COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, May 14, 2025
10:25 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCIL PRESIDENT KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILWOMAN NINA AHMAD
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILMAN MICHAEL DRISCOLL
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE RICHARDSON
COUNCILMAN JIM HARRITY
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILWOMAN RUE LANDAU
COUNCILWOMAN QUETCY M. LOZADA
COUNCILMAN NICOLAS O'ROURKE
COUNCILMAN ANTHONY PHILLIPS
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS
COUNCILMAN JEFFREY YOUNG, JR.

BILLS: 250195, 250196, 250197, 250198, 250199, 250200, 250201, 250202, 250210, 250211, 250212
RESOLUTION: 250214

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COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good morning, everyone.

(Good morning.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good morning, everyone.)

(Good morning.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: This is the continuation of our Committee of the Whole as we review the FY26 proposed budget. We will be reviewing Bills 250195, 250196, 250197, 250198, 250199, 250200, 250201, 250202, 250210, 250211, 250212 and Resolution No. 250214.

Ms. Loughead, could you please call the roll.

THE CLERK: Councilmember Squilla.

(No response.)

THE CLERK: Councilmember Gauthier.

COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Jones.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Young.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Driscoll.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Lozada.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Bass.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Phillips.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember O'Neill.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Thomas.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Harrity.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Ahmad.

COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Landau.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Brooks.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember O'Rourke.

COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE: Present.

THE CLERK: Council President Johnson.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Present. Thank you. A quorum of this Committee is present and this hearing is now called to order.

Ms. Loughead, would you please read the titles of the resolutions.

THE CLERK: Bill No. Bill No. 250195, an ordinance amending Chapter 19-1500 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Wage and Net Profits Tax," by revising certain tax rates, under certain terms and conditions.

Bill No. 250196, an ordinance adopting the Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2026.

Bill No. 250197, an ordinance to adopt a Fiscal 2026

Capital Budget.

Bill No. 250198, an ordinance to adopt a Capital Program for the six Fiscal Years 2026-2031 inclusive.

Bill No. 250199, an ordinance amending Chapter 19-2600 of The Philadelphia Tax Code, entitled "Business Income and Receipts Taxes," to revise certain tax rates and end certain exclusions from the tax on receipts, all under certain terms and conditions.

Bill No. 250200, an ordinance amending Chapter 12-100 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Traffic Code" to revise the fee for the use of parking meters, all under certain terms and conditions.

Bill No. 250201, an ordinance amending Chapter 19-1800 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "School Tax Authorization," to

provide for an increase in the tax of the Board of Education of the School District of Philadelphia is authorized to impose on real estate; and amending Chapter 19-1300, entitled "Real Estate Taxes," to establish an equivalent reduction the tax rate for the City real estate tax, all under certain terms and conditions.

Bill No. 250202, an ordinance amending Chapter 19-1806 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Authorization of Realty Use and Occupancy Tax," to eliminate certain exemptions, all under certain terms and conditions.

Bill No. 250210, an ordinance amending Chapter -- amending Section 10-1001 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Fees of the Commissioner of Records," to increase the portion of fees for the recording of deeds and

mortgages in related documents to be used for Housing Trust Fund purposes, under certain terms and conditions.

Bill No. 250211, an ordinance amending Chapter 19-1400 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Realty Transfer Tax" revising the rate of the tax, all under certain terms and conditions.

Bill No. 250212, an ordinance to amend Chapter 19-4400 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Development Impact Tax" to end imposition of the tax, under certain terms and conditions.

Resolution No. 250214, 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 2026-2030, and incorporating revisions with respect to Fiscal

Year 2025, which is to be submitted by the Mayor to the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority pursuant to an Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement by and between the City and the Authority.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Ms. Loughead. Today we continue the public hearing of the Committee of the Whole to consider the bills read by the Clerk that constitute the proposed operating and capital spending measures for Fiscal Year 2026, a Capital Program and a Forward-looking Capital Plan for Fiscal Year 2026 through Fiscal Year 2031.

We will now begin taking public testimony from the public on the City's proposed FY26 budget and Six-Year Capital Program for FY26 through '31. Before proceeding

however, I will lay a few ground rules on how we would like to proceed with public testimony this morning.

We are here today to hear from you about the City's proposed FY26 budget for the City of Philadelphia to ensure that there is an opportunity for all of you to be heard. Certain ground rules have been established as follows: Your testimony should be about the bills listed on the calendar. Once your name is called, you will have up to two minutes to speak.

In order to be fair to all those wishing to speak, I intend to hold faithfully to the two-minute limit. Once you are asked to begin your testimony, a timer will be started. When there are 30 seconds remaining to your time, you will be reminded of this.

Once your allotted time has passed, you will be asked to please conclude your remarks. We have opportunities this morning as well as this afternoon for public comment and we have a very significantly long testimony list, which we encourage everyone the opportunity to have their issues, voices and concerns heard regarding this upcoming budget during this session this morning as well as this afternoon.

Ms. Loughead, would you please call the first panel.

THE CLERK: First person here to testify is Harry Barney.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good morning.

MR. BARNEY: Good morning, Councilmembers and panel. Good morning to everyone. Happy to see everyone here. So I have three points to make and I will be under

my two minutes. So regarding the budget, I see there's lots of things related to housing specifically. So I have a question about the budget. Does the budget factor in disability needs and accessibility in terms of flashes, you know, having fire alarms for deaf people, doorbells, electrical needs for deaf, for the deaf community, ramps for the disabled community. So I'm just wondering if the budget factors in those needs for the disability community.

I am also wondering will the Housing Trust Fund have room for people with disabilities and does that include the deaf community? And my third point is in regards to employment, just like housing are deaf people included in that, including American Sign Language and American Sign Language interpreters. So those are just my

questions that I have. The budget seems to focus on the disability community, but that usually includes the disability community that is hearing, and I think that the deaf community is often left behind.

And I know that there are a lot of people in the deaf community that are afraid of things like that and afraid of housing not being accessible. So I just wanted to come and advocate for that and just let you know that those are the three things that are very important for you to talk about. That's all. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

THE CLERK: Next we have Chantay Love, Angela Regans, Xavier Williams and Donte Newell.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I also want to

acknowledge the presence of Councilmember Quetcy Lozada, Councilmember Mark Squilla.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good morning.

MR. WILLIAMS: Good morning.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Chantay, do you want to give us a brief overview before the young men begin their testimony?

MS. LOVE: Hello, President Council. Thank you for allowing us to be present. What we've decided to do was bring some of the young adults that are not only doing the work but also experiencing violence. These are students from Imhotep Charter High School. They're amazing.

They are part of the pulse and the breath of why we

still live and do what we do. And that today they decided -- we wanted them to speak their truth, to have a platform because that's also healing, being able to advocate for yourself, speak for yourself and be heard. And so, they're speaking from their authentic self. And I'm glad that you gave us the opportunity to do that.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. Please begin. Just state your name for the record and begin your testimony.

MR. WILLIAMS: Good morning. My name is Xavier Williams. I am a 10th grader at Imhotep Charter High School and I will be speaking for the Mirror Program. I'm speaking for the emotional stability of Black people in my community for several reasons, one being our school has

suffered a lot of violence, hurt and many losses in one year, even a month at best.

We last year lost a 10th grader who is very special to us. And when you actually got to know who he was even without knowing his face, it hurt us very -- it hurt us very emotionally because it came out of nowhere. And it's because of losses like this that we needed the EMIR program because we are still currently losing people in our community. And it's for no essential reason, at least in my eyes, because there is no reason for such violence to be needed in for young people in their lives.

Us as young people are already suffering from killing other people, going into gangs and breaking and entering all sorts of other crimes and we're barely even passed 14 years old. We're doing

this because of how we are surrounded, people that we are surrounded by, how we're raised up and the people we are around.

It's things like this that we needed the EMIR program and for other programs we need the emotional support for us to speak on. I'm now going to transfer the second part over to my friend Dante.

(Applause.)

MR. NEWELL: Hello. My name is Donte Newell. I was a 9th grader in Imhotep Charter University -- Imhotep Charter High School. When the EMIR program was created, they came up to me, asked me if I wanted to be a part of it. I said yes because of the loss of a student very dear to the community, which was Emir. Let's have a moment of silence for him real quick.

And while 9th grade was happening, I dragged Xavier here to the program with me which then after that I became an ambassador. 10th grade year, just learning, making friends, everything. But in 9th grade year, that was most precious year to me because I didn't have really much friends back then. I was shy, quiet. But now, I feel like I'm all around talkative, just a good guy to be around. And I think that's my most good characteristic for me. And that's what I love about everybody else, that I can be around them, talk to them and be joyful.

(Applause.)

MS. REGANS: Hello. Can you hear me?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes, we can hear you.

MS. REGANS: My name is Angela Regans. I am a 9th grader

at Imhotep Charter High School. And when I first joined the EMIR, I mostly joined for the money. Because when I learned, when I learned that we get to make $200 from this program, I was like, okay, this could just be a quick in and out program for me to join.

But when I actually got to get in there, actually learned what the program is about, actually like experience what we do in the program, that's when I realized that I don't want to just join here for money. I actually want to help make a difference in our world. Because with a lot of the gun violence that's going on, a lot of minors that are dying due to the fact that people are just because of what other people did for them or that they follow me against the crowd, I feel as though we shouldn't have to be dealing with

that as minors. We are high schoolers who have a bright future ahead of us but we're going down the wrong path due to the fact that we're influenced by the actions of others who are surrounding us, specifically like music and all that other stuff.

When people hang around that type of crowd, it brings us a bad reputation, especially for the Black community because a lot of people will look at us and think, oh, my God, they might shoot us. But in reality that's not the case.

A lot of people who are under the age of 13, because my brothers told me, are also doing drugs because they hang around the wrong crowd. I feel as though EMIR gives us the chance as 9th graders and below to help us learn that this is not what we should be doing and we should go down a good path

for us because we are all minors with a bright future ahead of us and we shouldn't let people that don't have that future, that we have that chance, that we have to take us down the wrong path because there's a lot of people that can die from it.

(Applause.)

MR. WILLIAMS: As a young person myself, I want to say wholeheartedly me and all of EMIR and all the young people that are around me, we are speaking not only as just a couple of students from a school and we're speaking more than just as a pile of kids. We are speaking as young individuals and victims of even our own malice.

We are almost doing this to ourselves when we don't have to be. People are afraid -- young people my age are afraid of leaving. Young people are afraid

of even communicating. We are afraid of even trusting each other. I'm friends with Dante even now and people we could even have close relationships with their friends, friendships and bonds could be broken at a moment's notice. And all of it can just go left extremely quickly.

So as a young individual, we are more than just some kids. We are young individuals growing up. And as we're growing up, we're going to experience even more emotions and hardship probably whether we like it or not, but we don't have to suffer as much as long as we stick together.

MS. LOVE: And I brought them because we went to Harrisburg and we knew City Council was next, but that we needed to be able to still hear the voice of what we are

trying to do, that we still no matter how old we get or how much seasoned we get into work, that in order to be relevant we have to still talk to them and hear from them and let them guide us. And so, we wrap services around them based on what they feel that they need. And because of that, they can be successful.

I'm so proud of them. I'm so proud of all of them because it's a lot of -- it takes a lot of courage to say I'm going to take the day away from school to come down here and stand in front of some people that they don't know, but also --

(Applause.)

MS. LOVE: -- in a building that they might not have even seen. But when you are making decisions, when you are making decisions on funding, we know the

numbers are driving down but we know that the leaders on the ground need your support, the leaders on the ground that's doing the groundwork. We are not only the pulse, we are the connectors. We are the collaborators.

And I'm a part of three collaborations that's driving the numbers down. We can't let our foot off the gas. We have to still be innovative and still be relevant and still have that trauma-informed care that's needed. We can't stop. And in order for us to make a healthy community, a healthy neighborhood and a healthy family, I don't want you as City Council to make decisions that will stop that. We got to level up. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

So any questions

comments from members of the Committee?

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So I just want to say to all the young people there, we want to thank you for speaking truth to power. We want to thank you for making a choice to be in the right place at the right time. We want to thank you for your leadership.

And so, on behalf of City Council -- I know a lot of times we have different guests that come down. We get up and we give them their props because they're like celebrities. But for me, these are the young people that will transform our cities. Let's get up and give them a real big round of applause.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much and

keep up the good work.

MS. LOVE: You told me to state my name for the record. Chantay Love, founder and Executive Director of EMIR Healing Center, which stands for Every Murder Is Real. Every murder has a loss, real pain, real loss, real tragedy. But inside of that, real people that have hope for a life and we can make that happen.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

THE CLERK: Next up we have Sarah Maginnis, Greg Boulware, Nor Farida, Lawrence James, Chris Cera and Matthew Koveal.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: State your name for the record and please begin.

MS. MAGINNIS: Good

morning. My name is Sarah Maginnis and I'm the Executive Director of NAIOP Greater Philadelphia, and I want to say good morning to Council President Johnson and all members of the Philadelphia City Council.

NAIOP Greater Philadelphia is representing the developers, owners and related professionals in office, industrial and mixed-use real estate. I'm here today to provide remarks regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 operating and capital budget and five year plan.

As City Council considers the Mayor's proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget and five year plan, NAIOP Greater Philadelphia believes inclusive growth should be a top priority. The phrase inclusive growth is used often these days so I believe it is vital to be clear about what it

means.

We at NAIOP see it as a continuum that starts with tax reform. Thoughtful and equitable revisions to our tax code will fuel jobs and allow Philadelphia's diverse, small and medium-sized businesses to make investments in the future of their enterprises. These investments lead to job growth and attract new businesses to our city, creating additional revenues for the city. And those revenues, when deployed thoughtfully and with intention, can enhance services and provide safe, clean and green communities, the very priorities of our Mayor and City Council.

That's where this full circle because -- excuse me. That's where this comes full circle because a safer, cleaner and greener Philadelphia will bring

more residents, visitors, and in turn more businesses. And any revenues lost through tax rate reduction in the short-term are reclaimed.

NAIOP supports actionable-phased tax reforms. We specifically support reductions in the wage tax and the gradual elimination of the BIRT tax, net income component that were proposed in the Mayor's fiscal year 2026 budget. The lower rates would help grow jobs, jobs that lift people out of poverty, improve public safety and add to the city's tax base to ensure that much-needed city services are not endangered. Reforms like these send a powerful signal to the national investor community, Philadelphia is serious about creating a business-friendly environment that supports growth and opportunity.

This is especially vital as we work to attract outside capital investments, which have historically been the lifeblood of our city's growth. While we applaud the gradual reduction in wage and business taxes, we strongly oppose increasing the realty transfer tax .3% increase which may --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Go ahead and wrap up.

