

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Thursday, October 31, 2013
9:30 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR., CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ

BILL 130745 - An ordinance amending an ordinance approved June 25, 2013 (Bill No. 130180) adopting the Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2014, by making certain additional appropriations needed to meet the unanticipated emergency created by the availability of a state grant to help with the fiscal crisis of the School District of Philadelphia...

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COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good

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morning. This hearing is called to

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order. This is a public hearing of the

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Appropriations Committee on Bill No.

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130745. My name is W. Wilson Goode, Jr.,

7

Chair of the Committee.

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I note that a quorum is

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present. To my right is Vice Chair of

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the Committee, Majority Leader Councilman

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Curtis Jones. To my far left is

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Councilman Brian O'Neill. To my

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immediate left is Councilwoman Maria

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Quinones-Sanchez.

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The title of the Bill 130745,

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an ordinance amending an ordinance

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approved June 25, 2013 (Bill No. 130180)

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adopting the Operating Budget for Fiscal

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Year 2014, by making certain additional

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appropriations needed to meet the

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unanticipated emergency created by the

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availability of a state grant to help

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with the fiscal crisis of the School

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District of Philadelphia, in accordance

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with Section 2-301(a) of The Philadelphia

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2 Home Rule Charter, all under certain
3 terms and conditions.

4 The first witness is Rob Dubow.
5 (Witnesses approached witness
6 table.)

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Let me note
8 for the record that Councilman Bobby
9 Henon is here as well.

10 MR. DUBOW: I'm sorry. I
11 didn't hear you.

12 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Please
13 proceed.

14 MR. DUBOW: Good morning,
15 Chairman Goode and members of the
16 Committee. My name is Rob Dubow. I'm
17 the Finance Director, and I'm here to
18 testify in support of Bill No. 130745,
19 which proposes to increase the
20 appropriations made from the General Fund
21 by \$45 million and to transfer it to
22 Contributions, Indemnities, and Taxes.
23 The funds would then be given to the
24 School District of Philadelphia. I'm
25 joined at the table by Rebecca Rhynhart,

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2 the City's Budget Director.

3 The 45 million is being sent by
4 the Commonwealth to the City in order to
5 be transmitted to the District. Under
6 Commonwealth legislation enacted last
7 summer, the 45 million is provided to the
8 District after two conditions have been
9 met: the City and the District enter
10 into an MOU under which the transfer of
11 funds can take place and the Pennsylvania
12 Secretary of Education certifies that the
13 School District has begun to make
14 financial, educational, and operational
15 reforms. Both of those conditions have
16 been met.

17 The funds would be used to
18 rehire guidance counselors and ensure
19 sports for the full year, among other
20 things.

21 For the reasons discussed in
22 this testimony, we request the bill be
23 voted out of committee with suspension of
24 the rules to allow first reading at
25 Council's next session.

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2 That concludes my testimony,
3 and we'd be happy to answer any
4 questions.

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you,
6 Mr. Dubow. Have you received anything in
7 writing from the School District about
8 how the money is going to be spent?

9 MR. DUBOW: I have not.

10 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Can you
11 request that?

12 MR. DUBOW: Yes.

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Questions
14 from members of the Committee?

15 Councilman Henon.

16 COUNCILMAN HENON: Yes. Thank
17 you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Just one quick question, and
19 I'm sure you've taken this in
20 consideration. Does this trigger at all
21 the maintenance of effort?

22 MR. DUBOW: It does not. The
23 state legislation that had the 45 million
24 in it specifically exempted this from
25 maintenance of effort.

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2 COUNCILMAN HENON: Great.

3 Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Any other
5 questions from members of the Committee?

6 (No response.)

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Seeing none,
8 let me acknowledge also Councilwoman
9 Jannie Blackwell is here.

10 Thank you very much.

11 MR. DUBOW: Thanks.

12 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Is Jerry
13 Jordan here or anyone else from the PFT?
14 (Witness approached witness
15 table.)

