COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Cardinal Bevilacqua Center
2646 Kensington Avenue
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, May 1, 2012
6:25 p.m.

PRESENT:
COUNCIL PRESIDENT DARRELL L. CLARKE
COUNCILMAN BILL GREEN
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILWOMAN MARIAN B. TASCO

BILL 120164, 120165 and 120166
RESOLUTION 120167

- - -

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good evening, everyone. We're going to start. I'd ask you to please take your seats.

First, I'd like to thank everyone for coming this evening. We hope that you experience Council at its best. If not at its best, close to it.

This is important for us to get out here in the neighborhoods. During the course of the last, I guess, couple of decades, there have been community hearings, public testimony, but traditionally they've predominantly been in City Council Chambers, and we thought it was important for us to come out to the actual neighborhoods that we represent. So I would like to thank you all so very much for being here this evening.

First, because this is an official public hearing, we have to go through the actual script to start the process. So I would like to at this time state that this is a continued public

hearing of the Committee of the Whole regarding Bills No. 120164, 120165, 120166 and Resolution No. 120167.

Ms. Lewis, would you please read the titles of the bills and resolution.

MS. LEWIS: Bill No. 120164, an ordinance to adopt a Capital Program for the six Fiscal Years 2013 through 2018 inclusive.

Bill No. 120165, an ordinance to adopt a Fiscal 2013 Capital Budget.

Bill No. 120166, an ordinance adopting the Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2013.

Resolution No. 120167, a resolution providing for the approval by the Council of the City of Philadelphia of a Revised Five Year Financial Plan for the City of Philadelphia covering Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017, and incorporating proposed changes with respect to Fiscal Year 2012, which is to be submitted by the Mayor to the

Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority (the "Authority") pursuant to the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement authorized by an ordinance of this Council approved by the Mayor on January 3rd, 1992 (Bill No. 1563-A), by and between the City and the Authority.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much, Ms. Lewis.

This evening we're here to continue the Committee of the Whole that will discuss this evening and hear from you about various revenue and spending measures incorporated into this particular budget, the aforementioned bills and resolution.

One of the things that we'd like to do today is to ask individuals who are interested in testifying, we have a significant witness list, so in order to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to speak this evening before we have to conclude, we're going to ask

that you summarize your comments and limit them to three minutes. I know three minutes might sound like a relatively short time, but once you get up there and talk, you're going to probably say, Man, I can't wait until I finish and sit down, trust me. Three minutes is a long time. So we're going to ask you to, if at all possible, abide by the three-minute rule so we can make sure everybody gets an opportunity to speak.

We will be here until the last speaker, so don't be concerned about not having that opportunity.

Before we proceed, I would just like to thank the host, Ms. Colleen Gibson, the Executive Director, for hosting us here at this wonderful facility. This is actually my first time here. And for those of you that heard a basketball a little earlier, I got to admit, it was me. So I apologize for making noise, but I couldn't resist. I

saw that ball laying on the floor. I had to pick it up. I got to also admit, I only made one out of five shots. So that basketball stopped bouncing real soon, because I realized I was not on my A game tonight.

Before we proceed, I would like to thank Councilwoman Sanchez and Councilman Mark Squilla, who are the host Councilpersons this evening. This is the borderline of their Council district, and I would actually like to ask them to say a few words to you before we start the process.

Councilwoman Sanchez.

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Thank you.

Good evening. Buenos Noches. It is quite a treat to be able to come out into the neighborhoods and listen to the people, as President Clarke said. This budget process is about you. We're about to make some serious decisions about you, your property, your schools,

and I think it's very important that we come out to you and give you an opportunity to tell us how you are feeling about what's going on.

So I want to thank all of the speakers that are here. If you haven't signed in already, please do so at the table. As the President mentioned, we do have an extensive list of folks, and we will stay here as long as it takes to make sure that everybody's voice is heard. It is a pleasure to welcome my colleagues as well as all of you to this process.

Gracias.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: The Chair now recognizes Councilman Squilla.

COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Good evening, everyone, and thank you for coming out. It's a great opportunity to be out here in the neighborhood, as Councilwoman Quinones-Sanchez says, and it's important to realize that we're out here because we work for you and we're

listening to you and we're listening to your concerns and your needs. And this is a great opportunity to be in your community where you feel safe and welcomed and to give us the information that we need in order to make informed decisions when we're on Council.

So I want to thank you all for coming out here and thank the Bevilacqua Center for hosting this, and looking forward to working with you and working through tonight to hopefully get the information you need to make you happy or at least knowing that we're working in the direction that you want us to. So thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Councilman.

In addition to your two host Councilpeople tonight, we have Councilman Bill Greenlee over to my left. To my right, we have Councilman David Oh, Councilman at large, and Councilman Kenyatta Johnson, and I do understand

there are a couple of other Councilmembers that will be here very shortly. And we have the capable Ms. Lewis here staffing us today.

Thank you.

Ms. Lewis, will you please read the name of the first witness.

MS. LEWIS: Marcus Delgado.

(Applause.)

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. DELGADO: Thank you. Good evening. My name is Marcus Delgado and I oversee One Bright Ray Community High School, which is one of the accelerated schools here in North Philadelphia.

Last year we survived the budget cuts, and enrollments at our school were slashed. We went from 390 students to 327 students. Some of the decisions that I made as the overseer of the school was, I cut leadership positions. I merged two schools into one school. I cut expenses in order to

retain small class sizes. The morale was extremely high for my faculty, staff and students as we were able to produce another successful academic school year.

Last year there was a belief from City Council on accelerated schools. We graduated 60 former high school dropouts this past January, and come August 2nd, we will have a total of 176 former high school graduates.

(Applause.)

MR. DELGADO: Thank you. Okay. I only have two minutes left.

As we prepare for our school prom this upcoming Friday and summer classes that will be scheduled from June to August, my faculty, staff and students are coming to me with a fear. To them it feels like deja vu all over again, when the School District came to us last year in the last hour and basically told us that we were cut out of the budget. It was the belief from City Council last year that saved us. It was the belief

that we do quality work that actually allowed us to open our doors this year.

I come to you before -- I come to you before this night and I say to you that communication from the School District has completely stopped. There's no work nor discussion on our future. There is no invitation to the table to speak about sustainability or strategies on how do we keep the accelerated school portfolio alive.

Decisions will have to be made by those that are employed at the School District headquarters about the accelerated school portfolio. Charter school operators are included in these conversations, District employees, District school leaders are included in these conversations, but the accelerated schools were left out once again.

Your belief last year in accelerated schools helped me, my faculty and staff graduate so many kids. I ask that you put pressure on the SRC to bring

us to the table, so that way we can have a say in what our long-term future is for these students.

The School District trusts us with their dropouts. They trust us with the students they push out. They trust us with the students that fail their schools, but they don't trust our opinions, they don't invite us to the table, and they don't ask us for ideas.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much for your testimony.

The Chair would like to recognize Councilwoman Marian Tasco, who has just joined us to my left.

You can clap if you want. I heard somebody start.

MS. LEWIS: Jamie Moffett.

(No response.)

MS. LEWIS: Jamie Moffett.

(No response.)

MS. LEWIS: Amy Miller.

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(Witness approached microphone.)

MS. MILLER: Good evening, members of Council. It's an honor to be here tonight speaking with you. My name is Amy Miller. I'm a resident of the 1st District and an active member in the East Kensington Neighbors Association, or EKNA.

Last month during the night after Easter Sunday, we suffered a great loss with the devastating fire at the Thomas Buck Factory located just blocks from here. It took the lives of two of our city's finest. This disaster revealed many things, including the need to adequately fund the Fire Department. Our lives and properties depend on our firefighters, and we don't support them enough.

There are many other abandoned, blighted, tax-delinquent, yet well-insured factories in Kensington that are also at risk of being set on fire.

If we don't have a well-funded Fire Department that can respond in time and in full force, then we will be facing a costly and deadly future as these buildings continue to burn.

I urge City Council to listen to and work with the Fire Department to better understand their needs so that we can have a budget that will protect our lives, our properties and the heart of our city.

Now, of course, we all want to prevent these fires from starting in the first place. To do so, we must enact preventative measures. This includes properly sealing buildings to protect them from vandalism, arson and the natural elements. Prevention also means getting these buildings back into use and back onto the tax rolls.