MS. MAGINNIS: Which may seem insignificant, but this increase adds up to real money in the commercial real estate market, a market that has experienced significant distress since the start of the COVID 19 pandemic. As you know, Philadelphia's office vacancy rate stands at around 20%, a 7% increase over 2019.

This increase has left many office buildings empty,

leading to the specter of what are often called zombie buildings. These buildings are not only eyesores but also increase the risk of foreclosures. At a time when we are working towards creative and innovative solutions to support adaptive reuse of distressed office buildings, increasing the realty transfer tax adds additional cost barriers to conversion pathways.

As you know, office-to-residential conversions are already fraught with hurdles and uncertainty. This proposal makes the financial viability of much-needed conversions even more tenuous. And --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You have to wrap up, ma'am.

MS. MAGINNIS: -- let's not forget that raising the transfer tax also hurts small

businesses who may want to own their buildings and residents who dream of one day purchasing their own home. Boosting the transfer tax is simply a bad idea all around. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

Mr. Greg Boulware who's the President of District --

MR. BOULWARE: Good morning.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Say it again.

MR. BOULWARE. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: President of District Council 33. I want to thank you and your workers and their hard work in terms of moving the city of Philadelphia forward. So thank you for being here today.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And thank you for your leadership. So you can please begin your testimony. Just state your name for the record.

MR. BOULWARE: Absolutely. Thank you, sir.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You're welcome.

MR. BOULWARE: My name is Greg Boulware, President of the mighty District Council 33 serving 10,000 men and women in the city of Philadelphia, the constituents of all you City Council here this morning. Thank you all City members of Council and President Council, appreciate it. I'm simply here this morning --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Bring your microphone in just a little bit.

MR. BOULWARE: I'm

simply here this morning to discuss the budget for this fiscal year coming up and how it relates to the public sector workers of Philadelphia. We know that we heard the Administration come and speak about the $550 million that was set aside for city contracts.

If you look at the escalating costs of everything going on, how things are increasing, it does not appear to us at $550 million will be adequate enough to make sure that those city public funds are publicly served the way they should be. If you look at the cost for what our members on average received, which is around $45,000, we did receive a 5% increase which helped minimally. But when you look at what's going on with the federal government and the tax cuts, and I understand how that impacts the state and the

local city government and things like that, but when we talk about the budget, the first thing that needs to be talked about is how we make sure we fund adequately raise wages and raises for our men and women that do all the necessary works in this city.

If you look and wake up and you woke up in the morning and your water didn't come on or if your trash was backed up and the men and women that didn't come and collect that trash were not available to you or God forbid, you had a health emergency and there was no health department workers there or you had a death in the family, there was no more workers there or you saved your pennies up and decided to take a flight and get out on the airplane, they couldn't operate because the runways were not clear and paved

the way they should be and the bathroom and laboratories weren't clean the way they needed to be, everybody would be in a bad way.

There's not one service in the city of Philadelphia that's not essential to the lives of every Philadelphian across the city. Our members are the ones that serve and do those things. They can't afford the ability to catch a flight. We need to make sure that that budget is funded publicly the way that it should be so services could be maintained and increased so that we could have longevity and have Philadelphia as a city, that's a world class city moving forward.

Every department in this city is still underfunded and underbudgeted and needs to make sure that we have the ability to maintain more workers and attract, attract workers and make it be

competitive in the workplaces to allow Philadelphia to continue to keep thriving.

The men and women of District Council 33 and all the other public sector unions in this city are the ones that make that happen and function on a daily basis and we need to work collaboratively to make sure that happens. You all, I appreciate the work that you've done.

Six months ago the vast majority of you signed off on a letter supporting our men and women, and that was right of the heels of a rally that we had outside this building. I would hate to get back to that point again. But if we can't come to resolve to make sure the contracts are funded in a manner and in a way that are deserving and respectful to the men and women that do all

the necessary work in this city, we're going to wind up back at that point again. And I'm hoping to avoid that type of situation.

So I'm looking at you all and seeking your help and making sure that we make sure that public service services are funded adequately the way they need to be. Thank you for your time.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Next. Go ahead, sir.

MR. JAMES: Good morning, Council President and members of City Council. My name is Lawrence James and I'm the President and CEO of Connexus Technology, a 22-year old IT staffing and digital transformation solutions firm started right here

in Philadelphia.

One of our largest customers is the City of Philadelphia. And right now we're actually rolling out broadband Internet access to all of the parks and recreational facilities in the city of Philadelphia. I'm here to urge you today to support meaningful reductions to the wage and Business Income and Receipts Tax because the current tax structure makes it incredibly hard to operate and grow a business in Philadelphia. Every dollar matters when you're running a business.

Connexus is not a large corporation yet. I'm a local employer trying to grow, create jobs and serve our community. We sponsor local basketball tournaments, we train interns and put them on our city contracts and we participate in countless

initiatives to improve the lives of people here in the city. But the way our city taxes businesses makes this harder every single year.

Between the wage, NPT tax and BIRT net income tax, we're constantly forced to choose between hiring one more staff member or covering our tax bill. That should not be the trade off. And now, with the $100,000 BIRT exemptions being repealed, even more of our revenue will go to taxes before we've even paid ourselves, reinvested in our business or provided raises to our hard-working team. For businesses just getting started or barely breaking even this is devastating.

If I were to start a new business today, I would give serious consideration to starting somewhere else and that should not be the case. I want to grow here.

I want to hire here. I want to stay in Philly, but the cost of doing business, especially compared to our surrounding counties, is pushing too many of us to consider leaving or shutting our doors.

We have an opportunity in this year's budget to take steps towards a more competitive, equitable tax structure that supports businesses of all sizes. Please don't let that opportunity pass us. I urge you today to support reduction to the wage and BIRT taxes, not just for me but for the thousands of small businesses and medium-sized businesses across the city that want to participate in making a long-lasting impact here in the city of Philadelphia. Thank you for everything you all do.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT

JOHNSON: Thank you.

MR. CERA: Hi. My name is Chris Cera. Thank you very much for your time. I live in Queen Village with my family. I'm also the CEO of Arcweb Technologies. The core problem is that we're in a crisis of private sector jobs. We need way more jobs and the budget does not address the urgent demands of the crisis. It seems evident that King of Prussia and the surrounding suburbs are more of our competition than Boston, San Francisco --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Can you speak up a little more or bring the microphone closer please.

MR. CERA: The Tax Reform Commission report said an average of 46% of residents across City Council Districts with private sector jobs commute to work outside

of Philadelphia. I saw that this morning walking my son to school. I was one of those people driving back and forth on the Schuylkill Expressway every day to King of Prussia. And then one day I started a company in Philadelphia. I started Arcweb from an apartment at 42nd and Chester Avenue and through the years, we've spent more than 50 million-plus with mostly a Philadelphia-based workforce.

I want to highlight three simple solutions and it comes down to really marketing sound bytes. It needs to be simple for both a common person and the chief financial officer to understand why they should start, stay, grow or move their company to Philadelphia. And I'd say number one, implement a 15-second test to ensure the complexity of the tax code is addressed. If you cannot explain

the BIRT and NPT tax structure in 15 seconds, then we'll continue to lose opportunities that will just never happen or to other cities.

I'll read you our current sound bytes, and this is our welcome sign on the City's website. Unincorporated businesses are required to file and pay the net profits tax and the Business Income and Receipts Tax. In this situation, you can apply a credit to your NPT that is equal to 60% of the BIRT paid on your net income basis. This is from the City's website on BIRT.

When you file your second year's BIRT returns, you must pay estimated tax for the following year equal to 100% of your actual tax from the previous year for the second filing only. You may pay this estimated tax in quarterly installments due to their

quarterly payments. So that's the first.

Let's make it explainable in 15 seconds. The second is eliminate the BIRT's double tax on businesses. Our sound byte here is regressive among the top 30 largest cities. We're the only one that does this. And number three, eliminate the BIRT prepayment on businesses. This is what I refer to as a second year slap.

Imagine you paid your taxes in April. You had to write a full check to the City for next year's taxes in advance. It comes down to those three things. It should be commended that the budget addresses one of those sound bytes with the elimination of the double tax in 2038. Zeno's paradox is the idea that you can cut your taxes in half over and over and over again

until infinity and never actually get to the goal. We've been living in Zeno's paradox for decades. We need leadership to eliminate this tax in five to six years to ensure that the folks running the city get it done. The budget does not address either of those two sound bytes.

And it's noteworthy the City is not expecting to grow. Yet a modest expectation of growth will provide the capital allocation necessary to make this process easier for everyone. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. One second. Excuse me. Now, what is it called, Zeno's paradox? Say it again.

MR. CERA: Zeno's paradox.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT

JOHNSON: Zeno's paradox?

MR. CERA: Yes. You get half the goal to infinity -- you can half your goals an infinite number of times and never actually get them.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Zeno's paradox.

MR. CERA: We've been living it for decades.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay. Thank you very much, sir. Thank you.

Please state your name for the record and begin your testimony.

MS. FARIDA: Thank you. Good morning, Council --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Could you bring the microphone closer to you please?

MS. FARIDA: Okay. Good morning, Councilmember. My name is Nora Farida. I am a business owner

in South Philly . I have a grocery store that also have Halal food. I am in the process of buying another commercial building and opening a (inaudible) restaurant.

I'm here today to speak in support to reduce Business Income and Receipts Tax, BIRT. This is the most (inaudible) for our small business. From COVID lockdown, all of us are staying singularly to recover financially. In the past two years inflection operation cost and difficulty to staff have already add more (inaudible) on small business.

On top of that, the City tax structure make it even harder so we cannot grow. I respect the line that the $100,000 BIRT expense will be going away. It will make us live even harder and will be a big blow to many small business like mine. I am now asking myself

how can I pay this tax in advance before I even have a chance to pay myself, pay off my new business or my employee.

It is make Philadelphia a torture place to do business. Many business owners I know are seriously considering relocating to place with a more business-friendly tax system. I am not joking. I know they don't want to live like me. They have family here. Their kids to go school here. They love friends here. They have friends here. They went to stay here. I love this city. I know our business and for your service or to our City Councilmember, please help us stay here. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. KOVEAL: Good morning. My name is Matt Koveal and I'm the Executive Director of the No Name Pops soon to be the

Philly Pops on July 1st. I wanted to start by thanking City Council. Leadership is a thankless round-the-clock responsibility and I'm grateful we have such a dedicated Council working on behalf of Philadelphia.

As many of you know, the past two years have been a whirlwind for the Pops. When the former management announced the shutdown of this beloved institution, the musicians stepped up from Local 77 and decided to keep the art form going. They believed and still believe that this city deserves more. These musicians are Philadelphia. They represent resilience, grit, determination and they've worked tirelessly to bring our art form back to life for our community.

This period of transition has been challenging,

but it has also opened the door for us to reimagine our mission and reconnect with what really matters, getting people on their feet and dancing wherever they might be, not just in concert halls but in parks, neighborhoods and public spaces across the city.

The future of Philly Pops provides music to people in different ways, understanding that not everyone experiences the city in the same way. Because of this, we provide music through the following ways: Our collaboration with Artsenia, which provides low cost community-informed programming to underresourced communities, our free pop-up programming throughout the city and our discounted and complimentary ticket program at the Kimmel Center, in which we provide tickets to veterans, students, teachers, first responders and

people from underresourced communities.

Just this past season we have provided $171,000, that's a big number by the way, in discounted and complimentary tickets to these communities. I've experienced many people tell me that they have never been to the Kimmel Center before. In fact, I've experienced people telling me that they didn't even know the Kimmel Center existed and we were the first show that they attended. That is quite powerful.

Our art form, popular music, has the ability to reach a wider audience than most of the performing arts organizations on Broad Street and we are doing just that. Our city and our world needs art. Look at the paintings on the walls in your offices throughout our community. None of that would

have existed without the community supporting the arts.

The Philly Pops has presented a proposal to City Council for the upcoming budget and I urge you to strongly consider supporting us and the arts. Music is now more important than ever. When the going gets tough, the musicians of the Philly Pops live by the famous Leonard Bernstein quote, and this will be our reply, "To make music more intensely, more beautifully and more devotedly than ever before." Thank you for everything that you have done to keep our art form alive and thank you for everything that you will do in the future. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

THE CLERK: Our next panel is Erin Dwyer, Dawud Bey,

Andy Frishkoff, Corinne O'Connell, Abraham Reyes, Maria Gonzalez, Audrey Patterson.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good morning, Ms. Dwyer. State your name for the record.

MS. DWYER: Erin Dwyer. Good morning, Council President Clarke and members of Philadelphia City Council --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It's Council President Johnson.

MS. DWYER: Oh, my goodness.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It's okay.

MS. DWYER: Well, now I'm done. There we go. Wow and it says Johnson too.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It's all right. It's all

right. It's okay.

MS. DWYER: I'm so sorry, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It's okay.

MS. DWYER: All right. Well, off to a hot start. My name is Erin Dwyer Harvard and I serve as the Director of Public Affairs for the General Building Contractors Association. Thank you for the opportunity to testify as a part of the City's FY26 budget process. I'm here today to express GBCA's strong support for three key priorities: The Mayor's H.O.M.E. Initiative, the elimination of the construction tax and the reduction of the City's gross receipt tax.

First, we commend Mayor Parker and her administration for the bold vision outlined in the H.O.M.E. Initiative. Addressing housing insecurity, preserving

affordable housing and investing in neighborhood infrastructure is not only the right thing to do, but it is a smart economic strategy. GBCA contractors are ready to help deliver high-quality and union-built homes for the city of Philadelphia.

Second, we urge Council to eliminate the construction tax. Initially introduced as a temporary funding mechanism, this tax disproportionately affects projects within margins. In a climate with unpredictable tariffs and rising material cost, we must work to eliminate avoidable expenses. Removing the construction tax will give our members the flexibility to continue to build hospitals, schools, homes and infrastructure our communities depend on.

Finally, we support the continued reduction of the City's

gross receipt tax. This tax penalizes volume over profit and disproportionately impacts general contractors in Philadelphia. In closing, GBCA believes that advancing these three priorities, the H.O.M.E. Initiative, eliminating the construction tax and reducing the gross receipt tax will strengthen Philadelphia's economy, create union construction jobs and support inclusive growth citywide. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. And I'm really sorry, Council President Johnson.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No. It's all good, Erin.

MS. DWYER: I've known you for too long to do that. I'm sorry.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No problem at all.

One second, Mr. Bey.

Young lady, could you please state your name. She went like this(indicating).

MS. PATTERSON: Good morning. My name is Audrey Patterson and I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak about the Mayor's H.O.M.E. Initiative. I was blessed enough to receive Basic System Repair Services for my home. The process was great and the contractors were awesome.