16 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Good
17 morning.

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Please state
19 your name for the record and proceed with
20 your testimony.

21 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Good
22 morning. My name is Hillary
23 Linardopoulos representing Jerry Jordan.
24 He was unable to be here today, but I
25 will be reading testimony on his behalf.

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2 I'm a staff representative at the
3 Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

4 Thank you for having us here today.

5 On behalf of Jerry, we want to
6 thank you and the entire City Council --
7 the Appropriation Committee and the
8 Council for convening this hearing on the
9 45 million being released to the School
10 District of Philadelphia by Governor
11 Corbett.

12 Clearly, the District is in
13 dire need of these funds and much more.
14 I can't imagine that anybody in this room
15 would rail against giving these
16 much-needed resources to our public
17 schools.

18 However, because there may be
19 disagreement over exactly how to
20 distribute this money, the Philadelphia
21 Federation of Teachers wants to be very
22 clear about our position on how the \$45
23 million should be spent.

24 The \$45 million in federal
25 funds were specifically slated to provide

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2 direct services to Philadelphia's school
3 children. Every dime of these funds
4 should be used to bring back the school
5 employees that were laid off in June.
6 The counselors, teachers, nurses, school
7 secretaries, and non-instructional
8 personnel that were released over the
9 summer are providers of critical programs
10 and student services and must be brought
11 back immediately.

12 We are hearing talk of \$10
13 million being set aside for payments to
14 charter schools. This is unacceptable.
15 The \$45 million was slated to provide
16 services to our children in traditional
17 public schools. And while there were
18 initially no strings attached to those
19 funds, Governor Corbett chose to play
20 politics by holding on to the money until
21 he got reforms and concessions from the
22 School District and the union.

23 Though he released the money
24 without any concessions from the PFT, the
25 reforms and changes provided to

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2 Harrisburg by the District had nothing to
3 do with charter schools. In other words,
4 charter schools have not borne the brunt
5 of the cuts to education. They were not
6 asked to make changes or reforms.

7 Therefore, all of the money should go to
8 the City's traditional public schools to
9 restore at least some of what our
10 children have already lost.

11 Thank you again for holding
12 this hearing and for allowing the PFT a
13 few minutes to share our thoughts on this
14 extremely important issue, and thank you
15 for allowing me to speak on President
16 Jordan's behalf.

17 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
18 for your testimony.

19 Any questions for this witness?
20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Seeing none,
22 thank you.

23 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Thank you
24 very much. Do you need copies?

25 COUNCILMAN GOODE: We have

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2 them.

3 MS. LINARDOPOULOS: Thank you
4 so much.

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Is Helen Gym
6 here or someone else from Parents United.

7 (Witnesses approached witness
8 table.)

9 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good
10 morning.

11 MS. GYM: Hi. Good morning.
12 Thank you very much. First of all, my
13 name is Helen Gym, Co-Founder of Parents
14 United for Public Education, and a few of
15 our members are also going to testify
16 briefly.

17 We wanted to thank City Council
18 for all your work that you've been doing,
19 especially for the Philadelphia public
20 schools. We are glad that the 45 million
21 did come back to the District, but it is
22 very important that the transparency
23 around how the money has been spent, as
24 Hillary mentioned earlier, is a critical
25 issue.

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2 Since the beginning of school,
3 through a formal complaints process with
4 the Public Interest Law Center of
5 Philadelphia and with the support of
6 Councilwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez and
7 Councilman Green, we've collected more
8 than 800 formal complaints from parents
9 in schools actually from over -- between
10 70 to 90 different schools, demonstrating
11 not small issues or petty kinds of
12 concerns but basically serious violations
13 of the state code, we believe, that
14 really emphasize very clearly that the
15 transparency issues around the 45 million
16 need to be emphasized.