It should have come as no surprise that the owners of the Buck Building owed hundreds of thousands of dollars in unpaid property taxes. One

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block from the Buck Building is the historic Albion Carpet Mills located at 1821 through 45 East Hagert Street. The owners of this six-story historic textile mill owe the City over $200,000 in unpaid property taxes on this one building.

An historic bath house at 1804 through 14 East Hazzard Street, just about two or three blocks from here, was purchased in 2005, and not a penny has been paid in property taxes since.

There are many more examples of this that I could name. Rampant and unchecked tax delinquency is dragging down our city and needs to be stopped. We need a streamlined process that holds owners accountable and doesn't coddle deadbeats.

The City's budget should allow for the costs of important proactive measures to protect, redevelopment and beautify Philadelphia. The cost of preventative maintenance, tax enforcement and property condemnation are great

indeed, but the cost of doing nothing is so much greater.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much.

I believe that, Councilwoman Sanchez, you either are going to introduce or you just introduced a bill to reflect some of the challenges with some of the vacant buildings?

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Yes. We've been working with the Administration for a year and, in fact, EKNA was one of the groups that came and testified. Last Friday we passed out of committee a bill that would upgrade our building code to require steel-plated seals on vacant buildings and trigger the requirement of this, particularly for large commercial and industrial buildings. It was not a response to the fire. It was something that we had been working on, because many of you know who

live in Kensington, we have plagued with the almost 500 vacant properties left by the Landvest/Coyle properties.

So this is something that we're extremely aware of and we are trying to be as proactive, and, of course, the land bank legislation, which will hopefully help us really streamline how do we get these vacant structures back into use. But I appreciate the testimony. I appreciate the support from the neighbors during this process.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Councilwoman.

MS. LEWIS: Linda Lauff.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MS. LAUFF: Good evening, Councilmembers. I'm Linda Lauff. I'm the President of the Friends of Pennypack Park as well as a member of the Friends of Fox Chase Farm, Pennypack Environmental Center Advisory Council and Tree Northeast. I represent 2,000-plus

members through these organizations.

To many citizens, our parks and recreation centers are our front yards and the back playgrounds for our children. These open, green spaces provide us with trails to stroll, hike and bike; picnic tables for family gatherings; creeks for fishing and rock skipping; baseball, basketball or soccer fields for our spontaneous game or sports leagues; or just a place to relax after a day or week at work. For many people unable to leave the City for a vacation to the shore or to the Poconos, our parks are our summer get-away, and yet there are so many other features this amazing park system provides to the citizens of Philadelphia, many historic mansions, venues for summer concerts and movies, swimming pools and tennis courts, environmental education centers for exploring and discovery, miles of trails along beautiful rivers such as the Schuylkill, Wissahickon, Cobbs Creek and

Pennypack Creek, as well as an educational farm for the public to learn about animals and our natural environment. Why would any Councilmember let these assets be neglected?

We know that in spite of decades of funding neglect, Philadelphia's Department of Parks and Recreation has done its best to continue many interesting programs, maintain its facilities and match the parkland, but four years ago, the Mayor and City Council promised an additional $8 million for the Parks' budget to be paid for by an increase in the parking tax. These monies were never delivered and the Department has been making due ever since.

How long could you maintain your home without money to hire a contractor to do needed repairs? Have you ever tried to find a working bathroom in a park or tables at a picnic area that are -- excuse me; or witnessed broken

benches and tables at a picnic area or poorly maintained baseball fields? Then you'll understand why so many citizens want additional funds for the Department of Parks and Recreation. Without the staff to manage these ongoing operational needs, our citizens feel unwelcomed in their parks and recreation center.

To many people, both native Philadelphians and those who have chosen to live in this city, parks are an asset we all recognize. Great parks increase real estate value in the surrounding community, attract businesses, connect people to their neighborhood and provide a place for much-needed relaxation. For kids -- and we all were kids at one time; you said so yourself -- we need a place to explore, play and meet with friends and learn about our environment.

Research continues to justify the importance for both children and adults for the exposure to the natural environment. It helps reduce stress,

increase physical activity, control weight, encourage healthy alternatives and provide a general sense of well-being, just to name a few benefits.

These are all the attributes we want for our families, our neighbors and ourselves. But to achieve this, we must invest in our park and recreation system so all citizens have easy access to a well-maintained and safe amenity.

We all love our parks. The staff of the Department of Parks and Recreation and 30,000 volunteers work very hard to maintain and help provide program in our parks and recreation centers. It's time for City Council and the Administration to fulfill your promise from four years ago. Please restore $8 million in funding to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. LEWIS: Bill Salas.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MS. SALAS: Good evening, members of Council. Thank you for coming out to the neighborhood. Much appreciated. I'm Bill Salas. I'm the President and co-founder of the Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises, better known as HACE, a local non-profit organization that does affordable housing development and small business development.

I prepared some written testimony, which I will leave for you, but I will try to summarize my written testimony in basically three areas.

In the area that we work with, affordable housing, obviously the budget in Philadelphia has gotten hit extremely difficult in the last two years. We've lost about $37 million worth of funding from the federal allocation of CDBG. However, CDBG funding is a very difficult

source of funding to utilize when you think about revitalizing neighborhoods. So while we have lost that funding on the CDBG side, I believe that the Administration and I urge City Council to look at different ways to fund that shortfall through the General Fund or through other sources of funding from various departments. I know that Councilwoman in particular has spoken about using some of the surcharges from the trash fees to be able to allocate some of those dollars to affordable housing or business development, or recently when they took out the allocation of mixed-use development from the commercial corridors that was using CDBG funding which has too many strings attached to it, using the General Fund would be a better way how to address that particular program, and that provides additional funding and leveraging.

The one thing -- yes, the funding in the budget is one thing, but

for every dollar that CDCs receive, generally we leverage $10 to $20 of additional funding, additional investment from city and state and federal governments. And so that when you think about investment and attracting investment, the areas that I believe that we need to consider the land bill, the Philadelphia land bank bill that's under consideration is a way that Philadelphia can streamline the disposition and the acquisition of properties in the City of Philadelphia.

The one thing I will say about the disposition of property is that sometimes the City, in an effort to meet its budget, has sold land in our neighborhood to the highest bidder, without taking into account of saving some of that land for the development of ongoing affordable housing, which is needed in the City of Philadelphia in our neighborhoods.

So, again, I would urge City

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Council to look at selling properties. Of course, you need to meet the budget, but at the same time, we got to preserve some of that vacant land, vacant building in our neighborhoods to preserve affordable housing in our communities.

And, thirdly, in terms of the reassessment of our properties in the City of Philadelphia, finding ways not to hurt the seniors in our community. And I understand there's some legislation that would protect some of the seniors and some of the low-income families that have had homes go from 20,000 to 200,000 and reassessing the houses would cost a huge economic impact on low-income families. So finding ways to perhaps keep that until the property is sold or transferred is a way how to protect our low-income families from higher taxes in gentrifying neighborhoods such as it is in our councilmanic district here.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

Thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. Salas. Good seeing you again. You're right, that we have to come up with more creative ways of securing funding for affordable housing. As you reference, we've lost a significant amount, and unfortunately the federal government is proposing a significant cut in the CDBG Block Grant dollars to the City I think to the tune of 17 million, I think it is, this particular year.

One of the things that we did do, and thanks to the support of the CDCs, we came up with the Housing Trust Fund. Without that, we'd really be in dire straits. It is because of the ability to attach fees, additional fees, at recording of deeds, we've been able to raise upwards of $10 million. So but for that, we'd really be out there.

But I agree that we need to look at other mechanisms as opposed to simply cutting programs that are probably

needed in this particular field than any place else. So we hope to continue to be very creative and working with the community organizations and coming up with other strategies.

So thank you for your continued good work.

MS. LEWIS: Rose Gray.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MS. GRAY: Good evening to everyone and thank you very much for being here and thank you for supporting your CDCs in your neighborhood. My name is Rose Gray. I'm Vice President of Community and Economic Development for Asociacion Puertorriquenos en Marcha. I'm here on behalf of APM and Nilda Ruiz who could not be with us tonight.

