just want to again thank
11 you. Thank you for your participation.

12 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

13 DR. HITE: Thank you.

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Councilwoman
15 Blackwell.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

18 Dr. Hite, as you know, we will
19 have a resolution heard on the 21st where
20 we'll ask a lot of these same issues. So
21 all that -- we know today is
22 Appropriations and we're talking about
23 this money transfer, but all these other
24 issues, many of which the President just
25 referenced, I'm sure will be asked again,

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2 and we'll submit them again on the 21st.
3 So you get another chance to respond.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Councilwoman
6 Reynolds Brown.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Yes. Good
8 morning. I want to salute you as well,
9 Dr. Hite, for working closely with
10 President Clarke and creating really
11 another milestone in the relationship
12 between the School District and the
13 President's office.

14 I've been informed by the
15 President's staff and I understand that
16 the regular briefings that we will
17 receive will be primarily focused on the
18 academic/educational aspects of the
19 District. I don't want the opportunity
20 to go past, however, in alerting you that
21 I and the members of this body also want
22 to know in detail -- let me say this:
23 Typically it is during School District
24 budget hearings that we get to the guts
25 of detail around the business side of the

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operation. And so my hope is that during
those quarterly sessions, we can also get
greater detail on what's happening on the
contracting, RFP, bidding process on the
business side of the equation and not
wait just until showtime during budget
hearings. Because there's a
continuing -- I won't go so far as to say
it's a concern, but the questions still
remain out in the Philadelphia community,
And how well is the School District doing
when it comes to giving women and people
of color opportunity there at the School
District. So in some way, shape, form or
fashion in a way that's comfortable for
you and your staff, we want details on
that too on a quarterly basis.

Thank you.

DR. HITE: Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you,
Mr. Chairman.

COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you,
Councilwoman.

Let me note for the record

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2 Councilman Brian O'Neill is present as
3 well.

4 Are there any other questions,
5 comments for this witness?

6 (No response.)

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Dr. Hite, if
8 you could stay around for about ten
9 minutes while we take a couple other
10 witnesses, there may be some other
11 questions that come up.

12 DR. HITE: Okay. Yes, sir.

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you.

14 Rob Dubow.

15 (Witness approached witness
16 table.)

17 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good
18 morning, Mr. Dubow.

19 MR. DUBOW: Good morning,
20 Chairman Goode, members of the Committee.
21 I'm Rob Dubow, Director of Finance, and
22 I'm here to testify in support of Bill
23 No. 150612.

24 The bill proposes to transfer
25 \$25 million from City Council to the

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2 City's annual contribution to the School
3 District. A portion of the projected
4 increase in property tax from the rate
5 increase enacted last spring was intended
6 to come to the City and then be provided
7 to the District. This transfer would
8 make that possible. We support this
9 action to provide additional, recurring
10 funding to the District.

11 That concludes my very short
12 testimony, and I'm happy to answer any
13 questions.

14 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you,
15 Mr. Dubow.

16 Any questions for Mr. Dubow?
17 (No response.)

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Seeing none,
19 thank you very much.

20 MR. DUBOW: Thank you.

21 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Councilman
22 O'Neill.

23 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: Thank you,
24 Mr. Chairman. I know the vote was taken
25 earlier, but I would like my vote to be

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2 recorded as aye as well.

3 Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So noted.

5 Thank you.

6 Helen Gym.

7 (Witness approached witness
8 table.)

9 MS. GYM: Hi. Good morning.

10 Thank you so much to the City Council
11 Appropriations Committee, Chairman Wilson
12 Goode, in particular because I believe
13 that the Cooperation Agreement and this
14 hearing is one of the most encouraging
15 signs of a new phase of productive budget
16 oversight by City Council to ensure that
17 students actually receive the basic
18 services that they need, that we focus in
19 on equity, particularly for our most
20 vulnerable and traditionally marginalized
21 youth, and real engagement of communities
22 in this process.

23 Thanks to the dogged work of
24 some of our media, we are hearing
25 firsthand about some of the serious

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2 consequences that happen to students and
3 their learning when we may overstate or
4 over-assume the benefits of
5 privatization. This does not mean, of
6 course, that some contracting, limited
7 and with due diligence on oversight,
8 doesn't have its place. Of course it
9 does. But in the last few years, we have
10 seen a significant expansion of
11 privatization that has had deeply
12 troubling consequences that we're not
13 tracking very well.

14 I think that it's clear that
15 the source for teacher substitute
16 situation has been well documented, but
17 the bigger concern is that 77 students in
18 a classroom at Mastbaum when I contacted
19 the District will not be relieved until
20 October 19th, and school started on
21 September 8th. It feels like that's a
22 situation that is extremely urgent and
23 serious, that schools shouldn't be left
24 to fend for themselves or figure that
25 out, but that needs to be an immediate

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2 deployment and that we need to be able to
3 jump on that very clearly and that we
4 want the District to be on top of that
5 and figure out how to support it.