17 In particular, parents of ours
18 have been present at meetings in which
19 the Superintendent and other members of
20 the leadership staff have laid out
21 certain priorities; for example, the \$10
22 million to charter schools. We're glad
23 to see \$50 million go back to IEP
24 services, wrap-around aides, and supports
25 for students with special needs, but we

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2 are concerned that very little money has
3 gone towards what parents have listed as
4 among their top concerns. One being
5 guidance counselors in schools. The only
6 public statement that we've heard from
7 the Administration is that there will be
8 one counselor per high school.

9 Northeast High School already
10 has one counselor and they have 3,500
11 students. Central High School has 2,400
12 students and two guidance counselors. So
13 they're considered one of the lucky high
14 schools, but with 2,400 schools and two
15 guidance counselors, there's a two-week
16 wait currently to see the guidance
17 counselor. And if you were to count up
18 the total amount of time that students at
19 Central High School would have time with
20 their guidance counselor this year, it
21 would amount to less than 17 minutes per
22 child per year.

23 Meanwhile, for plenty of
24 elementary schools and middle schools
25 where children are facing some critical

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2 issues, including homelessness, death of
3 a parent, being placed in foster care,
4 serious emotional stress that we've
5 documented through this complaints
6 process, there has been no guarantee for
7 elementary schools. One elementary
8 school in particular had a guidance
9 counselor for two hours a day one day a
10 week. They will have that guidance
11 counselor for two days a week, but for
12 that school with almost 500 students,
13 they desperately need a guidance
14 counselor full time.

15 The last area that we wanted to
16 talk about is that the District, in
17 refusing to have zero dollars of that 45
18 million go towards teachers, ended up
19 creating split grades all across the
20 District with the recent leveling
21 process. They moved and transferred out
22 139 teachers. And if you were to think
23 about 139 teachers moving out, that's 278
24 classrooms that are impacted on both the
25 receiving end and on the departing end,

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2 and at only 30 students per teacher, that
3 would be almost 8,000 students impacted
4 at the end of October, almost at the
5 beginning of November. Not one dollar
6 has gone towards hiring additional
7 teachers to relieve those kinds of
8 situations and, more critically, to
9 relieve split grades.

10 Split grades are a situation in
11 which students are placed in second or
12 third grade splits. Third and fourth
13 grade splits are very common. You might
14 have seven third graders in a 25-student
15 fourth grade class. It creates enormous
16 havoc. We believe it's academically and
17 pedagogically been proven to be a massive
18 failure. The District got rid of it as a
19 policy in 2007.

20 I know that this isn't entirely
21 in your control, but I also know that you
22 have an enormous bully pulpit, in the
23 best sense of the word, to be able to
24 emphasize to the District to ask for some
25 clarity, especially around the \$10

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2 million to charters, especially around
3 the money that goes towards nurses,
4 establishing priorities for guidance
5 counselors, and to eliminate some of
6 these split grades that are happening.

7 And, Councilman O'Neill, thank
8 you so much for going to Fox Chase
9 yesterday, but that community is in
10 desperate need of a guidance counselor, a
11 nurse, and a librarian, as you well know.

12 So I'm going to pass this over
13 to my colleague.

14 MS. TOWNSEND: Good morning.
15 Thank you for having us at this public
16 hearing. My name is Sabra Townsend and I
17 just wanted to say three things. One, as
18 a Philadelphia resident, as a graduate
19 from kindergarten to 12th grade of
20 Philadelphia public schools, I feel like
21 we as a city are in a position to do much
22 better by our children. I'm a parent of
23 a young man who is now 16, born with
24 special healthcare needs, but I feel like
25 he should have the same opportunities

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2 that I had from kindergarten through high
3 school, and that's not happening, and I
4 think that's unfortunate. We consider
5 ourselves a world-class city. We should
6 support world-class public education.
7 That's the first thing.