I want to piggyback on Bill. I think we've made great strides with the front door, the RDA front door, and I think that the land bank is upon us. It's the only way to feasibly put land

into one place so that it can easily be sold, whether it be sold nominally to groups that can effectively create transformation in neighborhoods that you cannot really get fair market value. As Bill said, when we get that land, look around you, this is a result of cooperation between the City, private and public investment where you're sitting tonight, and we've been able to leverage over $120 million in our community, which Darrell and Maria both represent. And I think, Darrell, we've worked together for over 20 years in transforming a neighborhood from a zero market to a marketplace. So your land and your small leveraging of 1.5 sometimes leverages $25 million. So let's keep that focus.

Another important thing is housing counseling. APM is blessed to have built 136 homes for sale to middle and low-income people. Zero foreclosures. You know why? Housing counseling. If we cut housing

counseling, you are cutting an educational tool as important as Mr. Delgado spoke. And I do applaud you, Mr. Delgado. I think that the schools are very important in our communities, because that's a quality of life asset that if I built all these homes and our kids aren't educated, we've done nothing. So the importance of the school integrated in everything we do is very important.

Another facet is the reassessment. I'm very concerned for our seniors as well as for our persons who bought the homes. Reassessment has to be equitable, well thought out, and it's not just a cookie cutter, it works all over the City the same way.

So I know you're going to be very thoughtful as you approach this challenge, and you do have many challenges, and we are here as a community development organization to support what you have to do.

And I want to make it before the bell rings. So they're the important things that APM is focused on: land bank, housing counseling, reassessment and continued supporting the CDC movement.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you. Again, thank you for the continued great work you all do at APM.

MS. LEWIS: Kevin Gray.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. GRAY: Good evening, Council. Thank you very much for your time. I just want -- quite frankly, Rose and Bill essentially summarized everything that I was going to say, because it really is a unified effort for community development. I'm the real estate director for New Kensington Community Development Corporation. Our boundaries are essentially from Girard

Avenue up to Castor Avenue or Frankford Creek, on the west side, from Front and Kensington to the Delaware River.

The main points that both Bill and Rose Gray raise are essential to our organization's existence and survival and effectiveness. The issue regarding the Housing Trust Fund is an excellent point, Council President. The issue is more so that the gap between the actual de-funded portion of the General Fund -- the funded portion of the budget doesn't really fill the gap with the increase in the Housing Trust Fund we receive. Essentially the Housing Trust Fund is 3.5 million in annual gains, but the gap is quite significant.

At the same time, we want the City to sort of recognize the commitment to the capital budget, affordable housing, housing counseling, neighborhood economic development, and make sure that it tries its best to find creative ways to support all of the initiatives.

Lastly, as Rose mentioned, the AVI is a major issue for the organization as well. The Administration is moving towards a citywide assessment based on actual property values. We encourage the City to get this done quickly, but not so quickly. We recommend putting a hold on the Actual Value Initiative implementation until there's a clear sense of the assessed values, the methodology and the process for determining the actual values, and if there's proper notice and education to residents about what AVI actually means to them in the end. We want to ensure that people are not forced from their homes and, therefore, we want to encourage key policy initiatives such as the maximum homestead exemption, phasing in of taxes over the period of time for seniors or allowing seniors to defer the actual tax increase over a certain amount of -- period of time. I think these measures are really effective in sort of

helping to ease this process. They won't solve it, but I think that it's key that the Administration try its best to find an equitable and fair process for determining these values for the neighborhood.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much.

(Applause.)

MS. LEWIS: Angel Rodriguez.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Good evening. My name is Angel Rodriguez. I'm the Executive Director of the Empowerment Group, and I want to thank the members of City Council for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony here today.

Empowerment Group is a non-profit organization, and our main focus is providing business technical assistance throughout the City and

cultivating local entrepreneurship. Regularly we work with local grocery store owners throughout the City and specifically with the Dominican Grocers Association. It's on their behalf that I'm here speaking today.

There are a couple of issues in our work that we've realized that they've raised concerns about the Department of Licensing and Inspection and Health Department. There are four main areas where they raised issues, which first is issues that are raised are reports from store owners about inconsistencies about health inspections which are conducted between different businesses that may be within a block radius of each other. So they would like to see more consistency with that.

Second, the most prevalent issue concerns fines given to store owners concerning violations for cigarette purchases by minors. Often store owners are unaware that they've

been assessed a violation and are not notified until three weeks after the violation has occurred, which causes great difficulty for them to correct the behavior.

Third amongst that is the concerns of shop owners that initial health inspections are conducted on Sunday afternoons, which is the slowest day and typically store owners are not present, which leads to violations and business shutdowns.

Finally, store owners are concerned about the lack of responsiveness by the departments when they report a complaint to these departments. Often they feel that their concerns are not addressed.

These are four of the main concerns, but neither the Empowerment Group nor the shop owners are suggesting that we lower standards for food safety or operating a safe business in the City of Philadelphia, but we would like to

suggest several remedies.

First, we'd like to see more technical assistance as it relates to the new health regulations and understanding of L&I regulations. Pursuant to that, providing store owners with violations at the time of the violation regarding cigarette violations, which is also considered best practice, which is done in New York City. Those violations are assessed right there. It allows business owners time to correct the action and also mitigate the time that they would be out of business.

Third, hiring more multi-lingual inspectors since the vast majority of shop owners are immigrants and/or their English is a second language for them. So understanding the techno speak of both departments is rather difficult.

Lastly, getting an extension of -- as an extension of the third point I raised, written materials in different

languages. We really need to be accommodating of store owners who are trying to be enterprising who do hire people and are an economic engine. I would also say that a lot of the grocery store owners that we provide services to help with the food desert issues.

If the departments already have included this in their budget, we applaud their foresight. If not, we would suggest that City Council actually push this issue so that we can see a better and healthier and safer business community in Philadelphia.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Councilman Oh.

COUNCILMAN OH: Yes. Thank you very much, Council President.

I just wanted to say that I did send a letter to the Health Commissioner. Ultimately we had received some complaints about the very thing that

you're talking about, and I'm aware that Councilwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez has scheduled a meeting as well on some other issues. But the issue that was brought to my attention was that business owners were receiving notices of violations three or four weeks after the date. When they would go to the hearing, the only thing they received was a -- looked like a ticket that had a stamp that an entity, not necessarily from the City, was basically stating that cigarettes were sold to a minor, but there was no name of the person who did it and there was no identification of the minor, not knowing whether it is or is not a minor, and they were asked to provide proof that they did not sell cigarettes to a minor, which of course they cannot do.

So we are following up on that. We do want to ensure that minors are not sold cigarettes, but we don't want to provide a lack of due process and fairness to store owners who are in an

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indefensible position.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Councilman.

MS. LEWIS: Julio Espanol. Julio Espanol.

(No response.)

MS. LEWIS: Miguel Martinez.

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: That's Julio.

(Witness approached microphone.)

TRANSLATOR: Good evening. I'm Ino Julios (ph). I'm translating for Mr. Espanol.

MR. ESPANOL (through translator): Good evening. Thank you for having us this evening. I'm the Vice President of Philadelphia Dominican Grocer Association. We have various concerns primarily with License and Inspections where we have issues with inspections when it comes down to businesses; the Health Department, where

inspectors are inconsistent in the manner of which they inspect businesses.

We would like to have Spanish-speaking inspectors and also so that the Health Department inspection unit can be more consistent when they're sending out inspectors to our stores not to send different inspectors. This causes a lot of issues in our businesses in the ways that inspections are carried out when one inspector tells you to do one thing and another inspector comes, looks at the same issues and tells you to do another thing.

Thank you for coming out tonight, and we hope to see your support for the community.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. MARTINEZ (through translator): Miguel Martinez, President

of the Dominican Merchants Association of Pennsylvania. I am here representing over 3,000 businessowners throughout the region. And our main concern are the lack of security that we have experienced in the several months that have passed. Every week a member of ours either has been assassinated or been a victim of a crime. I ask that the City Councilmembers take more serious the aspect of security around our neighborhoods.

TRANSLATOR: He's a politician back home.

MR. MARTINEZ (through translator): Our concerns are when it comes to fines, particularly the fine when it comes to cigarette sales to minors where the citation is issued and the businessowner doesn't know that he has been issued a citation until three weeks after the fact, and most of the time, plenty of time, they don't know who was either working or the description

that's given by the entity that came out to do the inspection does not match none of the employees.