They fixed my roof and did several other repairs. I am extremely grateful for BSRP. And without it, I would be struggling to figure out how to pay for repairs. As a senior, this program means everything and I want to see it help even more people. I retired from the school system and BSRP helps those that worked hard all their lives, not only to preserve and maintain their homes

but also keep their dignity.

I truly hope City Council passes the H.O.M.E. Intentative -- initiative, I'm sorry, because there are residents all over the city that needs help. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MR. BEY: I'm up next? Put some respect on your name, Kenyatta Johnson. She's up next?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: (Gestured).

MS. RATHMANN: Thank you, President Johnson. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Carrie Rathmann. I'm sitting in for Corinne O'Connell and I proudly represent Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia. Our mission is to create and preserve affordable homeownership

for low-income families, moving us closer to a city where everyone has safe, stable and a decent place to live.

City Council's decisions about housing funding have a powerful impact. That's why we urge bold investment through both the H.O.M.E. Initiative and full capitalization of the Housing Trust Fund, one that builds, restores and preserves housing where it's needed most. Through programs like Built to Last and the Targeted Housing Prevention Program -- Preservation Program, Habitat helps seniors age in place. We help prevent displacement. We keep children safe and healthy in their homes and we ensure our historic rowhomes remain part of our city's future.

We're building homes for lower-income families than any other developers, but these

outcomes depend on consistent, equitable investment. When funding is delayed or reduced, we know what happens. We ask Council to take action in six targeted ways, either through the H.O.M.E. bond, Housing Trust Fund or other budget items:

Number one, please prioritize housing funds for those earning below 80% AMI, the most vulnerable homeowners and folks throughout the city. We ask you to double funding to 1 million, the THPP Program that's currently 500,000. It helps expand critical repair work and lets us leverage more private dollars.

Invest 25 million in the Built to Last program for repairs and energy upgrades. Create a $4 million quick strike acquisition fund to preserve affordable housing in changing neighborhoods and keep it out of the hands of speculators.

Expand down payment assistance in the Philly First Home program, reform Turn the Key program to include nonprofit developers like Habitat who aren't able to access, and invest 6.25 million in the Community Capacity Building Fund for community development corporations. Our crisis is urgent, but together we can preserve what we have, we can build what we need and we can be a more equitable city. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

Mr. Dawud Bey.

MR. BEY: Thank you very much, Mr. President and members of City Council. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Dawud Bey and I am the Chairman of Fine Print Companies, a certified minority

business enterprise specializing in affordable luxury workforce housing, and the founder of the Dawud Bey, Jr. Training Academy, a state certified apprenticeship school borne out of a tragic loss but fueled by a relentless desire to change the lives in Philadelphia.

Let me be clear, city funding is not just about line items in the budget. It's about people. It's about futures. It's about whether the young man standing on the corner today will be building the same corner tomorrow. I was that young man standing on the corner with hope in my hands. When you invest in housing, you're not just putting up walls. You're laying the foundation for opportunity.

Our firm specializes in Turn the Key homes, newly

constructed, energy-efficient, affordable, luxury homes for working families. These are the people who are too often forgotten in the housing equation. They make too much for subsidies but not enough to afford market rate rents and mortgages.

With City support, we've turned vacant lots into homes. We've taken young men and women with little hope, trained them through our academy and put them to work building the very communities they live in. That's what real investment looks like. That's what real equity looks like.

But let me be equally clear, if funding is reduced or worse delayed, the consequences are immediate. We lose momentum, we lose projects and most importantly, we lose people. A misfunding cycle can mean dozens of apprentices left

untrained. A stalled housing project can leave families in shelters instead of their own homes.

The housing program currently in place, especially those that support affordable housing and workforce development are working, but they need to be expanded and treated with urgency. Let me give you a real example. On Parkside Avenue, we just completed a 24 unit housing development thanks to coordinated PHA support, the Philadelphia Accelerator Fund and those -- excuse me, and the Philadelphia Accelerator Fund. Those units now house working families earning 80% or less AMI of the Area Median Income. Without that investment, those units just don't get built, period or take our project in Grays Ferry in Point Breeze on the 2300 block of

Greenwood. That's not just construction. That's transformation.

That's three bedroom, two bath homes up in a zip code that has been heavily gentrified for far too long, where long-term residents watch development rise around them while being pushed out of their neighborhoods they help build. We're changing that narrative.

We're building homes that working families can afford on time, under budget and with integrity, employing apprentices from neighborhoods just like it. This is about more than housing. It's about restoring community ownership and making sure development works for the people who live there. This is not theatrical. It's not political. It's personal.

When you fund programs, you are giving us the tools to solve problems from within. You are not just backing buildings. You're backing people. You're backing hope. So I urge this body to slow down -- I mean, I urge this body don't slow down. Don't slow down. Don't scale back and don't forget the urgency communities live with every single day. We are ready to build, we are ready to train. We are ready to lead, but we cannot do it without your support. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much. Good job. Please begin.

MS. WEISSMAN: My name is Robin Weissman --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I know you. Hey, Robin. How are you?

MS. WEISSMAN: Pleasure to see you, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Welcome to City Council.

MS. WEISSMAN: I'm happy to be here. My name is Robin Weissman and I'm the Executive Director and CEO of the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. I really appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony about the Mayor's plan and City Council's plan to expand and enhance the City of Philadelphia's affordable housing stock.

There is no doubt that there is tremendous demand for more rental and single family housing across the state and in Philadelphia particularly. We know because we work on this challenge every day. Affordable housing is the mission of Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency and it has been for

the last 51 years.

I wanted to take a moment to talk about investing in housing. As a finance person, I know housing is the city's infrastructure and I know that preservation and development of housing is a public-private partnership with benefits for all. These investments are not only short-term, but they have enormous short-term and long-term benefits.

Housing needs are dramatic. They're necessary and needed for all segments of the entire economic spectrum. But it's really important to also note that housing investment is economic development with an enormous multiplier effect on economic growth and taxes and may help alleviate housing-related cost pressures. Supply will be key.

I've reviewed the

Mayor's proposed housing plan and I've met with staff personally to discuss the approach to meeting this challenge. I'm confident that it is a good plan and that it addresses the city's housing needs in a thoughtful and comprehensive manner. As I stated, the housing challenge in Philadelphia is sizable. That's why it needs an equally robust response.

I applaud the Mayor and others for the proposal to finance 800 million in bonds because the scale of this housing initiative has to match the level of public demand that exists in order to be effective. The Mayor is smart to address the current housing challenge on both the homeownership side of the equation and the rental side. It's obvious that the most cost-effective way to provide affordable single family housing is

to repair and preserve the housing that currently exists. The plan intends to do that.

And regarding rental housing, the Mayor's plan takes a comprehensive approach, working to provide housing for people of all income levels, including those at extremely low income. There is a strong emphasis on workforce housing which is also key. We need to provide affordable housing for Philadelphia workers like teachers and first responders because they need the option to be able to live in or close to the city where they're working.

I would also note that the timing of Mayor Parker's plan is also good as it will dovetail well with Governor Shapiro's first ever for the Commonwealth's comprehensive housing action plan that is currently under

development. Taken together, the two initiatives should provide really meaningful results.

In addition to its impact on housing, I want to re-emphasize the community and economic impact of the plan will be considerable. The scale of the investment will have broad reaching implications for the economic vitality of city businesses and much-needed regeneration and revitalization of the neighborhoods. No plan for expanding our housing stock will ever be perfect -- thank you. Different people always come at this from different perspectives.

What is important is that you and we all plan to take action immediately as Mayor Parker's plan is bold but also fiscally responsible. It takes a comprehensive approach needed to

make serious inroads in the housing challenges that face Philadelphia today. I believe it can be effective and we at PHFA will do what we can to support this smart and ambitious effort. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this vital discussion.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

Please state your name for the record and please begin your testimony.

MR. FRISHKOFF: Good morning, Council President, members of City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Andrew Frishkoff and I am Executive Director of LISC Philadelphia. I'm here to testify in support of the H.O.M.E. Initiative. First, let me thank my fellow panelists who are so dedicated to building and

investing in affordable housing in the city, but let me also thank each and every member of City Council who has championed the cause of affordable housing for all residents of Philadelphia.

The people are grateful for your advocacy and your leadership and allow me to congratulate you for having a Mayor whose passion and commitment to housing matches your own. Not every city is fortunate enough to have both. That being said, I encourage all members of City Council to join with the Mayor in recognizing the urgency of Philadelphia's housing needs and support the H.O.M.E. Initiative so that we can create and preserve affordable housing our residents and communities need to thrive.

LISC is a national community development intermediary

and community development financial institution that has invested more than $32 billion across the country, including 695 million in Philadelphia where we've supported the creation and preservation of 9700 affordable homes and apartments here.

I can attest that every city where LISC works is experiencing its own housing crisis. What is different about Philadelphia is that we have a $2 billion plan to tackle that crisis and build and preserve 30,000 affordable homes. In 2018, LISC served as the City's lead consultant in the development of its housing action plan.

Currently I represent LISC on the H.O.M.E. Initiative advisory group with the intent to provide insight and guidance to the City in the development and

implementation of the H.O.M.E. Initiative. Having done this work for almost 40 years, I can say that every plan has its critics and no plan is perfect.

However, the worst plans are those that have many suggestions but no workable solutions as well as those with no political will and funding behind them. Philadelphia has elected leaders committed to affordable housing. We have a plan. We have identified the funding to activate the plan. I ask you as our leaders please pass the funding for the H.O.M.E. plan. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

Please state your name and begin your testimony.

MR. REYES PARDO: Hi. Good afternoon. I am Abraham Reyes

Pardo. I'm the Vice-president of Housing at the Urban League of Philadelphia. The Urban League of Philadelphia is a 108-year-old civil rights organization. Today I'm here to testify to encourage the budget process related to the H.O.M.E. Initiative.

I wouldn't say more of what's already been said many times. This program means a once-in-a-generation opportunity to possibly alter the trajectory of Philadelphia, a city that is still referred to as the poorest big city in America. Collectively we're looking to make a pivot of historic significance, one that will imprint its mark on the lives of many generations of Philadelphians.

Although at the Urban League of Philadelphia we offer wraparound services, it is the office that I lead housing that

often becomes insignia of our organization, which gives our partnership -- which given our partnership with the City of Philadelphia has allowed us to earn the reputation for being able to turn policy into action.

When I look at the configuration of the H.O.M.E. Initiative, I see the names of many familiar programs like Philly First, Turn the Key, the nationally recognized Eviction Diversion Program, TFA as well as many others. From a housing counselor's perspective, this is a well-designed program that presents possibilities for many people coming from different spectrums of the housing journey, renters, landlords, homeowners, prospective homeowners, developers, et cetera.

One must recognize the significance of this investment,

which is being described as the 30,000 -- which is being aimed to produce 30,000 units in effort, but in practice has the potential to meaningfully reach a quarter of Philadelphia's population.

I don't mean to use this number in a scary way, but what we have observed is that for every person that makes it to the finish line we touch about 20 other people that will attempt to access these programs. Lastly, I want to recognize that at a time when the federal government has elected to fund some initiatives for the implementation and sustainability of fair and affordable housing, the City of Philadelphia has once again decided to step up to elaborate a plan that only sustains the current needs of the city but catapults vulnerable groups into their aspirations to access fair,

sustainable and attainable housing. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

The next panel.

THE CLERK: We have Nakia Parker, Alex Balloon, Sue Jacobson, Norman Bonk, Shari Hersh and Lois Williams.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much. Just state your name for the record and please begin your testimony.

MS. JACOBSON: Would you like me to go first?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Sure.

MS. JACOBSON: Good morning, everyone. And good morning, Council President and Councilmembers. I'm Sue Jacobson and thank you for the opportunity

to speak with you today. I'm the past Chair, as you know, of the Chamber of Commerce for Greater Philadelphia. And as you know, the Chamber represents about 1300 businesses and their employees.

But I'm here actually in a more personal capacity, as someone who started and I built my business here in Philadelphia 15 years ago. I love this city. I believe in this city and I wouldn't dream actually of building my business anywhere else.

But the truth is I would not in good conscience want to convince a business to come here today. Philadelphia's tax structure, as you know it's not just outdated. It's actively working against our ability to grow our city, give jobs to our residents and compete. Other cities, if we're being honest, are

eating our lunch. They're aggressively attracting jobs, businesses and talent and they are winning.

I truly believe we are a world class city, but we're losing business at an alarming rate. Our private sector job growth is falling fast behind our peers and our exorbitant wage and BIRT taxes, they're driving away the very people and companies that we need to stay, grow and invest. We can't, as we know, afford to kick the can down the road.

And so, what I believe is I really believe this is a wake-up call for all of us, and for us the time really is to act now. In just over a year, we all know Philadelphia is going to be on the world stage which is awesome, the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding, right, and FIFA World

Cup. They're going to put a global spotlight on our city. What story do we want to tell. Will we be the city that seizes the moment? We do not want to squander it.

Reducing the wage and BIRT taxes I believe would send a bold, clear message Philadelphia is open for business, we want you. And this is not just about economics. It's really about equity. The wage tax hits working Philadelphians hardest. It takes money out of their pockets and it limits opportunity in the very communities we say we want to uplift.

So your residents, you all know this, they are leaving our city. By making real, meaningful reductions, we give every Philadelphian a raise. We unlock growth, we build the foundation for a more inclusive economy and we

start telling a different story, one of competitiveness, progress and of being bold.

So the decisions you all make on this budget I believe is going to shape our city's trajectory for generations. This is your moment to choose bold reform which you know. And I want to say that all of us, the Chamber, our members and partners across the city, we stand ready to work with you. I hope you know that. So if it's all right, let's do this together. Let's build a city where people don't just survive but where we really thrive. So thank you so much, Council President, Councilmembers, for allowing me to speak with you today.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT

JOHNSON: Please state your name for the record and please begin.

MS. HERSH: My name is Shari Hersh and I'm a founder and Co-director of Trash Academy, and we are part of the Clean Philadelphia Now Coalition to end illegal dumping by 2028. I live in 19130. My Councilperson is Jeffrey Young, and I especially want to thank Councilmember Anthony Phillips for his support for our solutions-driven campaign to end illegal dumping.

We embrace the Clean and Green Initiative and we're happy to see and we support their pilot program with lidded receptacles and mechanical pickup. We see that in the '26 budget. It supports the safety of sanitation workers and can reduce residential dumping and fugitive trash.

But with over 40,000

vacant lots and 3000 miles of streets in Philadelphia, cleaning is not a cost-effective way to end dumping. Cleaning does not end dumping but actually provides city-sponsored dump sites, free dump sites. Our analysis of the FY26 budget identifies only 4% of the Clean and Green budget dedicated to preventing dumping.