8 The second thing, not just for
9 my child but for all children who should
10 receive a free and appropriate public
11 education, I think it's egregious for
12 conversations to happen about this \$45
13 million and gloss over the fact that
14 there is not a nurse in every school. It
15 strikes me as -- "convenient" is not the
16 word, but certainly it was no coincidence
17 that \$45 million of the money was
18 released to the City of Philadelphia
19 after the unfortunate and tragic death of
20 Laporshia Massey. Laporshia Massey. I
21 think that that's just unconscionable.
22 And then we talk about what we should do
23 for our students in public schools.

24 And the third thing I would
25 like to say is that every single school

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2 should have the services that they need.
3 If you're in -- if you're from
4 Philadelphia, if you've been raised in
5 the City, you know that there are certain
6 schools that get certain things and
7 certain schools that don't get certain
8 things. I was a product of the schools
9 that got the things. I went to
10 Masterman. I graduated from the
11 Philadelphia High School for Girls. I
12 know what a quality education can be.

13 But my point is that every
14 single school should have a nurse, a
15 counselor, the proper teachers, the
16 proper resources. And I think it's up to
17 us to make sure that the monies that are
18 allocated go toward making that happen.

19 Thank you.

20 (Applause.)

21 MS. THOMPSON: Good morning.
22 My name is Cecelia Thompson, and I just
23 would like to add that if it's in your
24 power, that you ask for a breakdown on
25 how the money and the resources are going

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2 to be spent. For example, I think the
3 District is using the state's guidelines
4 on one nurse per 1,500 students, which we
5 know in Philadelphia that's unacceptable.
6 So if they're going to allocate more
7 nurses, ask them what is the rubric, is
8 it going to be those schools that have a
9 high population of students with
10 emotional support needs or high
11 healthcare needs such as asthma, because
12 people think asthma is just something
13 that's relatively insignificant, but we
14 all know that that can be a severe thing.
15 As we all know, it can lead to death. As
16 well as -- I lost my train of thought.
17 I'm sorry -- how the counselors will be
18 deployed. It is said that all the
19 comprehensive high schools will have at
20 least one counselor, but you have K to 8
21 schools that desperately need a counselor
22 as well. How the itinerant counselors,
23 because they will still have itinerant
24 counselors, how that process will be
25 done. Right now I think itinerant

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2 counselors have up to seven schools and
3 the average is about five to seven
4 thousand students, and the counselors
5 themselves are saying that they just
6 can't do it.

7 We just heard recently that
8 because the PSATs, which is a time thing,
9 you have to do that -- I think the tests
10 were last week. A lot of students missed
11 that opportunity to take the PSATs, and
12 that wouldn't have had happened if
13 counselors were at the schools, but more
14 importantly, there were some counselors
15 who were elementary school counselors who
16 did not know what the PSAT process was,
17 so by the time they found out, the
18 deadline was already missed. So now you
19 have students who just missed that
20 opportunity altogether.

21 So if this was in your purview
22 to ask, We're going to give you this
23 money, but at least say this is what
24 you're going to do, you know, 10 million
25 will go here, such-and-such millions will

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2 go here, these are the schools that's
3 going to get what, I think that we as
4 taxpayers but as a Council at least
5 should be given that courtesy to get that
6 breakdown, because you are releasing the
7 money to the School District.

8 Thank you so much.

9 MS. TOWNSEND: I would be
10 remiss if I didn't mention one more
11 issue, and I'm sorry that I didn't
12 mention it initially. Librarians and
13 libraries. I think absolutely every
14 single school should have an open library
15 with a librarian.

16 Thank you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you.

19 Are there questions for these
20 witnesses?

21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you
23 very much.

24 Jess Bergan, Fight for Philly
25 or someone else from Fight for Philly.

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2 (No response.)

3 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Jess Bergan.

4 (No response.)

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Jihad

6 Seifullah, PCAPS.

7 (Witness approached witness
8 table.)

9 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good
10 morning.