I want to say thank you for coming out and to listen to the concerns that we have as businessowners.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

MS. LEWIS: Han Pan.

(No response.)

MS. LEWIS: Han Pan.

(No response.)

MS. LEWIS: Gerardo Flores.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. FLORES (through translator): Good evening to everyone. Welcome to everyone, and thank you for being interested in the community issues. My name is Gerardo Flores. I am part of the New Sanctuary Movement organization. The reason why I'm here in this meeting is to ask some questions.

Our immigrant community in the last couple of years have been facing a lot of issues against the immigrant community in the sense that we know that here in Philadelphia there is a collaboration between Immigration, ICE, and the Police. And I would like to ask the question, how much money does the City spend when a immigrant is arrested? And in some cases, immediately Immigration will have the information of the people who are arrested by the police. And if Immigration cannot go to pick the body up in that moment, they will request the police to maintain the body for a couple of days. So to maintain that person there, it's a cost. So that money that they spend of that body being held there, it's something that affect us as a community and other ones too, because that money can be used to take care of our neighborhoods, because there's a lot of criminal situations happening outside. There is a

lot of delinquents outside and there's a lot of trash outside on the streets, and our community, if they see some crime outside, they are -- the people, if they see a crime happening outside in the street, they are afraid to report it because our community is unprotected.

And I would like to ask please to the Council to turn around and look our immigrant community who is suffering for this. Because our immigrant community is helping to grow the community and it's helping the community grow. And there is a family who have lost -- who have family members who were deported, and there is a lot of pain on that. There's a lot of pain that in the long term will damage to the new generations.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

Councilwoman Sanchez.

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(Councilwoman Sanchez speaking in Spanish.)

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: I just wanted to thank them. During the Police Department's presentation, I put on the record a series of questions that were followed up from my office around the relationship between the Police Department and our secured communities and ICE relationship. We now have had this agreement for two years and there should be enough quantifiable data for them to show us the number of deportations, the cost to the City and any unintended consequences to it.

So I want to thank them and let them know that we've officially asked that for the record, and it's something that both Councilman David Oh and Councilman Jim Kenney have been working with our office.

Gracias.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

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Thank you, Councilwoman. As referenced in the earlier testimony, I would just like to say that our immigrant community has been one of the strongest, most vibrant portions of our city. We recently talked about the fact that our population has grown, and we took great pride in that, but the reality is our immigrant community not only helped and assist us gain population, but it also helped us and assisted the fabric of our community, creating businesses, being entrepreneurs, hiring people that maybe some other people did not hire. This city and this country -- and I don't have to get into a history lesson -- was built on the immigrant community. So it doesn't matter if you were an immigrant during the times of Christopher Columbus or if you were an immigrant in the early 1900s or an immigrant today, the reality is is that we should be as aggressive in providing support for our immigrant community as we have throughout the

history of our nation, and we in City Council plan on continuing to do that.

So I want to thank you for bringing that to our attention.

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: I'm going to translate that for you, if you don't mind.

(Councilwoman Sanchez translated.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Councilwoman. I couldn't have done it better.

MS. LEWIS: Blanca Pacheco.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MS. PACHECO: I also belong to the Board of New Sanctuary Movement.

It would be like most like a following question what Gerardo did already. I would like to know how much money the City spends when all the childrens are left behind when their parents are deported. The City has to hold the U.S. citizen children and they

will have to support them if they are left behind. So we would like to know how much money is spent on that. And also maybe to say a little bit more about like people say usually immigrants, they don't pay taxes, they are here just to get benefits, just to get American people jobs, which is not true. All the -- not all, but most of them, they pay taxes, they contribute to the country, and we would just like to know like how much money is spent and where does this money come from to pay for the people who is being held in jails and for the children who are left behind when the parents are deported.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

MS. LEWIS: Brian McNally.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. McNALLY: Good evening. My

name is Brian McNally and I've lived in the 1st District for the last three years and I currently work as a cook in the 1st District. Over the last three years, in this economy, I, along with a lot of other people, have wondered and worried whether I was one paycheck away or one sick day, more importantly, from unemployment. As you know, I'm not the only one in this situation. Many of us are struggling and looking for any kind of help.

Governor Corbett's cuts to the state budget are really ripping at the social safety net for us. We're at a point where workers can't afford to lose jobs. The City can't afford for workers to lose their jobs either.

So I'm here to support the earned sick days bill, because it would help people like me to keep our jobs. It won't cost the City a dime and will actually keep people working and paying taxes. If I get sick, if I have to

choose between working sick or losing income, it may be worse. This bill would give me the right to earn one hour of sick time for every 40 hours that I work. An earned sick days policy for all Philadelphians would improve job security, keep people off of public assistance. That means more money coming into the City's budget and less money coming out simply.

We have more than 200,000 people in Philadelphia working without paid sick days. That means that if they get sick and decide to stay home, they're deciding to lose income. In many cases, they risk having their hours cut or even losing their jobs.

More than 200,000 people in the City are one illness away from financial disaster. In Philadelphia, 31 percent of families live in poverty. People are losing their healthcare and losing their homes. The state is kicking people off unemployment and cutting funding for

public housing. They have made huge cuts to healthcare programs that families depend on.

Earned sick days can improve public health and help people become self-sufficient so they don't need to rely on these programs. Please show that we as a city value hard work. Please pass the earned sick days bill.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you. Councilman Greenlee is pretty happy about that.

COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: That was very learned testimony, I just want to say.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

MS. LEWIS: Roberto Gonzalez.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. GONZALEZ: How you doing? My name is Roberto Gonzalez. This is my

first time coming in front of these people and the audience here. I'm here to speak about -- I've been working since I was 15, and I'm 42 years old. I've been paying taxes. Where is all that money going at and where is the public assistance help from the government, you know? I've been kicked out of many places asking for help, and I'm asking you guys, what is the problem with that?

I mean, I got three little ones, can't get help for my kids. I'm embarrassed that the government is not doing anything for me. I have a church that's paying all my funds for me. That's really embarrassing for the government, that somebody that doesn't deal with the government has to help me pay for something for my kids.

Right now I don't get no food for my kids. I have to go out there and get it from somebody else, you know. I mean, I don't know what else to do. I'm asking you guys, what's going on with the

government without public assistance? There's a lot of monies given up, taxes, taking taxes out of our paychecks. I just want to know why I can't get no help. One single man is asking for help and he can't get it.

I just lost my home because I can't get that one little bit of help that I'm asking for. From 15 to 42 I've been working paying taxes and I'm asking for that little bit of help and I can't even get that. Can you guys really look into that?

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: I'm going to ask you -- I appreciate your testimony. We have staff at the table. If you can give us detailed information, we have several organizations here who provide housing counseling who might be able to assist you. So if you can go to the table and give us the information.

As it relates to the state cuts, you're correct. It is ridiculous what the Corbett Administration is doing

with the welfare cuts, particularly because all of that money is reimbursable by the federal government. There is a mean-spirited -- I don't know what they're drinking in the water in Harrisburg, but there is a mean-spirited attempt to make poor people poorer and to make it harder for people like you who are trying to work hard and move your children forward.

So if you can give them the information, we will try to connect you with the agencies that are here today. And we do appreciate you coming here, because that's what we want to hear about. We want to hear about the impacts of what's going on.

MR. GONZALEZ: I'm a witness to it. This is my first time in my entire life asking for help.

COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Well, we hope that this evening we can help you. So I'm going to ask you to go to the side, and we really do appreciate your

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testimony.

MR. GONZALEZ: Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much.

(Applause.)

MS. LEWIS: Michael McCrea.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. McCREA: I guess I can go on the other side. This is not my first time. However, I am President of the Philadelphia Recreation Advisory Council. I represent 180 volunteer groups. Each of those groups represents a neighborhood park, playground or recreation center. And I want my $8 million back, fellas. That's what I want, you know. I mean, all that does is -- that's not a figure we pulled out of thin air. All that does is take us back to four years ago where our proposed budget was. That doesn't even include the parking tax or anything else. Just $8 million takes us back.

I said in the four years of

cuts just in our operating budget, it's over $20 million in operating budget funding over that four years between Parks and Recreation together. I mean, that's just treating our kids like second-class citizens, guys. I'm sorry. That's just not acceptable. Somehow or another, that shouldn't have happened.