So I just want to give you an example of construction and demolition waste and how solutions could show up in the budget. I want to show you 9th and Ontario. This has been a dump site for 20 years. I was out there a few weeks ago and there was a huge dump, and I was out a week later and there was a different dump. So 20 years that dump site, and there's been a Block captain and Ward leader tirelessly trying to get it cleaned up and addressed. We call it a

million dollar block. It's one of the countless million dollar blocks across the city.

In the illegal dumping in Pennsylvania, a Decade of Discovery study published in 2014, it's old, the cost of cleaning one ton of dump material was $619. That's 2014. Those are the last reliable figures we have. I hope that Carlton Williams has new figures for you at.

If 9th and Ontario was cleaned up just once a month at that rate, the 2014 rate, not the rate we're paying now, that would be 247,600 for a single site. And we know there are sites all over Philly. If it was cleaned up once a week for 20 years, that would be 643,760, but they're actually cleaning the site more frequently.

So we say the city needs to, in the breakdown of the Clean

and Green budget, have a higher allocation for prevention and education. In San Francisco, one of the most successful --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Please get ready and wrap it up, ma'am.

MS. HERSH: -- waste management programs in the country. They achieved it through the creation of a recycling program for C&D waste and bi-yearly door-to-door education outreach program. Our convenience centers could evolve into this kind of success. They could be open to small haulers for a fee. We could manage small loads of C&D waste and we could radically change the amount of illegal dumping, freeing up funding for greening and other positive programs. The only way to reduce the cost and burden of dumping overall --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, ma'am. You have to get ready and wrap it up.

MS. HERSH: -- would be to invest in preventative measures.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much. Appreciate your testimony. And also, the District Attorney received additional funding from the Mayor to create an Illegal Dumping Task Force to actually prosecute those who illegally dump in the city of Philadelphia as well.

MS. HERSH: And that is criminal --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes, it definitely is criminal, ma'am. You're right about that. But thank you very much for your testimony. Thank you, ma'am.

Please begin, ma'am.

MS. WILLIAMS: My name is Lois Williams and I'm also with Trash Academy. I live in the Fairhill section of Philly, 19140 zip code. Quetcy Lozada is my District Councilperson. I'm here to talk about legacy dump sites. These are sites that are dumped on again and again. These sites have been actively dumped on for 10 to 40 years.

There are two such sites around the corner from me. One is at 4th and Westmoreland right next to a day care and an elementary school. We have been cleaning these sites for many years and we're tired of it. People in Chestnut Hill don't have to go through this. What we need to see is prevention and enforcement. With this, we can stop dumping.

I commend the Mayor for her Clean and Green program, but

cleaning is not enough. We need to judge progress by how many blocks -- we need to judge progress by not how many blocks were clean, but how long they stay clean. I appreciate the right kind of help which is cleaning, prevention and enforcement.

I want to see more of the budget going to prevention and enforcement. We can make this happen by 2028. Let's get together and work together and let's get this done. Okay.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

Go ahead, sir. State your name for the record and please begin.

MR. BONK: Good morning. My name is Norman Bonk. I'm not the director or CEO of anything. I'm just a guy. So thanks for

listening to me --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Just a guy is very powerful so.

MR. BONK: Thank you. I'm here to talk about Mural Arts. And I have participated in the Mural Arts programs for about five years. All right. I'm going to read this fast. They tell me I only got two minutes.

I spent the last week considering carefully what I would say to you about Mural Arts. Most importantly to me, I prayed about it. You already know the miracles and transformations that occur in the human lives that Mural Arts touches. To add to that would be thankfully I think preaching to the choir.

What I want to talk to you about is money, money, money, money, money, money. The reason you

should grant Mural Arts the money they're asking for is because Mural Arts is literally the best investment you'll ever make. For every dollar you give them, your return on your investment will be even better than any insider training could produce. And Mural Arts operates on the level.

They touch every demographic in Philadelphia, the rich, the poor, men, women, every race, every age, every aptitude, every soul. There's a Mural Arts mural in West Philly that I walk by nearly every day for years. It read, it's a quote by Nikki Giovanni, it read, "I will not deny my strength, though its source is not choice but responsibility."

It took me many years to internalize this, but I now live it. A mural did this. A mural helped me to finally grow up. City

Councilmembers, you're sitting on a gold mine. If I were you, the first organization that I would call when a pattern social problem arises is Mural Arts. They will find a way. They will have the humility and respect to ask the target population what they need, and they, with their unprecedented expertise, will find a wholesome way to meet these needs to empower people to get where they want to go.

When Mural Arts develops such a program, fund it. It's the best money you'll ever spend. Mural Arts has found a way to make lightning in a bottle. Get you some. I want to say lastly thank you for your respect. Thank you for your thoughtfulness. Thank you for your vigor. Thank you for your brotherly and sisterly love and thank you for the courage to be

you. That's it. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

THE CLERK: Next we have Jacqueline Hunter, Carrie Rathmann, Michelle Kerr Walter, Jacob Zychick, Robert Harris and Jameele Mitchell. You can make your way to the podium.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Hello. How you doing. Just state your name for the record and please begin your testimony.

MS. HUNTER: Good morning. My name is Jacqueline Hunter. I reside in the 4th Councilmanic District that is awash with illegal dumping from occupied multi-family units to abandoned, failed business sites. I have aligned myself with the aims and

objectives of the Trash Academy and the elimination -- excuse me, of illegal dumping in our city.

I agree with Maurice Sampson's assertion that this is very doable should we decide it's what we want to happen. Looking at the proposed FY2026, budget, I don't believe we have decided. To realize this goal, we've got to place concentrated emphasis and a lot more money on the education component of prevention. Abatement is an exercise in futility.

Require dumpers to participate in re-education sessions and in addition to fines. Reinstate civics classes in our public and private schools. A child will lead them. On the eve of the Semiquincentennial, let's practice the paraphrased adage of one of our founding fathers, Treatment without prevention is

unsustainable. The greatest prevention tool is education.

We invite the citizens of Philadelphia to join us at trashacademy.org. We need you. Tell our Mayor that we demand sustainability in Philadelphia's FY2026 budget. And I would just like to say to Councilperson Jones, if he is listening, there is a horrible sight down the street from Heston School and across from the recreation center there at Conestoga and Lansdowne Avenue. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, ma'am.

Jameele, thank you for the work that you do on behalf of District Council 47. It's good to see you today representing the workers. State your name officially for the record and

please begin your testimony.

MR. HARRIS: Thanks. I'm Robert by the way. Jameele is going to be speaking later, but thank you. My name is Robert Harris. I'm the Vice-president and Legislative Director for AFSCME District Council 47. Good morning. Our members are here today to advocate for the full funding and staffing of civil services. As stated in the Mayor's proposed budget, "The City's budget faces twin constraints of a high demand of services and a relatively weak tax base with which to support those services."

The planned incremental cutting of the business tax may further exasperate these constraints at a time when we need to prepare for a decline in federal funding. Looking ahead, federal tax cuts that benefit billionaires

over working class people pose a distinct risk to state and local budgets. With that understanding in mind, it is imperative to fill longstanding vacancies in our city's civil service positions, as grant funded supplement and plugs to city services, which are often staffed by exempt employees, may suffer cuts first due to the lack of funding from federal government.

Filling vacancies of civil service positions create strong union jobs staffed by Philadelphians with opportunities for advancement and sustainable pensions. High vacancies in our city services is asking us to do more with less, often leading to issues of safety concerns and burnout for our employees.

We must continue to fully fund and focus on fully staffing our civil service

positions to ensure that the City can keep up with the growing need of services for taxpayers. Currently, departments that suffer high vacancy rates include libraries at a 9% vacancy, L&I at a 14% vacancy, Property Assessment at a 20% vacancy, Water at a 22% vacancy, DHS at a 23% vacancy, and Parks & Recs at a 32% vacancy rate with a budgeted increase of only 20 employees.

We are expanding upon a fractured infrastructure and these lofty goals -- these are lofty goals considering the small incremental gains we've had in hiring in recent years. The City's budget should also to continue to support cultural institutions, which create tourism and enrich the lives of Philadelphians by standing with workers in the many museums, including the Philadelphia Museum

of Art, our parks, our libraries and the Philadelphia Zoo which we represent.

D.C. 47 has seen an insurgence of organizing of cultural workers, as they too fight against the cuts in funding to nonprofits. These workers often have advanced degrees in specialized areas that are required to fulfill these positions. And yet they are paid lower salaries than their counterparts in other regions or comparable regions and based on the sizes of their institutions.

We need to fight for these workers to operate our cultural institutions well. Yet they are not making enough money to live within our city. We ask that you stand with these workers and your allocations of funds to these cultural spaces. I also urge

Council to continue to hold the leaderships of our eds and meds, holding their feet to the fire, and to support workers in these institutions through the many attacks that they will continue to see from the federal government. Push these institutions like UPenn to make sustainable investments in their surrounding communities and in Philadelphia as a whole.

The budget is a reflection of values, priorities and choices. We ask for you to make the choice to prioritize city services by valuing the workers that make Philadelphia happen.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

MS. MITCHELL: Good morning, everyone. Can you hear me?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT

JOHNSON: Yes.

MS. MITCHELL: Good morning, everyone. My name is Jameele Mitchell. Currently I'm a staff rep for 2186 and a workplace violence prevention coordinator for District Council 47. But formally I'm a Recreation Leader 3 with Philadelphia Parks and Recreation. So I come today because of my current role. I have the privilege of engaging regularly with many of our dedicated individuals who work tirelessly to keep the city running.

I can say without hesitation that the employees of the City of Philadelphia are deeply passionate about their work. Time and again they go above and beyond to serve the departments and the residents of our city. However, despite their unwavering commitment many of these workers are facing

burnout, exhaustion and a sense of being overwhelmed.

Some employees are spending their own personal funds to supply their worksites. Previously as a recreation leader, I had to use advisory funds and at times my own wallet and at times trade with other rec leaders to secure supplies that are usually funded by the department. I've even traded paper towels for trash bags.

One of the librarians recently told me that she had to use funds to do the same thing, get trash bags. Usually typically our site-specific funds such as advisory board funds are typically used for trips, buses and programming, sometimes for fee teachers. But that's only if a site can actually afford it.

Many employees working

in our departments, they are chronically overstaffed. This often results in workers being unable to take time off needed, in some cases forced to work in unsafe and unsanitary environments with minimal security measures like work spaces without surveillance cameras. These conditions are not only draining but increase the risk of workplace violence.

Some of the things increased funding could help with is hiring and retaining enough qualified staff to meet operational needs, installing and maintaining security systems including surveillance cameras and ensuring functional phone lines, providing essential supplies and equipment to meet the work expectations and ensuring timely repairs to buildings, worksites and vehicles.

We cannot expect

excellence from a workforce that is overextended and undersupported. Investing in our employees is not just a moral obligation. It is essential for the efficient and effective functioning of our city. When we take care of our employees, we're in turn better equipped to serve the residents of Philadelphia. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Jameele.

DR. TSOU: Good morning. Dr. Walter Tsou. I'm the former Health Commissioner for Philadelphia. My budget request is to actually strengthen our funding for public health and ask the administration to support a new head for the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services. It's been over a year since we have not had a

leader for DBHIDS and at a time when there's an enormous amount of stress and burden on mental health services in our city.

Even worse, the proposed federal budget Medicaid cuts are likely to directly impact mental health services, which would put a huge hole in the city budget. Who will be leading the mental health services through these choppy waters? We need to know.

The Public Health Department is always the ugly stepsister of city government. It is often not a priority for funding, even though health care is enormously expensive and prevention underappreciated. During COVID and the next pandemic that would certainly come, many of the key essentials like immunizations, contact tracing, PPE and health education had to be contracted out.

These services should be inhouse and part of the Health Department.

Disease surveillance, health inspections and district health centers are really year-round operations. Unfortunately, most of the Health Department budget comes from the federal government directly or indirectly, which makes it particularly vulnerable to the projected federal cutbacks.

Prudence would dictate that we need to have funds available to protect these vital jobs that keep our city healthy. I would like to offer a different take on violence that has plagued our city for decades. Much has been made of the reductions in crime that we've seen in the past few years. That reduction has been applauded, if not fully understood.

I attribute much of this

to the Biden administration's wide decision to retain and enhance the safety net during the pandemic, which has led to less financial stress, and wait for it, less anger. Before guns, angry people would punch people but today they shoot them.

Now, my prediction is that the proposed Trump cutbacks in Medicaid, food and nutrition and so on are going to lead to much more financial stress and, yes, anger. And what do angry people do? They take it out on others. So be prepared for a rise in gun violence, which will impact our business community.

The solution is not to have more police. It is to maybe having more community public health workers, the same people who could do disease surveillance, health education, contact tracing during

pandemics, could be doing home visits, follow-up on missed immunizations, doing baby checks, home safety inspections, including whether they have safe for gun storage or fire alarms, et cetera. In other words, people who would not invite police into their homes are more likely to invite health workers whose goal is to do a health check upon their loved ones.

The value of community health workers has been shown repeatedly in the public health literature. And yet most governments have failed to recognize the important role that hiring people who are from Philadelphia neighborhoods who look after their own neighbors could be the most cost-effective person in city government.

I want to plant the seed about a smarter way of approaching

both health and stress in our city that will set us apart from the looming violence that will be coming to America and to make our city truly one of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MR. ZYCHICK: Hi. Jacob Zychick. Thank you, Council President Johnson, the entire Philadelphia City Council for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Jacob Zychick and I'm the Community Advocacy Director with the American Heart Association. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Philadelphia, leading to the loss of over 4000 lives each year.

Hypertension and unhealthy diet are two contributing factors to heart disease, and that

is why we are committed to work with Philadelphia City Council to remove barriers and expand access to evidence-based strategies that address both. Far too many Philadelphians lack access to healthy foods. While food insecurity has actually increased over the past three years, there's nearly 1 million Philadelphians that live in an area of an overabundance of unhealthy foods.

According to a report published by Feeding America, more than 30% of children in our city are food insecure. Nutrition incentives like Philly food bucks support a triple bottom line, helping families bring home more nutritious foods, supporting Pennsylvania farmers and keeping more food dollars in our communities. Nutrition incentives empower families to purchase

healthier food options by making produce more affordable.

We'd like to thank Councilmember Ahmad and others in City Council for really championing the importance of Philly food bucks in the Fiscal Year '26 operating budget. We'd also like to thank Council President Johnson for establishing the Nutrition and Hunger Task Force to truly address this in the short and long term and we are excited to participate in that task force.

In addition, nearly 1 in 3 adults in Philadelphia are affected by hypertension. Self-monitored blood pressure machines in the home and office are endorsed by several national and international organizations. Sadly and unfortunately, there are too many barriers to implement SMBP, including out-of-pocket costs, lack

of reimbursement for devices for providers and a lack of insurance coverage for devices.