6 The nurses and counselors
7 situation has also been well documented,
8 but I also want to emphasize again that
9 it is not getting any better, even after
10 months and years of addressing this
11 issue. I want to emphasize that this is
12 not significant chunks of money that
13 we're talking about. When the nurses
14 moved from 1,500 -- 1 to 750 student
15 ratio to 1 to 1,500 student ratio, it was
16 in the range of \$5 to \$7 million at the
17 time in 2013. The School District
18 recently testified that to get a
19 counselor back in every school would be
20 on the range of \$3.7 million. This is
21 certainly doable and necessary at this
22 time.

23 At a rally at Jackson
24 Elementary School this week, it becomes
25 immediately apparent that the basic lack

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2 of services in schools, the fact that
3 there are three schools without even
4 having a nurse assigned to them, that
5 there are 16 -- a nurse available to
6 them, that there are 16 schools without
7 nurses being assigned to them is a major
8 issue about whether parents even want to
9 send their children to school, to a
10 public school, and ultimately to live in
11 Philadelphia and feel like it's safe for
12 their young people. I feel like this is
13 a doable situation, that if Council is --
14 this is the appropriate and necessary and
15 much-needed oversight body to start
16 asking some of these questions.

17 I want to make a quick pitch on
18 something that hasn't been talked about
19 very much, which is the rapid
20 privatization around speech therapy and
21 services around speech therapy. So there
22 are about 130 -- there was formerly about
23 a staff of about 130 speech therapists
24 serving 6,800 maybe students in the
25 School District of Philadelphia. Now

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2 we're down to 60 School District
3 therapists and the rest are filled by a
4 variety of contractors, who, by the way,
5 are expanding in terms of the number of
6 contracts. There aren't just one
7 contract. There's Progressive Therapy,
8 Mediscan, EBS. Twenty percent of these
9 contractors quit mid year and that there
10 are 10 to 15 positions that may even be
11 open in the District. But it's important
12 for people and for all of us to start
13 tracking and paying attention to these
14 things, in part because at the end of the
15 day, speech is a federally mandated
16 service, and if kids are going without it
17 or if they are being interrupted -- my
18 own son had a significant speech
19 impediment. He can't see multiple speech
20 therapists in a year. This needs to be
21 consistent. They need to track growth.

22 We have an open site called
23 mightilyschools.com which is tracking
24 complaints about school services. We've
25 received several dozen unsolicited

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2 complaints about lack of services in
3 schools.

4 So I just want to say that I
5 want to see this as a partnership with
6 the District, that we want to figure out
7 solutions to this, but that it is
8 extremely important with the limited
9 amount of funds that we have that we
10 particularly laser in and focus in on the
11 basic and essential services that are
12 necessary, needed in schools, at the end
13 of the day federally mandated, state
14 constitutionally required, and that as
15 the District seeks to do other things,
16 new initiatives that may not have existed
17 before, the Renaissance Schools program,
18 which costs 4,000 assumed more dollars
19 per student and stranded costs that have
20 never been justified or clarified, that
21 we need to have more places and that this
22 Cooperation Agreement -- and in
23 particular that I look forward to working
24 with City Council very carefully to
25 ensure that our services are met and that

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2 Council's budget oversight and
3 responsibility, fiscal responsibility, to
4 the children of the School District and
5 to the City are well cared for.

6 So thank you very much.

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
8 for your testimony.

9 Any questions, comments for
10 this witness?

11 (No response.)

12 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Seeing none,
13 is there anyone else to testify on this
14 bill?

15 (No response.)

16 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN:
17 Mr. Chairman?

18 Ms. Gym, if you could please
19 report back to the table.

20 (Witness approached witness
21 table.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: So
23 operating on the philosophy that you
24 cannot hold people responsible for that
25 which we have not brought to their

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2 attention -- that's how I try to live --
3 I assume you've registered your concerns,
4 your observations with the School
5 District in a way that let's them know,
6 A, you're interested; B, you're
7 concerned; and, C, seeking to work
8 through with them what those possible
9 remedies could be?

10 MS. GYM: Although I may not
11 have directly raised the issue of the
12 speech therapists, I know that that issue
13 has been raised before. The nurses and
14 counselors has been well documented, and
15 I believe the source for teachers has
16 been well documented. But in part, I do
17 think that one of the things that we want
18 to be able to do is have a better -- as
19 complaints, for example, if we were to
20 open up the complaint site a little bit
21 more broadly, we would want to talk to
22 the School District about that before we
23 made anything public.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: And "we"
25 would be whom?

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2 MS. GYM: Well, the complaint
3 site is independent. If it were to go
4 under any other kind of body or entity,
5 it would certainly not -- and I didn't
6 raise anything that we received through
7 the complaint site publicly here and
8 won't unless I raise it with the
9 District.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay,
11 then. All right, then. Thank you.

12 MS. GYM: Thank you.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you,
14 Mr. Chairman.

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Any
16 questions or comments for this witness?

17 (No response.)

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: No one else
19 to testify?

20 (No response.)

21 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Seeing none,
22 this concludes our public hearing and our
23 public meeting.

24 Thank you very much.

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concluded at 10:30 a.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the
proceedings, evidence and objections are
contained fully and accurately in the
stenographic notes taken by me upon the
foregoing matter, and that this is a true and
correct transcript of same.

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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