But all we're asking for is to take it back four years more, $8 million. That at least puts us back where we were four years ago. It doesn't give us where we need to get to, but it puts us where we should have been four years ago. You know, four years behind, but at least it gives us something to get us to where it is. Because we are partners with the Recreation Department and I think they do what they can do with their budget, and we hold them accountable for that. However, at some point in time, there's just -- the rubber has got to meet the road somewhere. And we raised over $150,000 in one year just on site in the

districts, not counting the Splash Fund. We raised 150 on our own for the Splash Fund and for the pools the one year. So in addition to raising the money on site for all the programs of which we're responsible for, over 90 percent of the program dollars on site come from fundraising, come from grants and proposals and donations. That's where 90 percent of the program dollars on site comes from.

So I want my $8 million back, guys.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Let me respond to that real quickly, because as a person who was involved in this whole Parks/Recreation merger, Councilwoman Brown was the other co-sponsor of the bill, and the belief was that we were going to come up with

more aggressive funding strategies for the Parks and Recs. And we did in fact vote for legislation that we thought was going to put more money in. We authorized it. It was a parking tax. And ultimately that money ended up going to the General Fund. We had a downturn in the economy. The Parks and Recs never saw the light of day as it relates to that money. And I don't know as we move ahead if we'll be in a position to put the money back in the General Fund. Hopefully we will, but what I do say -- I said then is that we need to come up with different ways of funding Parks and Recs.

One of the things that we have been promoting here recently -- and it's to a degree somewhat controversial -- this whole notion of municipal marketing, where we talk about raising revenue as a result of being able to market products on publicly owned facilities. Now, some people say, Oh, you can't put a Coca-Cola hat on Billy Penn. That's not what we're

talking about, but the reality is, if you go to a particular recreation center actually in my councilmanic district, there's actually a ball field where there's a brand new field, and what happened in that particular case is that the local residents, who kind of oversee that field, went out and got local businesses to advertise at that facility, and they raised enough money to put a brand new Kentucky bluegrass field over at Fishtown as a result of that. It wasn't sponsored by government, but it showed a blueprint on how you can raise money outside of the traditional measure.

I don't -- and this is my personal opinion. I don't, frankly speaking, know why there will be a concern. In the old days, you actually used to utilize a rec center for other than having a community meeting. But if Nike or some other sports-related company says, You allow us to just advertise at the center in a tasteful way, then we are

prepared to give you money for your rec center, I think that's a conversation that we should have, because it's related to the product. Pretty much every one of those young people out there playing ball has some kind of sneaker on or some kind of shirt. So I don't know why we wouldn't at least have that conversation about raising revenue outside of the fiscal measure.

So that's one of the things that I'd like to see, people be in a position to at least have that conversation, because we have to come up with other mechanisms.

MR. McCREA: I appreciate that, but I think -- I don't want that to take away -- while I realize that and I agree with that, I don't want that to take away from I'm talking just operating dollars.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I know exactly what you're talking about.

MR. McCREA: We just want our share of operating dollars. That's

great. That's another thing, and I'd be more than happy to support that, and we supported that in the past, we'll continue to support that, but I'm just saying our operating dollars just takes care of the basic stuff so that we can do with the funds that we get from those other revenues do some of the other things and give us some extra stuff, not just the basic, which is what we're doing right know.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I understand.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I'm fully supportive of that.

The Chair would like to recognize Councilman Bill Green, at-large Councilperson, has also joined the Committee.

MS. LEWIS: Koran Clain.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. CLAIN: First I want to

thank y'all for letting me be here to explain what I have to say.

I was pressured in 1996 to take a deal from the judge and the DA. I felt as though it wasn't right. But I wanted a trial. I wanted a trial, but the judge pressured me into accepting a deal, and that wasn't fair.

So I went to Harrisburg in March to go in front of the pardon hearing to get it expunged and they refused to expunge it. It was a misdemeanor, and they told me -- they refused to give me a reason why, to give me the reason why they would not expunge my misdemeanor.

I feel as though we should all be aware of what the DA is doing. To force someone into getting a deal is wrong, and so later on in life, you're going to pay the price for it. I'm paying the price for it now, because socially, economically and political, it's not helping me. I cannot advance in

the job, like what I want to do, because of the misdemeanor. And I think we should have more forums like we having now to help individuals to come out -- stop pleaing the deals with the DA, because it's not fair to us. And that's what I want to say today.

Thank you very much.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, sir, for your testimony.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: The Chair recognizes Councilman Oh.

COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you, President Clarke.

Sir, while you cannot get it expunged, you can get a pardon, and there is a process. So you can apply to the Pardon Board to have your misdemeanor pardoned. I'll speak to you afterwards so you'll know what that process is. There is a difference between getting expungement and a pardon. They're two different legal processes.

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COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: If you can just hang around until after the session, we'll be here. Thank you.

MS. LEWIS: Jordan Davis.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MS. DAVIS: Good evening, everybody. My name is Jordan Gwendolyn Davis -- prefer feminine pronouns -- and I live at 1904 South 5th Street, which is in the Dickinson Narrows neighborhood.

I would just like to state that a potential 300 percent property tax increase, which I only found out today from an e-mail blast from Representative Michael Grimm, would not only hurt homeowners but us renters by extension. I get only a paltry $700 per month in disability, plus other freelance income, and I've managed to find a single-room occupancy for 300 bucks a month all inclusive.

If this property increase goes through, I may become homeless again, and

I would be eligible for subsidized or public housing, but there's a lengthy wait list. And since I don't have drug or alcohol issues, I am not eligible for most shelter-plus care programs.

The low property values and relatively low property taxes in this city are the only reason I even come close to getting by. And of course let's talk about homelessness for a minute, which, of course, would be the consequences of the higher property taxes.

Our shelters are, in a word, overcrowded, if you're lucky to even get in. When I was in a shelter last summer, I shared the sixth floor of said shelter with a woman who uses a wheelchair. I mean, that's just terrible. And a woman in her 60's or 70's is currently sleeping in a bank branch in South Philadelphia and the police actually know this.

You may think that a better world is not possible, but according to

Dennis Culhane, a University of Pennsylvania professor, cities are spending as much to warehouse people in shelters as it would cost to just give everyone a housing voucher. And with stable housing comes greater likelihood of self-sufficiency, which would save the City a lot of money in the long term.

I'd like to close this by saying we are the 99 percent and you shouldn't balance the budget on the backs of the poor.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

MS. LEWIS: Dominique Jones.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MS. JONES: Good evening. My name is Dominique Jones. I'm from CADI, the Career and Academic Development Institute. CADI is the first step to a better life for students who haven't

always been on the right path. It is a place where every day students are working harder to make their lives better. CADI is outstanding for accepting students that have been incarcerated, had children or just can't make it in the traditional schools for any reason it may be. For most students at CADI, this is the last chance we have. We have been rejected from other schools because of low credits. CADI accepted us and accelerated us. They prepared us to be more than just a stereotype or a statistic. CADI gives us a chance to overcome and achieve anything we may have.

As a student at CADI, I speak on behalf of all the students that come every day and work hard just to be that one step closer to a better life, to have that feeling that we can do whatever we put our minds to. At CADI, we achieve, we succeed and we do our best. It's more than just a school. It's a place where

students succeed.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much for your testimony.

MS. LEWIS: Lyetta Stewart. Lyetta Stewart.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MS. STEWART: Good evening, members of City Council, guests. My name is Lyetta Stewart. I'm a senior at Career and Academic Development Institute. As a student and representative of the CADI family, I believe that alternative education schools such as CADI and others like it play a significant role in developing positive citizens for our communities. With academics and career exploration as its focus, CADI serves to stimulate individual growth and development for its students.

As I entered CADI, my

perception of the future was not clear, like a lot of other students in the City of Philadelphia who chose multiple paths to a high school diploma. I did not know how or what it took to be a great student. However, with the small student body, coupled with accessible staff members, I was taught to think positive, to believe in myself and have the determination that matters for change.

Students who attend alternative ed schools are some of the most courageous people I know. Some are teen parents, some are from single-parent homes and some even are homeless looking for the second chance to better themselves. It is the stuff that makes or breaks a person's spirit. Moreover, it is the fiber that teaches us to survive the issues that plagues our communities by realizing that education is the key to our future.