We truly believe that we need to look forward to addressing and improving access to SMBP, self-monitor blood pressure machines, to truly address hypertension moving forward. Once again we'd like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the importance of funding Philly food bucks and looking towards the future to address hypertension in our city. Thank you and have a great day.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MS. KERR-SPRY: Good morning, everyone. My name is Michelle Kerr-Spry. I'm the Program Director for Mothers in Charge, which was founded 22 years ago by Dr. Dorothy Johnson-Speight.

Thank you, Honorable President and members of Council, for allowing me to speak today.

The ask is simple. We're asking for greater investment in violence prevention organizations. For 22 years, Mothers in Charge has provided consistent culturally-appropriate services for families that have been crippled by homicide. We offer grief support, grief support for siblings and the younger kinfolk of the slain that are often the forgotten mourners.

We have anger management programs because grief and trauma may show up as anger, which is misinterpreted by many. We have been able to provide re-entry services to keep our formerly incarcerated neighbors and family members home. Thank you for your investment in the CEG program,

which allowed us to expand our reach to reach more young people that have been impacted by trauma.

Artivism is one of those programs. We have been provided artivism For now going on three years. It's a trauma-informed art program that helps young people not only to identify their trauma, not normalize it but use their voices to create a new tomorrow through the development of a superhero to save themselves and their communities.

We've also been able to use those funds to implement an MIC village in Murrell Dobbins High School, where we've been integral into conflict resolutions for the student body through an art-based program. Our programs in totality impact the whole family. Healing in our adults creates a mirror for our youth to become good neighbors

and friends. The investment in violence prevention needs to meet the level of need. And given that violence is the language of the traumatized, the need is great.

We thank you for hearing us today. We thank you for your previous investment in trauma and violence prevention opportunities. And Mothers in Charge hopes to continue our work. Even while the dollars have not been available to us, the work has continued. And we hope to continue for many years in the future until homicides are eradicated from our beautiful City of Brotherly Love and sisterly Affection. I thank you for your time today.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you and thank you for your hard work.

THE CLERK: Eliza

Walmsley, Daniel Walsh, Christopher Snyder, Mo Manklang, Brett Bessler and Leonard Redd.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

MR. BESSLER: Just so you know, Chris Snyder is not here.

MR. WALSH: Good morning, Council President. Good morning, City Council. My name is Dan Walsh. I'm a D.C. 47 Local 2186 member. I am also a steward for the Parks and Recreation Department. I am currently a Parks & Rec employee. I have been a Parks and Recreation employee for over 26 years. I have worked in a variety of neighborhoods, Port Richmond, Tacony, Frankford, Fishtown, Kensington and Harrowgate.

I feel safety of Parks & Rec facilities for staff and participants has increasingly

become challenging. There have been an increase of incidents in and around Parks & Rec facilities. For example, shootings, the threat of violence towards staff and participants and actual workplace violence towards staff. The aftermath of such incidents leads to a decrease in morale, added stress and trauma for those impacted, something I have experienced myself.

The lack of staff and retention of staff plays a significant role in these workplace and safety incidents. Far too many centers were facing understaffing and the City relies too heavily on seasonal staff to fill in the many gaps in the system. By having a fully-funded Parks & Rec Department and working with the union to protect our members, we can address these issues with full funding.

We could have municipal guards at Parks & Rec facilities to provide safety and handle any potential incidents that may arise. The Philadelphia library department already has this in place. This addition of municipal guards would be beneficial to the Parks & Rec department, providing lasting union jobs to Philadelphians and securing long-term solutions to safety concerns onsite.

It would free up staff from acting in a security capacity and allow us to focus more on programming. Having a fully-funded and fully-staffed Parks & Rec Department would allow us to extend the possibility of additional hours and provide more programming for the community, such as our tot and youth populations. Having a fully-funded staff and department and working with the union to protect

our members would be beneficial to everyone involved in the Parks & Rec community. Thank you, Council, for providing the opportunity to speak.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MR. BESSLER: All right. What's up, goofballs. Good morning. My name is Brett Bessler. I'm the Vice-president and Business Agent --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Mr. Bessler, you said what's up who? Say it again.

MR. BESSLER: Goofballs.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Who's the goofball?

MR. BESSLER: We're all goofballs.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Nah, I ain't no goofball. But go ahead.

MR. BESSLER: That's what I say. Good morning. My name is Brett Bessler. I'm the Vice-President, Business Agent, proud member of AFSCME District Council 47 Local 2186 representing City of Philadelphia workers. If you support union municipal workers in this room, let me get a hell yeah. There you go.

Year after year we come to these departmental budget hearings and listen to Council and department heads discuss the expansion of services. Prime example this year came when Free Library of Philadelphia's Director Kelly Richards spoke on the expansion of FLP services to seven days a week within the next few years.

Our members in the Free Library of Philadelphia can't even get trash bags, trash bags. Do you

really think we'll be able to achieve what we envision in this budget when we can't even get trash bags? Multiple times this year I heard Councilmembers say that "they'd spare no expense when it comes to the city's youth." Have municipal guards been added to the budget this year in PPR to help create a safer environment at our recreation centers? No.

Last year we talked about bringing in more park rangers to protect one of the largest urban park systems in the entire world. Last year we were budgeted 23 rangers. This year we have 25, an addition of two rangers. Is this what sparing no expense looks like?

What about in the Philadelphia prison system? Over the years we have seen a steep decline in budgeted positions for the RTS unit, which includes our

city social workers. These workers provide social services like the Options program to help our incarcerated population get the services they need to come home and be productive members of society. This program has been in existence for 35 years and is hailed as the gold standard by the courts.

Yet for whatever reason we have divested from these proven services and reduced our services and contract out to Yes Care. Years ago Yes Care started with a budget of 70 million which has now ballooned to well over a quarter of a billion dollars, pushing $300 million.

Incarcerated persons have died on Yes Care's watch and we continue to provide Yes Care with millions and millions more every year. Those individuals passed away on Yes Care's watch and

didn't have the opportunity to come home and be productive members of society. They came home in a body bag and Yes Care got a 17% raise.

I'm not the first one to say it and I certainly won't be the last. Our fiscal year budget is a moral document. It outlines our goals and priorities. It is a snapshot in black and white of the city that we strive to be. But you can have all the morals you want. But at the end of the day, it's how you stand by them. We want to provide high-quality consistent services that benefit the residents of city of Philadelphia, but that will not happen if we continuously stretch thin the workforce that makes this city run.

We can operate as a well-oiled machine but only if this Council body stands by its morals and holds these departments

accountable to ensure they spend the money that you all give them. An investment in our membership is an investment in Philadelphians. Together we can transform the City of Philadelphia into being the premier employer in this city, offering Philadelphians union-represented jobs with decent wages, benefits and a pension. We're here not only to stand by our morals in District Council 47 but fight tooth and nail to defend them and we hope you will be too.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much. This goes out to the goofballs.

THE CLERK: If we could also have Elowyn Porby, Leah Shepperd, Omeed Firouzi and Adisa Julian come to the podium.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

MS. MANKLANG: Hi, City Council President and City Councilmembers. My name is Mo Manklang from District 6 in Frankford. I'm here today on behalf of the Philadelphia Cooperative Lions and the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives.

Through the work that I do I have a frontline seat every single day to the needs and the successes of our small businesses that are formed as co-ops. These are businesses that are owned by their members and in their nature they benefit the community around them. They benefit Philadelphia. Members can be individuals who get access to fresh food at Weaver's Way Bank, at the Philadelphia Federal Credit Union or workers who start businesses together so they could carve their own path and benefit from the value they create.

Co-ops build more resilient workplaces that are anchored here in this city and build wealth for our families. Co-ops like Child Space that has not only cared for our children, but has been a leader in the child care field for decades, and likewise Home Care Associates, which has been a leader and high road employer in a field racked with exploitation and insufficient resources, these co-ops have served our community and this is the kind of business that we need more of here in the city.

In the FY26 budget, we're asking City Council to include a $1.3 million grant fund to stimulate Philadelphia's co-op economy over the next two to three years. 1 million to fund co-ops directly and 300k to provide pro bono technical assistance to make

sure that those funds are well-utilized. This strategy is modeled after proven successes that we see across the country, especially in Madison, Wisconsin, which doubled their amount of co-ops through this program.

Co-ops face the uphill battle because there's still a learning curve on how the business model works. So we're continually logged out of funding and resources and opportunities that other businesses have, and that's only shrinking with the federal environment right now. And the loss of the BIRT exemption is going to hurt our co-ops even more. We're facing almost 10,000 businesses just in Philadelphia County that are up for close or sale in the coming years because of aging business ownership, and we want to make sure those jobs get

saved and they stay in the community.

We're heartened that City Council declared the Year of the Co-ops earlier this year. Thank you so much for that recognition. And now, we ask you to put that resolution into action, continuing to lead the country and growing the local co-op economy. PACA and the Federation join the alliance for just Philadelphia in fighting for people's budget. No tax cuts, investing in essential city services and in the co-op businesses that ensure our communities are front and center. Thank you so much.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Good afternoon. Thank you to our Council President.

Before I get started, I want to give a shout-out to my Council representative, Councilwoman Cindy Bass and her office. The communication between us has been great.

Today I sit here as a representative Clean Philly Now and the Trash Academy, and I am asking City Council when we look into this budget for 2026 is that we have more balance in how that money is spent. We spend, according to the numbers I looked at about, 23 million for abatement, but very little on prevention and more importantly, enforcement.

Enforcement has to be a part of this Clean and Green initiative that the Mayor is proposing for this city because without it --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Just a point of

information. You know the Mayor just gave the District Attorney a significant amount of dollars and millions to create the Illegal Dumping Task Force to prosecute those folks who are illegally dumping. I don't know if this information is widely known, but that is part of a strategy around Clean and Green. Just wanted to add that to the context of your conversation.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, I am aware of that. But my aspect of that is when it comes to enforcement, it's not strictly law enforcement type enforcement. When we have enforcement of these particular things, it's like with a child. You teach a child something and if they don't do it, if you don't teach them, then there's no enforcement. But when you share that information with them, they're

going to do one or two things.

They're going to get -- you're going to get tired of doing it and they're going to start doing it. Enforcement is stopping people from doing this illegal dumping so that they, because of that, enforcement, have an effort of working towards making it easier for the city to use funds other places because they know that illegal dumping has a price. So all I'm asking for the budget is more money towards enforcement and we can take some of that -- you'll actually have less spending in abatement because the enforcement will pick up. And I thank you all for your time today.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, sir.

MS. WALMSLEY: Hello. My name is Eliza Walmsley and I

proudly live in District 2. Thank you, Council President Johnson, and thank you Councilmembers. I'm urging you all today to increase your budget to Mural Arts to 5.2 million.

When I moved to Philadelphia in 2016, what attracted me to the city is its vibrant art scene and specifically the city's investment in public art. For me art is the fabric of our city that brings every corner of this wonderful city together. The murals brought me here, but their programs keep me here. Let me say that again. The murals brought me here, but the programs keep me here.

What I have since learned since being a donor and volunteer to Mural Arts Philadelphia is that they are far more than murals. Though vitally

important I might argue to making a cleaner and greener Philadelphia, they build individuals and communities up. It isn't just about art. It's about empowerment.

So when you fully invest in Mural Arts, you are saying yes to 2600 Philadelphia students who can participate in art education programs annually. You're saying yes to supporting our formerly incarcerated residents that have a right to work and contribute to our city's success. Yes to the over 10 City of philadelphia partnerships that Mural Arts collaborates with you all on each year. You are also saying yes to economic development and tourism for our great city and yes to fostering community connections one neighborhood at a time.

Look, I know it's fraught. I know you have many

pressing issues that we have heard today facing our great city, but you've got to invest in alternative organizations and solutions like Mural Arts. I personally cannot think of a better use of funds to beautify, inspire and empower Philadelphia. Please increase the budget for Mural Arts to 5.2 million. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MS. SHEPPERD: Hello. My name is Leah Shepperd. I'm a mother, an active voter, a homeowner living in the Kensington section of Philadelphia. I am here on behalf of Alliance for a Just Philadelphia to demand a people's budget. Our city budget must invest in public services that keep communities safe and thriving, especially our marginalized

communities most affected by federal Medicaid and SNAP cuts as well as those most targeted by ICE.

In short, we need safe and equitable work opportunities, safe affordable housing and we need to protect and support our immigrant communities. In order to do this, we need a city budget that stops giving tax breaks to big businesses and increases the funds -- oh, sorry, excuse me, stops giving tax breaks to big businesses, implements a wealth tax for the ultra wealthy and increases the funds for public health efforts rather than increasing police funding.

Most importantly, we need these efforts informed by reliable data based on evidence-backed research. One way to reduce police funding is to stop funding Wellness courts and forced recovery

programs. Evidence-backed research shows forced recovery programs do not work. They are not effective and lead to higher rates of overdose. We need a people's budget rooted in community care and harm reduction rather than criminalization if we truly want to end Philadelphia's crisis with housing and substance use disorder.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MS. SHEPPERD: And since I have a little bit of time left --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Sure.

MS. SHEPPERD: I was not yellow yet. Just a little data to back up the police funding debate, there's some graphs on the Philadelphia Controller site shows data from 2006 to 2013 comparing police funding to homicide rates,

and that shows the police funding is relatively stable. Homicide rates fluctuate up and down multiple times. And then from 2014 to 2020 it shows both the police funding and homicide rates steadily increase.

So I can't say exactly what is causing this, but what it does make clear is that there are other factors contributing to the rise and fall of homicide other than police efforts. So it's a little added. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

Excuse me. The Chair recognizes Councilmember Jones.

COUNCILMAN JONES: So I have a question. What is the average relapse rate of these traditional programs that provide these services? What is the average annual recovery time and

relapse rate?

MS. WALMSLEY:

(Inaudible).

COUNCILMAN JONES: Yeah, thank you. I think that's important. I once upon a time served as a Board member of Genesis 2. I think it was the oldest at the time recovery organization in Pennsylvania. And I'll never forget that at a board meeting I was the Treasurer, signed a lot of checks. That was before the automatic check signing thing, so I got carpal tunnel doing that.

And I asked the question. I said, what was the average relapse rate. And it was something like 97% of the time, something high like that. And my question became, well, if we were in any other industry where 95% of the times at McDonald's the burgers weren't going to work or the cars

weren't going to work, what would be the rationale of doing it the same way over and over again and shouldn't we explore different means to accomplish the goals that we want. And I never ever got the answer. So I thought I would ask you.

MS. WALMSLEY: I agree. I mean, when we should look at other countries too, we should look at other cities, other states to see what people are doing across the world, what has worked across the world. Oh, can you hear me? Sorry.