11 MR. SEIFULLAH: Good morning.

12 Thanks for giving me the opportunity to
13 speak this morning. My name is Jihad
14 Seifullah. I'm the Coalition Coordinator
15 for PCAPS, Philadelphia Coalition
16 Advocating for Public Schools, and I'm
17 here today to give testimony.

18 For the last seven weeks, PCAPS
19 has been around the City at more than 50
20 schools hearing from parents, teachers,
21 and students, and the overarching thing
22 that we're hearing is this 45 million is
23 a start, but it's clearly not enough.
24 And now that we have the 45 million, we
25 need to make sure that it goes where it's

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2 needed and where it does the most good.

3 Just recently, Superintendent
4 Hite indicated last week that he intends
5 to funnel 10 million of the 45 million
6 into charter schools. The 45 million was
7 intended to help neighborhood public
8 schools as a result of the budget
9 shortfall, and as we know, 24
10 neighborhood public schools were closed.
11 Thousands of teachers and staff were laid
12 off from our neighborhood public schools,
13 and programs were cut. Libraries were
14 closed, and students are suffering at
15 those schools.

16 Our public schools are not just
17 dealing with the crisis -- it's not just
18 a budget shortfall. It's a crisis. It's
19 an emergency, and immediate action needs
20 to happen to bring our schools out of
21 this crisis.

22 With this being said, my
23 question is, why should charter schools
24 get a portion of the 45 million when it's
25 the neighborhood public schools that have

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2 taken the hit?

3 Furthermore --

4 (Applause.)

5 MR. SEIFULLAH: Furthermore,
6 when it comes to charter schools, between
7 financial mismanagement, lack of
8 oversight, poor student performance,
9 charter schools aren't working in
10 Philadelphia. Plus, as SRC member Joe
11 Dworetzky put it, the average net loss to
12 the District when a student goes to a
13 charter school is 7,000 per student.

14 When charter schools are
15 already draining resources, starving our
16 neighborhood public schools of funds,
17 again, I ask the question, why do we give
18 them a portion of the 45 million?

19 Teachers, parents, and students
20 want to make sure that the District uses
21 the 45 million to restore the programs
22 and staff that have been cut from our
23 neighborhood public schools, things like
24 our school nurses, counselors, and
25 clerical support staff that keep the

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2 schools running smoothly. Education
3 experts agree on this issue. Every
4 school needs a school nurse and one
5 counselor for every 250 students. Our
6 schools, our kids, our community deserves
7 no less than these basic resources.

8 And I just want to thank you
9 for giving me the opportunity to speak on
10 this. And on an additional note, there's
11 other ways that we can find more
12 resources for our schools, and I wanted
13 to leave copies of a White Paper that
14 PCAPS put out two days ago in regards to
15 tax abatements. If I can -- should I
16 bring it up or leave it on...

17 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: They're
18 getting them.

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you.
20 Any questions for this witness?
21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Seeing none,
23 thank you very much.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I'll call

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2 one more time, Jess Bergan.

3 (No response.)

4 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Is there

5 anyone else to testify on this bill?

6 (No response.)

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Seeing none,

8 we will move from our public hearing into

9 our public meeting to consider Bill No.

10 130745.

11 The Chair recognizes Councilman

12 Jones for a motion on Bill No. 130745.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,

14 Mr. Chairman. I make a motion on Bill

15 No. 130745. I move that this bill be

16 reported out of committee with a

17 favorable recommendation and that the

18 rules of Council be suspended to allow

19 for first reading at our next scheduled

20 session of Council.

21 (Duly seconded.)

22 COUNCILMAN GOODE: All in

23 favor?

24 (Aye.)

25 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Those

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2 opposed?

3 (No response.)

4 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Bill No.

5 130745 is reported out of this committee

6 with a favorable recommendation and

7 suspension of the rules to allow first

8 reading at our next session of Council.

9 This concludes our public
10 meeting.

11 Thank you very much.

12 (Committee on Appropriations
13 concluded at 9:50 a.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

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direct control and/or supervision of the
certifying reporter.)

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