All it takes is one's heart being at the right place and knowing that

obtaining a high school diploma is priceless. Therefore, I ask you to save our schools for future students like me who can benefit from having their wheels turned toward success.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much for your testimony.

MS. LEWIS: Elwid Carrasquillo.

(No response.)

MS. LEWIS: Elwid Carrasquillo.

(No response.)

MS. LEWIS: Douglas Bryant.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. BRYANT: Good evening. My name is Douglas Bryant. I've lived in the Frankford section of Philadelphia for over 65 years. My residence is in the 4600 block of Mulberry Street.

I would like to take time to thank you, President Clarke, Councilwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez and fellow

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Councilmembers, for giving me the opportunity to speak on our neighborhood's own Wilmot Park.

Wilmot Park, as you know, is about one-fifth of the square block bordered by Hawthorne, Meadow and Mulberry Streets. The park has recently been renovated to upgrade the basketball court and installed new playground equipment for the children.

I have three grandchildren ages 11, 7 and 6 years old that live with me during the week to attend school. Daily when they come home from school, they would ask if they could go to the park to play. This beautiful park, only a half block walking distance from where we live, but they are forbidden to go because of shootings that have occurred there. Thank God no children have been shot there yet that I know of.

Recently at the City Council budget hearings for parks and recreation centers, Councilman Curtis Jones gave a

detailed report on the violence that occurs at our parks and recreation centers. A simple precaution to our problem would be to have cameras mounted on the daycare center and church directly across the street from the park and monitored by the 15th District. This would give the Police Department a clear view of the entire park.

The lighting in the park is very poor. We ask that you add lamps and cameras, two simple precautions for the safety of the children.

I stand before you this evening for myself and the residents of Frankford imploring you to do the right thing for the safety of our children and children throughout the City of Philadelphia and release the $8 million promised by you and our Mayor.

In closing, at the opening I mentioned I was born and raised in Frankford. To give you a little history, if you did not know, when I was the age

of my grandchildren, I lived directly across the street from Wilmot Park. At that time the park was a graveyard. I remember looking out from my mother and father's bedroom as they were creating the park, removing the bodies of those that were buried there.

I pray that you and the Mayor would release that money so that they will never be removing bodies of our children from Wilmot Park.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

MS. LEWIS: Wayne Jacobs. Wayne Jacobs.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. JACOBS: I would like to say first of all thank you, Council, for allowing us this opportunity to speak with you and to bring our issue that is very important to our organization. My

organization is X-offenders for Community Empowerment, and we work with formerly convicted people who are no longer on probation and parole, who may have been crime free for five, ten, 15, 25, 30, 40 years, and we'd like to bring to y'all attention a practice that is going on at the Criminal Justice Center or, I would like to say, the manufacturing center. And what is going on there is that they have a rush to have people plead guilty and never once telling them about the collateral consequences that they may face after they pled guilty. And a lot of time, these people, people who pled guilty for the first time, are working people who may have jobs and healthcare, education, child care, and they were never informed at the time of pleading guilty that they would lose their job.

So what we are coming to the City for is to ask for y'all to assist us in terms of having a public hearing to address this issue. We're talking about

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285,000 people who have pled guilty in this city who did not receive fair information.

You know, when you go and buy a house, they have buyers beware, protection, tell you about the good, tell you about the bad. When you getting ready to go buy that used car, the same rule apply. However, that rule do not apply in the Philadelphia court system, because they withhold information. They never tell people about the collateral consequences.

And I'd like to say further that the folks that I'm talking about is people who have been crime free for those amount of years who don't need job readiness. These are people that already have the skills and abilities to be able to feed they families at the skill level that they possess, and all they want is that opportunity.

And so I just wish that Council would consider looking at this issue,

because if these people could get back to work, we can get more tax money. They would become a tax benefit instead of a tax burden.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Mr. Jacobs, quick question, please. The assumption is that individuals even if they decide to plead guilty are given a lawyer. In the event they can't afford one, they're given the Public Defender, which was actually the testimony in Council today from the Public Defender's Office.

Are you saying that the Public Defender, who is supposed to represent you and all your interest, they do not talk about the ramifications of pleading guilty? They just talk about the sentence and not --

MR. JACOBS: What they do -- let me give you a little -- it's a practice that they have, and what they do

is, they set you up. Already you are a person that's already under pressure. This is your first offense. You don't know nothing about what's going on. So what do you do? You listen to your lawyer. And you be trying to tell your lawyer that you want to fight this, and he turn around telling you, Hey, I can get you a deal.

So what the person do? This is the reason why we got 94 percent of the convictions are results of negotiated pleas. And what the person do? He's already nervous and scared, so he'll say, Listen, you take this deal and you can go home today and be over with.

What is it?

One year non-report and probation.

A person will think, Oh, I've never been convicted. They go back to work, come to find out they a school teacher. Now they out of a job. But if that person would have known that that

was going to happen to him, I don't think he would have pled guilty. Okay? I don't think that person would have pled guilty. That person would have fought that case, especially if they felt that they was being persecuted from the door.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All right. Because if we had known that before today, we could have asked that question at today's session, but I will call them back and ask that question. We have callbacks next week. I just wondered, because I would think that there are significant issues related to it.

MR. JACOBS: And thank you, Councilman. Not only ask the Public Defenders, also ask the court now. Today at the hearing, District Attorney Seth Williams says that he support the colloquy being changed to include collateral consequences. So he's on our side.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

Okay.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you for this opportunity.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Councilman Green.

COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Mr. President. I was just going to make that point. There's a lot of innovation going on at the Criminal Justice Center and moving to more pleas and especially the kinds of offers being made, time served, et cetera. And so some of this innovation is good and we just have to make sure as we change, that we make sure we address all these issues.

If you have specific people in mind, I'd appreciate it if you'd send their names to my office so that we can look into those specific cases. I don't know if we can help or not, but it won't hurt.

MR. JACOBS: Okay. But you know one particular thing. You know, at the time of the sentence or negotiate,

they have a lot of alternatives. Let me give you an example. If you are a drug addict who got busted for drugs and this is your first bust for drugs, they can sentence you to Section 17 where you can go to a drug program, complete that term of probation, and if you are a mellow person and complete that, your record will be expunged, no collateral consequences. District Attorney don't -- they selective in who they give that to.

Another one, Section 18, this is for people that is a drug addict that did a low-level crime such as shoplifting. If they go to a rehab and complete that term of probation, that case will be placed on the shelf and it would be expunged. That mean that them people, first-time offenders, are not carrying this burden for the rest of their life. This way, they families don't have to live in poverty. And that's what it's all about, finding alternatives to incarceration and to find

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alternatives to collateral damages.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, sir. We'll follow up on that. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. LEWIS: Jessica Calter.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MS. CALTER: Hi. Good evening. My name is Jessica Calter. I am the Treasurer and a founding member of the Friends of Manton Street Park and Community Garden in the 1st District. I'd like to thank Councilman Squilla, President Clarke and all of the Councilmembers here this evening for the opportunity to testify. I know you've heard a lot from other parks and recreation folks. I will be brief.

I'm new to the world of parks and recreation. I started the Friends of Manton Street Park just a year ago, but in that very short time, I have firsthand witnessed the incredible impact that our

public parks can have to bring together a neighborhood. Our park has introduced the strangers in our neighborhood to each other, and it's become a source of beauty and civic pride. And I'm here tonight to ask you to restore the $8 million to the Parks and Recreation operating budget.

Manton Street Park and Community Garden is located at 4th and Manton Street. Our neighborhood is also the home to Sacks Playground, the Jefferson Square Park and many other wonderful parks and recreation centers. All of these places are dependent on the Parks and Recreation operating budget to keep up and keep running.

Lately our parks have struggled with litter, trash, graffiti and other issues, and as research has shown on the broken windows theory, there is proven that disorder and disobedience grows in environments of litter and graffiti. An increase in crime is certainly not something that our neighborhood can

afford at this time. And no one wants the deferred maintenance and lack of trash collection to turn what could be a beautiful neighborhood asset into a catalyst of crime.

Restoring the funds promised to the budget can help stop this from happening and help keep our parks clean and graffiti free. You can make this happen, and please consider restoring the funds to the Parks and Recreation operating budget.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much.

MS. LEWIS: Ron Williams-Garcia.

(Witness approached microphone.)