And I just want to make sure I understand what you're saying. You're saying that there's a 97% relapse rate after forced rehab. Is that what you're saying?

COUNCILMAN JONES: It was not necessarily forced. Some people walked in the door

voluntarily. But the problem is it's not whether how you arrive there. It's the result of whatever it was we were doing, 97% of the time people went right back.

And then there was some more comforting things that came after that. They said, they will keep trying until such time as they are ready. As member Harrity always talks about, it has to come from here. And so, never having been addicted but people -- I'm only six degrees of separation from plenty of people in my family that have gone through recovery. And it wasn't until the time that they looked in the mirror and had that clarifying moment and said enough is enough and the rest became easy.

I'm questioning how are institutions that arguably make a lot of money at providing these services can consistently at 97%,

Mr. President, like we have to think about doing something different. And whatever that is I'm open to it, but I just don't understand how we can say the status quo is okay. This is what I got. I'm sorry.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Member Jones.

MS. WALMSLEY: Could I share a personal experience with you.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Sure.

MS. WALMSLEY: So I help care for three other kids that I did not birth, that are chosen family who each of their fathers died of overdoses. They had all previously were in recovery. They were all great fathers. You could tell -- you knew looking in their eyes they loved their kids.

The reality is that substance use disorder is a

biological issue. It's an issue that is chemical. It's not something that we can control with our minds. Bit's not something that we have -- it's something that people are really struggling with. Addiction is an issue that people -- it's not a choice people are making. That's my point here.

And I want to applaud District Attorney Krasner who in one session suggested and recognized a program that is being used in Portugal that is really effective. It does involve legalization. And with that, there is more control over what is being put into drugs. So with legalization, this government is able to regulate the drug supply and make sure that really dangerous chemicals like what we're seeing now in Philadelphia are not being put into that drug supply.

COUNCILMAN JONES: I did not do that in a adversarial way. But as a true question that somebody who has to make a decision on this, that it is better that I open my mouth and say what I don't understand so that you can and others can educate me so that I do.

MS. WALMSLEY: Thank you for that opportunity.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

These are the last two and then we will break for lunch.

MS. PORBY: Hi. My name is Elowyn Porby. I am the MidAtlantic Regional Director for Vote Solar. We are a nonprofit that works to accelerate a clean energy transition that doesn't leave anyone behind. Thank you for hearing me at the end of a long morning. I'm also a proud resident of Point Breeze represented by

Council President Johnson and I'm a member of the Here for Climate Justice Coalition.

I'm here to urge City Council to fully fund the Philadelphia Energy Authority's $10 million budget request. I know other testifiers today are going to speak to the health and safety, the economic and community benefits of comprehensive home repairs. These are more than enough reason to invest in Built to Last and its ongoing work.

Knowing that those points will be covered, I want to add an additional dimension which is that comprehensive home repairs are a key to unlocking an equitable clean energy transition. As solar energy has improved and become more affordable and as energy bills have increased, it's overwhelmingly clear that going solar is a smart

financial investment for families that are able to make the switch. Yet for many households, solar installation remains out of reach. Not because of solar panel costs alone, but because their homes require fundamental upgrades before solar can safely and effectively be installed.

This creates a significant barrier to clean energy adoption in communities that would benefit from it the most. Funding Built to Last has three major benefits for the clean energy transition here in Philadelphia: First, enabling equitable solar access. Many lower-income households have aging electrical systems, structural issues or roofing problems that must be addressed. When retrofit funding covers these presolar upgrades, we expand who can participate in the

clean energy economy.

Second, maximizing solar investments. An energy efficient home requires a smaller, more affordable solar array to meet its needs. Retrofits effectively multiply the impact of every solar dollar invested. And then third, creating sustainable career pathways. Building a resilient clean Philadelphia takes work and that work can translate to well-paying jobs across the city.

However, these opportunities can remain inaccessible without training programs like PEA's Bright Solar Future. Without addressing fundamental home infrastructure needs first -- oh, that's my time. Okay. Well, yes, I stand with communities across the city and other members of the Here for Climate Justice Coalition and

urging you to prioritize this critical investment as part of this year's budget. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much. 2nd Councilmanic District, appreciate your testimony.

Go ahead, sir. Wrap it up for us.

MR. FIROUZI: Thank you, Council President Johnson and Councilmembers. I won't keep you too long from lunch. My name is Omeed Firouzi and I'm Professor and Director of the Temple Law Low Income Taxpayer Clinic. We serve low-income individuals who have disputes with the IRS, Pennsylvania Department of Revenue and Philadelphia Department of Revenue.

And as such, I'm here to talk about the Mayor's proposal to repeal the $100,000 exemption from the Business Income and Receipts

Tax. We can't talk about this though without talking about the issue of worker misclassification. When workers are misclassified as independent contractors, their employers fail to withhold taxes which means that the workers end up with a higher tax burden and fewer benefits. This happens in a range of industries -- bless you, Councilmember.

This happens in a range of industries across the city, including among home health care workers, staffing workers, school workers and of course people who work in the gig economy. So there are thousands of low-income and middle-income Philadelphians who are affected every year.

So what does this mean in terms of this tax? Well, for the last several years, thankfully these workers when they get a 1099

or are paid in cash and are misclassified, at the very least they're paying the same rate of tax that employees pay, that same 3.75% rate roughly for residents, for example. That's the same rate that I as an employee would pay in terms of withholding.

So that has been consistent because of the fact that there has been an exemption from the Business Income and Receipts Tax for the first 100k of gross profits. So this has allowed these workers to just pay the same rate. Now, of course it's worse for them because they're paying it essentially after the fact out of pocket, but at least they're paying the same amount.

But if we got rid of this exemption, this is going to be an added burden for these folks because it's not necessarily the

case that they even have expenses because they're really employees, so it's not like they're going to be able to claim expenses to have a lower net profits rate. And even if they wanted to challenge their misclassification, there's no clear and direct way to do so before city agencies, and a lot of them are afraid to challenge their misclassification because of retaliation. So that likely means a lot of folks are going to end up paying this Business Income and Receipts Tax, and that's going to be another administrative barrier for a population that's already subject to so many barriers that prevent them from going further. So I hope that you will consider the impact of this policy.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No, thank you very much. We're taking everything in

consideration. Thank you very much.

Council will be at ease until 1:30. Just before you leave, at 1:30 we have to go into the Committee of the Whole to vote on the appointments of those who will be appointed to the Center City District which requires official business as a quorum. Thank you very much. See you at 1:30.

(Lunch recess.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good afternoon, everyone.

(Good afternoon.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good afternoon, everyone.

(Good afternoon.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: This is the public hearing and the public meeting of the Committee of the Whole regarding Resolutions Nos. 250403, 250404, 250405, 250406 and 250407.

I want to thank you all for being here.

Ms. Loughead, will you please call the roll and take attendance.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Squilla.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Gauthier.

COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Driscoll.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Bass.

COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Phillips.

COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember O'Neill.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Thomas.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Jones.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Young.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Harrity.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Ahmad.

COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

Here.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Landau.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Brooks.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember O'Rourke.

COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE:

Present.

THE CLERK: Council President Johnson.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Present. Thank you. A quorum of the Committee is present and this hearing is now called to order.

Ms. Loughead, will you please read the titles of the

resolutions.

THE CLERK: Resolution No. 250403, appointing Chris Cullom to the Board of Directors of the Center City District.

Resolution No. 250404, appointing Allan Domb to the Board of Directors of the Center City District.

Resolution No. 250405, appointing Jim Pearlstein to the Board of Directors of the Center City District.

Resolution No. 250406, reappointing Carol Watson to the Board of Directors of the Center City District.

Resolution No. 250407, reappointing Tina Byles Williams to the Board of Director of the Center City District.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Ms. Loughead, and will you please call the first

panel to testify on the Center City District appointee resolutions.

THE CLERK: Paul Levy from the Center City District.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: How are you doing, Paul. Just state your name and title for the record and please begin your testimony.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much. My name is Paul Levy. I'm Chair of the Board of the Center City District and very pleased to be here. Let me apologize on behalf of Prema Gupta the CEO, who has been in that role since January. She is out of town dealing with an ailing parent at this time so she could not be here.

I'm very pleased to testify in favor of the past listed resolutions. And in keeping with the provisions of Bill '727 which 1990 authorized the creation of the

Center City District, I want to testify in favor of all five nominees. Nominees 3 are individuals recommended by our Board of Directors at their February 2025 meeting to fill vacant seats. Another 2 are filling a different set of vacant seats.

The two Board members we have for renewal terms are Tina Byles Williams and Carol Watson. We have two seats that are vacated that will be occupied until December 2029. Chris Cullom is the Chief Operating Officer of Thomas Jefferson University and Jim Pearlstein, the CEO of Pearl Properties. And then one seat that has been vacated with an expiration term of December 2028, and that would be proposed to be filled by Allan Domb, CEO of Allan Domb Real Estate.

I've attached to my testimony brief professional bios of each of the five new individuals and renewing individuals. Were these nominees to be approved, the Board's composition would be 28% minority, 38% women with a very strong mix of commercial, office, hospitality, retail and cultural representation. That list of the remaining Board members is also attached. Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify and I'll take any questions you may have.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

Any questions or comments from members of the Committee.

Chair recognizes the gentleman from the 5th Councilmanic District, Councilmember Jeffrey Jay Young.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you, Mr. President.

And good afternoon, Mr. Levy. Thanks for being here. Just a quick question for the Board. Composition and makeup of the Board, is there any representation from this body on that Board? Does City Council have a seat on that Board?

MR. LEVY: Traditionally there has not been a member of City Council. The approach has always been to have property owners, businesses and representatives who then are approved by this body.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you. I mean, I ask that because those same property owners and businesses come to us, myself, I'm sure Council President Johnson and Councilmember Squilla as well, with issues that they have regarding just overall quality-of-life stuff

in Center City outside of the things that you all deal with.

I mean, I've even had complaints of property owners about Center City District, right. And so. We're just trying to figure out how we as a body can have a voice, because you are taxing authority that essentially, you know, that some members, you know, everyone's not going to like it, right. And you are a taxing authority and we are essentially held accountable to some of those members as well. So I just wanted to throw that thought out there.

MR. LEVY: Understood. And I would just say we welcome free and open communication, which we have with every member of City Council. So do not hesitate to bring any problems to my attention or to Prema, and I know you've addressed several to her. We

welcome that conversation.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

Are there any other questions or comments from members of the Committee? Is there any witnesses to testify on these resolutions?

Chair recognizes Councilmember Dr. Anthony Phillips.

COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: Just a quick question which is burning for me. I just want to make sure that this Board, Paul, if you could speak on it, can talk about what do they see as part of their vision, what do they see as the most viable strategies for repurposing vacant office spaces in Center City?

MR. LEVY: Sure. I'll be glad to address that. As you know, we've been very fortunate, this body passed a 10-year tax abatement back in 1997 and we've had extraordinary success as a city converting more than 40 major buildings, 10 million square feet, from office to residential.

One way to put it is we've done the easy buildings in the last 20 years, and we have the challenge now of a lot of buildings that don't lay out easily for conversion. And so, certainly we are open to a discussion whether there could be, as the Mayor has proposed, possibly a 20-year abatement for certain buildings.

I think we do need some new tools for some of the harder buildings to do so, a very good track record, but we may need to do more as we move forward and we'd be

glad to share the recommendations that we've given to the Administration in that regard.

COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: Quickly, is residential the only option just out of curiosity or is there anything else for entertainment purposes or community purposes, whatever that --

MR. LEVY: I think you're raising an excellent point. There are a lot of people nationally saying that our downtowns are frankly overcommitted to only office and what we really need to is diversify. Residential is just one of those things. Obviously, education and research hotels, we've converted many buildings. But you're right, entertainment and other uses, and I think the real challenge of the next several years is to maintain as many office jobs as we can and

everything they support, but to think about new industries that we have here. Life sciences obviously is doing well in University City because of proximity, but we need to think differently going forward.

COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: Thank you, Paul.

Thank you, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

Any other comments from members of the Committee?

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Any other witnesses here to testify on the appointment resolutions?

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Hearing none, this concludes the hearing -- thank you very much.

MR. LEVY: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: This concludes the hearing for Resolution Nos. 250403, 250404, 250405, 250406, 250407 and we will now go into the public meeting.

There being no further questions from this Committee and no other witnesses on the list to testify, I will ask if there is anyone else present who wishes to offer testimony on Resolution Nos. 250403, 250404, 250405, 250406 and 250407?

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Hearing none, I want to thank everyone who took time out of schedule, particularly Paul Levy, for participating and we value your opinion. As we are now in our public meeting to consider action

on the following Bills 250403, 250404, 250405, 250406 and 250407, Ms. Loughead, please call the roll.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Squilla.

COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Gauthier.

COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Jones.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Young.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Driscoll.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Bass.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Phillips.

COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember O'Neill.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Thomas.

(No response.)

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Harrity.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Ahmad. Councilmember Ahmad.

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Councilmember Dr. Nina Ahmad, Dr. Nina Ahmad.

COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Present.

THE CLERK: Councilmember Landau.

(No response.)

THE CLERK: Councilmember Brooks.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Present.

THE CLERK: Councilmember O'Rourke.

COUNCILMAN O'ROURKE: Present.

THE CLERK: Councilmember President Johnson.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Present. The Chair recognizes Councilmember Majority

Leader Gilmore Richardson for a motion on Resolutions 250403, 250404, 250405, 250406 and 250407.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Thank you, Mr. President.

I move that Resolution Nos. 250403, 250404, 250405, 250406 and 250407 be reported from this Committee with a favorable recommendation and that the rules of Council be suspended as to permit first reading of this bill, of these resolutions at the next session of Council.

(Duly seconded.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: The Chair notes for the record that Councilmember Gilmore Rich -- no, Councilmember Jamie Gauthier seconds the motion.

It has been moved and properly seconded that Resolution Nos. 250403, 250404, 250405, 250406

and 250407 be reported from this committee with a favorable recommendation that the rules of Council be suspended to permit consideration of these resolutions in our next session of Council.

All those in favor of the motion will signify by saying aye.

(Aye.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Those opposed?

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: The ayes have it and Resolution Nos. 250403, 250404, 250405, 250406 and 250407 will be reported from this committee with a favorable recommendation with the suspension of the rules to permit consideration of these resolutions at our next session of Council.

This concludes the public meeting of the Committee of

the Whole to consider the Center City District appointment resolutions. We will now continue with our scheduled public comment regarding the FY26 budget.

Ms. Loughead, will you please call the next panel to testify during our afternoon session.

THE CLERK: Daniel Betancourt, Anthony Mohammed, Tiffany Johnson, Carol Johnson and Mitesh Patel.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Please state your name for the record and please begin your testimony.