DR. GARCIA: Thank you, members of Council. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Dr. Ronald Williams-Garcia. I'm a disabled veteran

of the Latin American Post 840, but I'm also the Director of TriState Anger Management and Consultation. What we try to do is to teach people emotional intelligence skills, anger management resolution skills, conflict resolution, peer mediation, anything to help people to have a better life.

I'm here today because I'm concerned about the violence that's going on in the City of Philadelphia. I did some cursory research and determined that the City of Philadelphia Police Department themselves are reporting there's been 104 homicides since the beginning of this year, and we haven't even gotten to the summer months yet. We've had any number of horrendous events in the 7th District. We don't need to recount all of them. We know what they were.

The City of Philadelphia Police Department is reporting that there's 609 violent crimes during the week of April 9

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through 12 or 16, and they say each week the number of violent crimes are increasing.

My concern is that when I give my doctoral dissertation in the 7th District, I sat in 50 homes, I went to 50 homes and talked to the parents and the children, visited Edison High School and visited the other high schools in the area and talked to all of them. The concerns they raised were exactly the same concerns that were raised by Dr. Elijah Anderson in his book The Code of the Streets. The difference was, he did his research in 1999. I did mine in 2007, and now we're in 2012 and the same events are occurring.

I'm here to propose that the City of Philadelphia in their other efforts like Philly Rising and things like that are not addressing the violent issues. They're never going to reach the people who are responsible for the violence by doing neighborhood cleanups.

Only the good people go to the neighborhood cleanups. We need to find a way to reach the people who are responsible for the violent incidents.

We have a body of research that's available either through my research or through the research that Dr. Elijah Anderson produced. We have a way to resolve these things. What we need to do is form a committee, a grassroot committee of parents, responsible criminal justice officials, responsible City executives and address the violence in the City before we get to the point where we have no return. Our children are dying, and our children are our future.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much for your testimony.

MS. LEWIS: Diana Quinones.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MS. QUINONES: Yes. Good evening. My name is Diana Quinones. I am a neighborhood resident. I'm a federal employee, a single mother of two, one in child care, in preschool, and a daughter in college. I have recently established an alliance called the Norris Square Neighborhood Alliance. It's not Norris Square Civic Association. It is not Norris Square Neighborhood Project. It is a group of homeowners, tenants and small businessowners committed to the preservation and development of affordable housing, community cultural spaces and the support of protections for renters and homeowners, and our objective is to ensure that the current residents are the beneficiaries of community change and not the victims.

On the issues of rezoning, we know we're not all here for that, but I was just wondering what the Council is going to do about possibly getting the ordinances that are already set in place

by L&I, to enforce those ordinances that are already set in place, that are already in motion. They should probably enforce to prevent the concern that some folks in my neighborhood have brought up to one of our Councilmembers, which is of private or single-family dwellings being turned or converted into apartments. So since that's become an issue, the whole issue of rezoning on my area, in my neighborhood where I live has been brought up. So if there are already ordinances set in place in the Department of License and Inspection, why isn't that enforced and why is it that the zoning is the drastic option to that?

Secondly, as I said, I'm a single working mother of two. I'm not poor enough to qualify for any of the programs that others do. I'm not rich enough to afford a lot of the things or a lot of the expenses that I have.

This whole issue with the taxes, right now I'm currently paying the

highest property taxes on my block. That's 1900 block of Howard Street. Are there alternatives to prevent folks like me that make 60,000 a year that are not poor enough to get benefits or qualify for incentives or I don't make enough to afford certain things so that I am protected from my property taxes going up again? Because if this happens, unfortunately, as mentioned with this lady in South Philly, she's being pushed out of her neighborhood and is already making plans to sell her home. I'm not ready to sell my home.

I bought my house for $45,000, which is considered chump change to most people. My house was appraised at 130,000 in 2007. Haven't had it appraised lately. But I'm not ready to sell. I'm not ready to go anywhere, but I want to be able to afford to stay where I'm at. I want to be able to afford to continue paying the $10,000 a year I pay in preschool, in child care for my son,

which brings my income down to 50 now. I want to also be able to continue to afford paying for my daughter to go to Community College, because I cannot afford a four-year college for her. That brings my income down some.

So are there any other alternatives that you have or that the Mayor has for this whole tax assessment other than raising the taxes on common folks like us that will not be able to continue to afford living where we do? Have you guys considered going back to the proposal of raising the soda, making the soda and the beverage companies pay more so that we pay less? That's what we would like to know.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: The Chair recognizes Councilman Squilla.

COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I was

going to speak earlier on the AVI issue and with the recreation issue, but I knew a lot of people would be speaking about it and it seems like it's at least two of the bigger issues today.

The AVI issue is very important throughout the City, and actually I guess some areas about the taxes will go up, other areas the taxes will go down. The problem is that we don't really have all the information together to actually come up with an idea of how it's going to affect each individual.

We were just briefed recently with information by neighborhoods, basically how it will affect those specific neighborhoods, but it's really hard to tell by those numbers and specific -- without having specifics how it really will work.

The fear is that we're not going to -- by not knowing this, we're not going to know what actually homesteads to put in place to protect

some residents like yourself and other residents throughout the City. And also I know President Clarke is working on some homestead possibilities to come in and try to protect people by income and other avenues. We also need some state legislation passed in order to do this. If that's not passed, then we won't also be able to do that either.

So it's a very hard sell right now for some Councilmembers, and the Administration is trying to work with Council to come up with some ideas of how to make it work and how to protect certain constituents. I am not there yet at this time, but I'm still willing to work with people to come up with ideas on how to make this happen and how to make it easy for -- never easy, but be able to pay your taxes is something that we want all residents to do, and we don't want to chase people out neighborhoods. Our goal isn't to just because you happen to move into a neighborhood and happen to

increase in value, that you now have to move and so other people can move into that neighborhood. That's not what we want to do, and I think we need to work on those actual particulars to make sure that we do this.

My proposal is to delay it. Other people aren't so sure they want to do that. But we're trying to get there before the end of the month, and hopefully we'll have a consensus then and hopefully we'll be able to protect as many people as possible.

With Parks and Recs, I agree with Councilman Clarke and looking at alternative measures to come in with extra revenue to give to the playgrounds. We would love to give $8 million back. Even if we do that in the budget, it's not guaranteed that the Administration will actually put that money in. So we could actually earmark that through the budget process and add extra dollars, but if they don't want to actually throw that

into Parks and Recs, then they don't have to.

So a lot of us are on your side for that also, and that's why it's good to come up with creative ways to bring additional income into certain departments, and we're working to do that also.

And, you know, a lot of people I hear today, and it's really discouraging knowing that people are worried about things and they're worried about things because they don't know what the outcome is going to be, and I think it's our job on Council to make sure we know what the outcome is before we vote on something, and I promise to do that for you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Councilman.

The Chair recognizes Councilman Green.

COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Mr. President.

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There's a couple of things that the City is looking at to deal with the impact of the move to a fair tax system from an unfair tax system, and really that's what that's about. And so as you consider this, you probably, because you've been reassessed at 130, are paying more than all of your neighbors, and the purpose of this is to create equity within the system so that everybody on the same block is paying the same time, and we all want a fair playing field.

Part of the problem with at least the current version of the bill sent down by the Administration just based on some quick math is the smoothing which is put in to prevent taxes from increasing over three years and actually slows down the decreases of someone like you who is overpaying over three years creates also a brand new unfair tax system. It's also extremely complicated.

And so we are looking at every single option we can come up with to try

to help someone in your situation and other people who are going to be treated unfairly because of smoothing or because of the new tax system. So increase the homestead exemption from 15,000 to something much, much higher, which would shift the burden of taxation back on to commercial and industrial from residential, where it's going to go. There's lots of ideas. Council President Clarke has a very interesting idea based on some state legislation and constitutional amendments that happened back in the '90s.

And so we are working on it, and I hope that we get there in a way that's going to make the most people happy possible. It's a very difficult situation for us to be in. We want to protect people like you.

With respect to L&I and inspections, one of the most frustrating things that happens every budget year to all of us on City Council is we say, You

tell us that inspectors make money, that you send somebody out, they fine, they produce more in income for the City than they cost the City, yet we cannot get L&I to hire inspectors. We have not reached that marginal point where adding a new inspector doesn't mean additional revenue, and if we did that until we got to that marginal point, we would have enforcement of our laws instead of the complete disregard for our laws that currently happens in most of the City, and believe me, as a Council, we're working on it, and I appreciate your comments.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Councilman.

MS. LEWIS: Victor Negron.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. NEGRON: Good evening, Council, and thank you for coming out to the neighborhoods. I want to first start

off by thanking you for taking a good hard look at what's going on in the City in terms of the remapping ordinance and being able to look at truly what's happening in our neighborhoods. For you guys to have that type of courage, kudos to you, because let the true sources be there.

The other thing I wanted to talk about was OSH. I know homelessness is a huge issue that we don't truly understand, and I personally work with some folks at OSH. Transitional housing works. They finally figured it out between PHA and OSH, and they finally figured out how to get folks out the streets into the first step, second step, into possible homeownership.

So I want City Council to really take a good look at the outcomes that are coming out of Roberta Cancellier's area, because I really think that that $1.2 million could be vested in a good place, because we've got huge

homeless communities. Like they just had one in Bucks County that you just saw. We've got them all in our neighborhoods. You just got to head out there. You can go down Indiana Avenue right know, 2nd and Indy, go back to the woods where the train tracks are, there's a whole set of homeless folks that nobody knows about. So I just want to advocate for OSH.

Parks and Recreation, President Clarke, we need our $8 million, man. Because I come from the Norris Square community. I live right on the park, remember Kensington West Neighbors Association. We can do what we can do, but if we can't get our trash picked up, if we can't get our lights turned on, the volunteers can't do but so much, but at least that $8 million sets the operational tone so that we can go out and fight and maybe sell companies like Keystone Mercy or some other folks some dollars to come into the Recreation Department and support that. So those

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operational dollars -- and what Ms. Quinones said, soda tax for kids. How about that? I know it's a touchy subject, but we can get some soda tax for the kids, that would be great.

Last, but not least, recidivism. Recidivism. Act 24 was passed back in January. We had so many folks who 30 years ago did something or 20 and lost their jobs working 18 years in the School District, right, in a school with a brand new kitchen that can't afford cooks. We got to do something about recidivism, and I challenge you. I know you're fighting the guns, right, at the state, but let's take a look at Act 24 in the School Code and see if there's some way we can come up with a solution.

Thank you very much. Good luck.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much.

(Applause.)

MS. LEWIS: Eric Lewis. Eric Lewis.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. LEWIS: Good evening, Councilmembers. Thank you for having me here tonight and listening to what I have to say. I'm here to speak about my own personal experience.

You have to excuse me. Working in the construction environment, my voice is kind of messed up.

I'm here to speak about my own personal experience of being forced to plead guilty or go to a jail as a result and not getting the full information about the effects of a guilty plea. As a first-time offender, I was never told about my options available regarding the ARD program.

Individuals who have a Public Defender should have the same due process as those individuals with paid lawyers, where explain to them what the outcome of

a guilty plea may have on them.

It has been very difficult for me to obtain employment to be able to feed my family, keep a roof over my head as well. I strongly believe that if things were explained to me, I would not have been forced to take a plea. The exact words of the Public Defender at that time to me was, Do you want to go to jail or do you want to go home? When he asked me that, I ask you, what you think I said? I want to go home.

If they would have offered me the ARD program, I could have got this thing expunged ASAP, and when I fill out applications, I didn't have to put that down.

So here it is, I'm 42. I listened to everybody's emotional needs about the community, taxes, about the other young gentleman that was 42 years old that lost his home, and all I want is a second chance, because I couldn't be that individual that could go and do

something like rob and steal and kill. But I'm trying to hold tight. I don't want to result to that. I want to be able to work and give my kids something to look forward to to be able to strive for success. If they see that in me, then they'll walk right along with me. So I'm just asking for a second chance.

Thank you for taking the time out.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you for your personalized story, sir.

The Chair recognizes Councilman Oh.

COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very much, Council President.

Listen, sir, ultimately you may not be able to expunge your record or do anything. It just may be a record because of the guilty plea. That's a legal issue that's done with, but the issue of whether you get a second chance that you want to have, the gentleman who

talked here just about losing his job and losing his house, all of these things in common have the same characteristic, that you need a good job and one that will accept you in your current situation, pay you, give you healthcare and let you build to a better future.

One of the biggest challenges I believe we have is to bring good jobs into our neighborhoods, jobs that will pay well, provide benefits, and that's the biggest struggle that I personally see for our city.

One of the issues that we have in these hearings is that there's inconsistencies in how we're going to do this and some different opinions, and we are trying to work through that. There's good ideas, there's varying ideas, but, you know, as the Bible says, iron sharpens iron. When we're all done our different parts here, we'll come together and try to do the best we can for people in our city, they can live well and have

a brighter, better future. But we have tough choices to make, and I hope you'll support us in that process, and I hope we can do something for you.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. LEWIS: Jonathan Centeno.

(Witness approached microphone.)

MR. CENTENO: Hello, Council. I actually just signed up to speak. I wasn't expecting to speak. I just wanted to observe, but I just heard about the recreational funds.

Recently I became President of Friends of McPherson Square, which is about a half mile from here, friends group, and I'm also a coordinator for the Kensington EPIC Stakeholders.

So just real recently I didn't know there was any kind of money taken away from Parks and Rec. I just want to give a testimony recently of my experience with working with Parks and

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Rec and organizing the community to do some really great things.

So Parks and Rec wanted to plant some trees in the park. This confused some of the residents, because they were concerned more about issues of safety and crime. But we were able to kind of use that opportunity to have conversations about the crime in the area, and very quickly with the support of Councilwoman Quinones and some other key City agencies, we were able to organize some great residents into kind of taking back the neighborhood.

The doctor earlier kind of mentioned the cleanups. The cleanups identify the good people of the neighborhood. That's really hard to do sometimes, to identify those who want to see change and transformation. So when you have positive things going on, positive people show up, and they want to do something. So we were able kind of to take back that park, and that park

historically has been known for the drug abuse. But when you invest in areas like that and give people that opportunity to kind of do something, they really do show up and they really take advantage of that. And if that project had not happened, right now that momentum, that leverage, all those things that kind of happen within that park would have not happened. It would be in the same kind of condition it was a couple months ago.

So communities do -- it's not just for playing and having a place for kids to play, but it is a place where the community can kind of come together and organize to do some real positive things.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you so much for your testimony.

This actually concludes our witness list. Is there anyone else?

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

There being none, I would like to thank all of you very much. I would like to thank our two Councilmembers, Sanchez and Squilla, for allowing us to visit their district this evening, great hosts, and thank our good friends from the Bevilacqua Center for a wonderful time, and I want to thank all of you. And for the record, we have a stenographer, so all of this is in the record in City Council and it will be a part of our budget deliberations as we move ahead. So I just wanted to thank you.

Councilman Green.

COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you, Mr. President.

Just very briefly. A lot of people came here for the parks and other things, and I want everybody to keep in mind what we do. We take very limited resources and we choose between competing ideas for good, and in some neighborhoods we go into, people want us to spend $8 million on additional police, which would

be 100 extra police officers. In some neighborhoods it's parks. In other neighborhoods it's things. We make very difficult choices and we do the best we can, and we hope that whatever decisions we make you'll ultimate support us.

I also did the math very quickly on Mrs. Quinones' situation. If her current assessed value is 130 and her house is worth 250, she would actually pay $4,250 in taxes to the City of Philadelphia through smoothing as part of the formula, which is intended to protect people like her. And without smoothing, she would pay $3,125. This is part of the problem with what we're facing in trying to make all of these changes in one month. It's very difficult. And that's certainly not the intent of the Mayor or anybody else who gave that bill to us. So it will be an interesting month.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I'll

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pick up where I left off hopefully.

So, folks, I just want to thank everyone for tonight's spirited discussion. We look forward to seeing you again. Thank you so much, and thanks, Councilwoman Sanchez and Squilla, for hosting this wonderful event.

This concludes the neighborhood budget hearing for this evening. The Committee will stand in recess until Wednesday, May 2nd, 2012 at 10:00 a.m., at which time we will reconvene in City Council Chambers, Room 400.

Thank you.

(Committee of the Whole recessed at 8:10 p.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 on May 1, 2012, and that this is a true and correct transcript of same.

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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