MR. MOHAMMED: Sure. Anthony Mohammed.

MR. BETANCOURT: Dan Betancourt, Finanta.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT

JOHNSON: Thank you very much. Whichever of you want to start first, please begin.

MR. BETANCOURT: I'm going to go ahead and start then. Thank you, Dan Betancourt, President of Finanta, CDFI in North Philadelphia in the Greater Kensington area. Today I'm here to talk about affordable housing for our community, particularly around the unbanked Finanta, who's been part of the American industry empowerment zone for more than 30 years, launched and is the first time we're saying this publicly, has launched a brand new credit union, and that's what I'm here to talk about, and how we're going to address housing citywide.

First of all, we did receive a charter for this brand new bank and we're going to place our very first branch in North

Philadelphia on Kensington and Castor. Yes, and this is not an ordinary credit union. This is a minority depository institutional income designation and CDFI credit union.

The first time in the country it's been done in 25 years that a CDFI started a credit union, so it's a pretty unusual situation. We did start a steering committee citywide. Some members, part of the Administration of course and Councilwoman Quetcy Lozada has been there to table and Commerce department members Karen Fegely and Yvonne Boyd and the whole idea is to provide critical affordable housing options for low-income Philadelphians.

We know that City Council is working on a plan with the Mayor to address housing for those that are underserved in the

city, particularly around the 30,000 housing goal that we have here in the city. Our CDFI addresses housing in two ways: One, the traditional Finanta, the CDFI, provides capital for developers of affordable housing. We've done that through LIHTC, among other tools.

And then finally, the credit union will provide affordable housing in terms of mortgages. And so, what I'm here to really say is we're working with the administration to provide two things: One is contributions to the credit union for this launch and to help capitalize it. And number two, it is to provide a deposit so we can use that capital to lend in our community.

Already within a short amount of time we raised $30 million in deposits. And so, we're

well on our way to provide this brand new public institution here for Philadelphia. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. Just for clarity, so you're saying you're partnering with the Administration to receive funding to support the credit unions to provide funding for those who are becoming first-time homebuyers, correct?

MR. BETANCOURT: Correct.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That's all I wanted to know for the record. Thank you very much.

Go ahead, sir.

MR. MOHAMMED: Yes. Good afternoon, Council President and Councilmembers. My name is Anthony Mohammed and I'm the owner of AM Electric, Inc., an electrical contracting company right here in

North Philadelphia. We've been in business since 2002 doing residential, commercial work all across the city.

We're a small team, just over 10 employees, but we're proud of the work we do and the people we serve. I'm here today because the city's business taxes are holding us back, plain and simple. We've been busting our backs to keep the lights on literally and to keep good employees employed. But every year those tax bills get heavier and it gets harder to grow, harder to take care of our team and harder to stay competitive.

We're not a big corporation. We're small. This is a local working-class operation. We want to build something solid for our families and our community. The hardest part for me as a business owner has been looking

after my employees who show up in the cold, in the heat, working overtime, doing things the right way and not being able to offer them health insurance for a long time, not because I didn't want to but because between taxes, operating costs and keeping payroll, there just wasn't enough left.

We finally started offering some medical insurance for our employees, but it came too late for a few good people who left us for jobs outside the city where companies aren't getting squeezed like we are. That hurt. It wasn't just losing workers, it was just was losing people. I trained people I needed.

I'm not asking for a handout, none of us are, but we need some breathing room. The tax rates in the city are punishing the

people trying to do things the right way.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much, sir.

MR. MOHAMMED: Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Ms. Johnson.

MS. JOHNSON: Hello, hi. My name is Tiffany Johnson. I'm here today to give my testimony about my experience with different city-owned, funded programs, PHDC, Built for Last, TAP. I've been dealing with these programs for the last couple of years and they have helped me and my family, especially my elderly mother that just got out of the nursing home.

For one program, PHDC, they helped me with different home repairs through the Basic Home Modification Program. That program is very excellent. They prevented

me from having to relocate my mother into low income or what have you. They came out very fast. They did a lot of repairs that saved me money. And my mother, she's receiving retirement so it benefited her because she didn't have to spend too much money out of pocket.

The reason I'm here also is to thank you for having these programs. They are well-needed in the community. They help elderly, low-income, people with mental health issues and just people that just can't afford to do repairs. And I think there should be funding sent to these programs because they do help and they do assist people in the community.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

THE CLERK: Next we have

Joselyn Rodriguez-Almendra, Ysis Rivera, Mike Roth and Jorge Gonzalez.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: State your name and please begin.

MS. RIVERA: Good afternoon. My name is Ysis Rivera.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: My name is Joselyn.

MS. RIVERA: We're students at Olney High School and we're here just to express our gratitude and the commitment that the School District has recently shown us for our athletic facility. It's amazing to see the school district investing in our sports field. The improvements that are going to be made will make a great difference in our teams and the school community.

We generally appreciate this initial commitment to enhancing our athletic facility. As we look ahead, we also recognize that to truly bring this project to its full potential and create a top-notch base for our student athletes, further investment will be important for the next phases to begin.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: We're both very grateful for the investment in the sports field. We know that these investments will improve our training environment and overall experience and a greater sense of pride and motivation. However, to truly reach our full potential and embark the next exciting phase of development for our team and facility, further investments will be critical in the upcoming years.

MR. GONZALEZ: Good

afternoon. My name is Jorge Gonzalez. I'm Olney High School Athletic Director and being a Spanish teacher there for seven years. So first I want to express our gratitude to the school district for consideration and proposed budget allocation for Phase 1 and 2 of the renovation of the athletic complex. These four steps are meaningful in (inaudible) in the heart. Development and spirit of the youth and their families.

That said, as we envision the future of this complex we recognize our community need to stand beyond these initiative phases. To truly serve our growing population and to provide a (inaudible) that's accessible in closely and fully functional, we need to go forward. We respectfully ask for you to

continue partnership and advocacy to maintain the Olney athletic complex a full scale reality. With the additional support, we can ensure that these projects become a lasting source of pride, of benefit for everyone in our city. Thank you for your literacy and your commitment to our community. Thank you.

MR. ROTH: My name is Michael Roth. I'm the proud principal of Olney High School. Members of Council, thank you for having us today. I do want to recognize these two students, Isis and Jocelyn, who've been great advocates for the Olney school community while also carrying a course load, while also applying to college, but they have done a tremendous job speaking in front of the school board about this very issue and speaking with the

Philadelphia Inquirer.

Just a little bit of context about our visit here today. I've had the pleasure of serving in leadership capacity in the Olney neighborhood for the last 13 years. During that time, I've served for eight years as the principal of Olney Elementary School and am now in my third year as the principal of Olney High School.

As some of you may know, Olney High School came back to the school district of Philadelphia's control three years ago after a Aspiras Charter was not renewed. In each of those years since becoming a school district of Philadelphia school, we have improved student test scores.

This past year we have had the highest ELA and biology test scores of the last 10 years. We've also established eight majors

that students can select from after their sophomore year, and these majors are focused on giving students skills that can ensure postsecondary readiness.

We are also proud to boast 17 active sports programs. Both of our boys and girls lacrosse teams were in the playoffs yesterday. If my voice is a little hoarse, it's because I was cheering them on. Girls won, boys lost.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: (Inaudible).

MR. ROTH: Lacrosse team, lacrosse. As you've heard from our students, our school community has been advocating that the student athletes no longer have to play in an unacceptable sports complex. I am proud to say that since the school team's advocacy, the school district of Philadelphia has proposed $7.15 million

investment to build a new and modern fieldhouse and put in new fencing.

(Applause.)

MR. ROTH: Yeah, we're really excited about that. This will also add bleachers and a few other items. A vote for approval of this funding is scheduled to go in front of the school board this month. We are grateful to the School District of Philadelphia leadership team and are hopeful for that approval from the board this month.

The student athletes, athletic director and myself have come to Council today to celebrate these needed investments, but we are also asking that City Council, the Mayor and others do not forget that even with these investments, the sports facilities, the students and the communities deserve will

only be half done. I just need 30 more seconds and I'm done.

Our hope is to secure funding for the additional $10 million needed to allow for modern fields and a track where students can safely compete. They cannot run on the track right now. And Jocelyn actually got hurt just a month ago. Her ankle was twisted on our softball field. We would like to thank Councilmember Phillips for his advocacy and hope that other members of City Council will support us in these efforts. So thank you for having us today.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. One second. Don't leave just yet. Don't leave just yet. One, I would like for Dr. Councilman Phillips just to speak on this because he's like the lead advocate.

But any time we have young people in the room speaking truth to power, and I know we have other folks come in the room we get all up and we take pictures with them and smile, but let's stand up and give them a round applause for these young people for doing the right thing.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We just want you to know we support you. You're the future leaders of now. And so, it means a lot that you're here speaking truth to power advocating regarding to your school needs.

The Chair recognizes Councilmember Dr. Anthony Phillips.

COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: Thank you, Council President.

I just want to briefly say thank you to Principal Roth because we met about a year ago or

so as part of this tour that I was doing around the 9th District schools. And immediately in our meeting there was a synergy, because Principal Roth had been thinking about the Olney High School field and its terrible conditions. And I had just driven by the field and I said, what's up with this field.

And so, immediately we both started talking about what is needed and why for decades this field has not been maintained or any support. I mean, we have young people who have to go to the restroom outside. Their bleachers are condemned. They can't even use the bleachers. I mean, the field looked like -- I mean, it was rough and these kids were playing on it like it was just something that they were used to and they are used to unfortunately.

And the reality of matter is that if we take care of this field, we're going to take care of a whole neighborhood in the city of Philadelphia that needs some love.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: So the school district has committed a little bit of funding, which as you said is going to help with some of the bleachers, the fieldhouse and the scoreboard. But that does not help us redo the field itself so Jocelyn can play softball properly and safely as well as the football field.

So now, we're asking for Council to chip in and then we're also getting the state to work on chipping in. So we just need everybody to come together to make it something bigger and better for this neighborhood. I want to thank

Principal Roth and all the students for all the amazing advocacy that you are doing. We got something done and hopefully this body together we can get something done for you all together. Thank you. Appreciate it.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you for your testimony.

THE CLERK: Next we have Malachi Armstrong, Brennan Morag, Catherine Blunt and Thanh Doan followed by Adisa Julian and Ben Clark.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Can you please state your name for the record and please begin your testimony.

MS. DOAN: Good afternoon. My name is Thanh Doan

and the owner of TD1 Agency located 600 Washington Avenue. I'm also the realtor and property investor in Philadelphia since 2014. TD1 Agency was established to sell insurance and assist many business owners in many different ways.

I'm here to testify in support of further reducing the wage tax and Business Income and Receipts Tax. I'm also speaking on behalf of many business owners which are my clients in Philadelphia and including mine.

As a business owner, we are facing financial challenges in many different ways which include all the business expense. The cost of auto insurance in Philadelphia is higher than supper. The increase in the premium have been increased twice as fast. Home insurance, the premium has risen by 30% and higher, also included

commercial insurance premium rising by 7.9 and higher too.

Starting in January 1, 2015 electric bill will increase of approximately 10% and 12.5% of the natural gas bill. September 2024, water bill also increased by 12.3%. Cost of supply have increased and will increase more. Limited parking and crime are also additional disadvantage in Philadelphia compared to New Jersey and many other suburb area.

Property taxes increased and the landlord also increased in rent. The 100,000 exemption being removed will impact all small businesses. This will increase tax liabilities. A lot of my clients moved to Delaware County, Delaware state and New Jersey due to those reasons. My office also have to change to virtual office for that reason.

Instead of paying additional tax, we use this money to reinvest into the business and hire more employees. This will generate more jobs and then more resident want to live in Philadelphia. Every dollar matter when we are running small business. I am in the process of reopen my physical office again in Philadelphia. I were working in Philadelphia since 2018 and so many of my clients, but the need the City need to make grow possibilities. Thank you very much.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MS. BLUNT: Good afternoon, Council President and Councilmembers. I am Katherine Blunt currently in the 3rd District and formerly from the 5th District Jefferson Manor. I am here to

voice concerns regarding Resolution 250214. I'm not opposed to the passage of a city budget that assesses, plans for and addresses the big picture in which the here and now as well as anticipates the economic reality of the city, state and country and the immediacy and in the distant future. The economics of all are intertwined.

Hopefully, we acknowledge the economic recession. Hopefully, we understand its potential negative impact because the economics are interconnected. We understand that our fiduciary responsibility goes beyond the immediacy of our current term in office. It goes to also a responsibility for our constituents, the city and the other terms of office, of other officeholders and extends beyond the current generations to future

ones as well.

I am here to announce and remind, if we don't know, that the people do know that business as usual model that we use for government operations and government funding and spending is really dead. The people on the street know that. We know it is continuously resuscitated by and for and through connected government and corporate operation systems mutually dependent on power politics driven by big money economic. It is a system that is kept alive for a shrinking minority while the large majority of us are left in decay.

I am here to ask you, as Dr. King would, to be our champions. We need you to champion us. I'm not going to quote statistics or any of that because it is already being given to you.

But I'm asking you to be our champions. The people who live here have lived here and will be here when the others go and the others continue to destroy. Stand up for us. Be with us. Hear our voices, share our concerns, and work for us. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. JULIAN: Good afternoon. My name is Adisa and I reside in West. I am here today to express opposition to the proposed budget's allocation of funds. Many of our community leaders, organizers and youth have advocated for themselves and their loved ones, for these Councilmembers entrusted with our welfare to prioritize people over corporate profit and policing.

Many people don't want millions of their tax dollars used on new police stations and training

facilities, upgraded firing ranges or electric bikes. We don't need to fund PPD's access to tactical drones like those used to conduct genocides overseas or to invest in Bluetooth cameras that record once weapons have been drawn.

We don't need to fund riot gear for PPD to weaponize against us when we exercise our First Amendment. We don't need to spend 1.8 million on police recruitment ads and we surely don't need to waste 1.3 million on moisture wick uniforms for the well-being of cops, although maybe the added comfort will make them much trigger happy.

Truly I don't want to see a dime go to the PPD. I'd rather see that 800-plus million reallocated to boost every ask from your constituents. But we know that won't happen. So to my fellow

constituents, when this budget passes mostly unchanged and they ask for your votes between now and November to facilitate incremental change to issues that are killing us daily, I hope that it is understood as a sign to divest from this violent and oppressive institution. And to those elected leaders who are truly advocates for the people but regularly face barriers by the system, I hope that instead of becoming career politicians you choose to mobilize the people away from the suppressive system and towards an equitable Philadelphia. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. ARMSTRONG: Thank you all for hearing me on behalf of the Covenant House Youth Shelter Pennsylvania. I'm Malichi Armstrong, Covent House alumni, ambassador, youth advocate, author

and transformational speaker.

In 2012, the Covenant House saved my life. My story, like so many others who've passed through the Covenant House doors would bring dispirited tears to your eyes leaving you to question humanity. On the other hand, the support we encounter will bring tears of joy, allowing you to believe in the humility of humanity.

I've discovered that people who dedicate themselves to this line of work are raising young adults like myself, that their titles and positions far surpasses expectations and encompasses so much more from employment processes, housing, transportation, food, clothing, parenting, sibling mentoring type relationships, teaching life skills such as paying bills, accountability, et cetera,

are surface and dare not to compare to the lifesaving efforts of staff members pulling crying youth off the edge when our early lives have plummeted.

Today as an author and speaker I empower people to destroy the limits of circumstances and become leaders of life. And I stand with you today humbled, honored and hopeful for every youth stood where I once stood, asking you our decision-makers to make one better decision. Invest not just in charity but in commitment to our children, our community and our country.

Programs like Covenant House can serve youth in shelters who are searching for jobs and in school, with speakers from all industries with entry-level requirements like trucking, cyber security, nursing, finance. Just

like recruiters do in trade school, we change lives by connecting people and systems, aligning programs and creating opportunities that lead to purpose filled lives.

Programs must intertwine and align systematically like partnerships. Resources must highlight companies hiring entry-level employees, high school diploma, GED. Our youth see a different workforce, the gig economy, e-commerce, entrepreneurship. These skills need to be trained and developed alongside of personal and interpersonal growth. Investing in ourselves is our biggest opportunity. It's our biggest investment if we can only accomplish and achieve this together. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

THE CLERK: Next we have

Emily Pugliese, Audrey Patterson, Emily Abendroth, Diana Gonzalez, Bonita Cummings and Desiree Whitfield.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Just state your name for the record and please begin.

MS. PUGLIESE: Good afternoon. My name is Emily Pugliese. I am the Policy Director at Green Building United. We are a regional nonprofit membership organization focused on the equitable transition to a climate-friendly and healthy-built environment through education, advocacy and strategic initiatives.

I am here today to encourage Council to use this year's budget as an opportunity to create a holistic and long-term plan for housing in our city. Yes,

we face a housing crisis in Philadelphia that requires quick and strategic solutions, but it's imperative that we consider the long-term impacts of those solutions so we don't exacerbate future crises.

In 2024, the Parker Administration released their energy poverty alleviation strategy, which found that a quarter of low-income households spend nearly, 20%, 20% of their total income on energy alone. The report also states that 70% of single family homes lack basic air sealing.

We know how to tackle these challenges: Build on the success of the integrated approach championed by the Philadelphia Energy Authority's Built to Last program while continuing to improve Philadelphia's building energy code

to ensure all housing investments citywide are working proactively to combat this energy poverty crisis.

At the same time, utility costs are continuing to skyrocket, as evidenced by recent rate change cases by the Philadelphia Gas Works and Philadelphia Water Department. Climate change will continue to exacerbate these costs in the years ahead. So now is the time to take definitive action to make our housing stock more energy-efficient and resilient. If we don't take action now, we are merely pushing these costs onto homeowners and renters in this city, many of whom are already struggling to pay bills.

Lastly, City Council must remember that Philadelphia and the rest of the nation faces cuts to federal funding and investments,

including the LIHEAP program that helps our most vulnerable neighbors cover the cost of housing. Council should be considering investments in direct energy assistance programs and complementary initiatives like the Shallow Rent Subsidy program to decrease the long-term carrying costs of housing and guarantee our residents comfort and safety in their home.

As the budget is finalized, Green building United asks that City Council fully fund the Philadelphia Energy Authority at $10 million to include $5 million for the Built to Last program, work with the Parker administration to ensure that the H.O.M.E. Initiative and forthcoming changes to building codes prioritize long-term affordability and energy-burden reduction for residents and fund complementary

programs like the Shallow Rent Subsidy program that will ensure housing affordability is possible for all Philadelphians. Thank you for prioritizing affordable, efficient and resilient housing for all.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MS. ABENDROTH: Hello. My name is Emily Abendroth. I'm the Program Manager for Philly Climate Works, which is a project of Sierra Club PA and a proud member of the Here for Climate Justice Coalition. I'm speaking today both -- also, I live in the Cobbs Creek area of West Philly and I thank Councilmember Gauthier for her service as our representative.

I'm speaking today both as a resident who every day sees the dire need for comprehensive

home repair funding access on my own block and as a member of an organization that is determined to join forces with others across the city to fight for the services and resources and dignity that we all need and deserve as many others.

I'm here today asking City Council and Mayor Parker to fully fund the Philadelphia Energy Authority's $10 million budget request, both to support the Built to Last home repair program for low-income Philadelphians and other critical initiatives that they do.

My own life and work experiences have particularly allowed me to see the need, the potential and the impact of the Built to Last program. I live on a low-wealth block where many of my neighbors have been for 30 to 60 years raising multiple generations. Every single house on that block

was built between 1920 to 1925. Very few to none of us have efficient cooling access. There's very little air sealing. And because we are right on the creek, there have been problems for decades with block plumbing, flooding and poor drainage, problems that are only getting worse as the force of storms that we're enduring in terms of amount of rain per hour is increasing.

These houses may have even had difficulty weathering many of these conditions in 1920, but a century of wear and tear on their infrastructure has made them differently vulnerable, and I watch my neighbors all the time do the patchwork repairs that they can, including simply bucketing out water. But in order to do the kinds of things that are long-term repair and remediation, we need the

kinds of programs that Built to Last is that meets multiple kinds of services from multiple programs and braids them together.

I just want to name that this is something that Built to Last uniquely provides. I'm very aware that currently neither the Mayor's budget nor her major H.O.M.E. Initiative include funding for PEA or Built to Last. And it's my hope that this City Council will insist and ensure that both of them do.

I want to also name as a person my support for the package of protections for Philadelphia renters that Philly Thrive and One PA in collaboration with Councilmember O'Rourke's office have pushed so hard for. And I know that despite your busy schedules I'm hoping you will find time and space to hold a hearing

for the Safe Healthy Homes Act this legislative session. And that's it, yeah. Thank you. And I'm here for climate justice. We believe safe, healthy housing on a living, able planet is both essential, achievable and winnable. Please advocate.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Welcome back.

MS. CUMMINGS: Good afternoon, Council President Kenyatta Johnson and Councilmembers. My testimony is actually three minutes. I'm not even going to try to read it, but I would add that it be transcribed into the record in its entirety, along with just some photos that I copied to kind of show around what I'm going to try to just pull some excerpts of this testimony around, you know, this operating and

capital budget plans.

Don't much frighten me for many people who may know me, but this package that was given for 17 members of Council and it is some extra ones that was on the table so Council should have it, I'm here because I know a budget is going to be passed and that's no doubt.

However, I just wanted to say for my community of Strawberry Mansion, and I think I said my name. I'm Bonita Cummings, Director of Strawberry Mansion Community Concern, that you not allow us to be an experiment.

And I'm really -- I lost a son in 2018 to gun violence so I'm very clear about death. And we've all already witnessed in terms of experiments, we've seen it in the public housing highrises, failing in public safety and

producing cruel housing conditions. We saw it in the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment on Negro males. We saw it in Henrietta Lacks and family, the treatment that her family is still impoverished today.

So I say we know every neighborhood needs housing and we are grateful to have an expansive look at housing, but we also have had the experience of being experimented on. So the designs are not in cooperation with what communities are asking. So we want to make sure that in terms of density being created, that it's not created where it creates crime, trash. There's no socioeconomic upliftment as described in these plans.

And my community employment, there's hardly any. Strawberry Mansion residents can't even get jobs at the corner

bodegas. So I'll just ask you all to please not allow us to be experimented on. Don't allow 10 more years to go by while Black males and Black females now get shot down because we've put so much density in neighborhoods with housing with no quality plan as to how that housing should be placed in neighborhoods.

And don't allow this bullying to go on from anyone, particularly these powerful housing organizations, the zoning board, planning commissions, unions, because your neighborhoods or your districts are next. And if Strawberry Mansion gets overrun with excessive housing that creates too much density, it places our boys on street corners, our girls on street corners. They have nowhere to go, just houses stacked on top of each other and nowhere

for them to go. So I just want to say thank you. Please don't experiment with us one more time, particularly with public housing.

Right now they're just not calling them highrises. They're shortrises, but we're packing each other up on top each other. So thank you for your time and for hearing the voices that are too often left out of the rooms where decisions are made. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

THE CLERK: Next we have Rob Zuritsky, Burnell Goldman, followed by Mitesh Patel, Jigar Mehta, Loc Pham and Michael Pennyman.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

MR. ZURITSKY: Good

afternoon.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good afternoon. How you doing today?

MR. ZURITSKY: Really good.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That's good. Just state your name officially for the record.

MR. ZURITSKY: Robert Zuritsky representing the Philadelphia parking industry. And I'm happily joined here by a lot of the people in the parking industry. If you would all please stand up and just wave to our friends in Council here. Thank you.

Also joined by Burnell Goodman, who operates a couple of hotels in the market. He's just one of the people that are concerned about not having enough parking in Center City going

forward. So thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm here to bring to light the crisis affecting every Philadelphian's access to affordable parking.

Over the last 10 years, Center City has lost over 10,000 parking spaces, 62 private facilities and more than 500 jobs due to the unsustainable tax policies. It no longer makes sense to operate and maintain offstreet parking in Center City, Philadelphia. Over half of everyday parkers are Philadelphia residents. There are teachers, nurses, trade workers and families who need affordable convenient parking to reach their jobs, medical appointments and local businesses.

If we don't act, the consequences are severe. In addition to making it harder on

constituents, we risk 2000 living-wage jobs in the parking industry, $150 million in annual tax revenue that our industry generates for the city as well as our ability to host major events like the FIFA World Cup and All-Star Games coming next year, events that allow Philadelphia to shine on the world stage.

The problem is clear: Parking facilities face the highest tax burden in the city. Some facilities facing over 60% of what they collect. I am urging the City Council to re-evaluate just one of the 13 taxes and fees that are paid by offstreet parking lots, specifically the Use & Occupancy tax, which uniquely penalizes private -- I'm going to just keep going, private parking operators and taxes lots as if they are open, 24/7 and filled 24/7.

Fortunately, the Tax Reform Commission has recommended a solution, eliminate the U&O tax on parking facilities while increasing street meter rates $1 per hour in commercial areas. Data analysis shows that would generate the funds needed to provide U&O tax relief.

I urge this Council to adapt this reform to protect jobs, maintain accessibility and ensure stable revenue for our city's future. We need to act now if we want to keep offstreet parking viable. Philadelphians deserve and need affordable, available transportation options. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MR. GOLDMAN: Good afternoon, Council President, fellow Councilmembers. My name is

Burnell Goldman. I'm the area GM for the Windsor Suites Hotel and the Model by Hilton Philadelphia, Rittenhouse Square. Between those two hotels, we have well over 100,000 guests, tenants, visitors that stay at our combined hotels every year. And we employ at least 75 employees directly. And then indirectly with our partners, there has to be well over 100 other people that work on the building with our restaurant partners and other vendors that support our hotel.

I just wanted to kind of echo some things that Rob just mentioned. Just overnight parking at our hotel at most hotels in the city are anywhere from $65 to $75. So if you think about it, a guest that may pay that times two because they come in on a Friday or Saturday, right, and the room rate

isn't much more than the cost of that parking. If you combine the two days and add them together, it's like here for a third night if you're staying for two nights. So if you -- and this is just everyday folks that are staying at the hotels, right.

You know, after the pandemic we had to rely -- we do rely on more leisure business than we do business travelers. So this is mom and pops. These are people that you know that do staycations and your relatives that come and stay at our hotels.

A lot of our employees choose to park because of the limitations with SEPTA. We all know what's going on with that currently, right now, so our employees do depend on parking as well but it is expensive.

As you well know, the

hotels pay 15.5% tax. Parking right now is even higher than that at 22.5. So if you think about it, the parking -- the higher the tax for our parkers, the worse it's going to be for those 100,000 guests, those tenants, those residents, everyone who comes to stay and our employees at our hotels. So I'm just asking you to not increase that tax because it will have an effect on all of your friends, families, visitors, anyone who's coming to the city of Philadelphia will just be passed right on to them. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. State your name for the record and please begin your testimony.

MR. PATEL: Hi. My name's Mitesh Patel. I'm here to discuss the proposed budget and

more importantly the tax implications. It's weird for me to be talking about it because I am an S Corp/LLC so I understand I'm on the BIRT and the revenue side, but I feel like a lot of the businesses in my area are going to be tremendously affected by being incorporated.

I can figure out my taxes on maybe two pieces of paper. When I looked the credits and the 60% and the different numbers, I feel as though those who are unincorporated are going to have a hard time figuring it out. They will need accountants. They will probably need more resources and they may also look at possibly not even declaring whatever income, just to try and figure out what it is that's being asked of them.

I feel as though there could be better ways. I have

reached out to the Asian American Chamber, and their recommendations would not increase like their rate of tax that I am seeing that is being proposed on the individuals that are already having a hard time in the community. And having property there I can already see the insurance rates are high. We're going to add on this extra tax. I don't understand how businesses are going to open up in a struggling area.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much, sir.

MR. MEHTA: Thank you. My name's Jigar Mehta. Thank you, Council President. Thank you, Councilmembers. Mitesh Patel, he did call the Asian Chamber, but he also called me. I'm a dear friend of his for many, many years and I'm here basically for him. He asked me to explain this in the way that

I can best explain it.

He asked me first, he said, Jigar, that's great, all this corporate stuff, unincorporated stuff. He goes, what about the guy who makes $100,000 of revenue and $65,000 income? That's the Area Medium Income in Philly. $65,000 -- if you're making $65,000, the max rent you could probably pay is about $1,600, $1,500 best. That's the affordability max you're going to do. That's Northeast Philly. We grew up in Northeast Philly.

So he said, he goes, what is this going to do to them? I said, this is what it's going to do to them. This is going to be an increase. If you get rid of the $100,000 exemption, this is going to be an increase of 1652 for that person that makes $100,000 revenue and $65,000 income. That's the

1099 contractor. That was the man who testified earlier before. That's a 1099 person that can't get a job because they've been just as impacted. They're not going to be able to get a W2 job so they start their own business. This is the immigrant who cannot speak English who has to survive for their family. They're the ones who are going to get impacted by this.

And then here's the worst part about it: Because of the way this is structured with the, you know, we went through to do the math, what would happen with them is very, very complicated how the tax credits of taking a 60% BIRT tax credit, applying it to the NPT so you can get a new, fair, equitable tax base, that was very, very complicated. That is also going to increase the estimated payment.

So the impact on that person making $65,000 for that first year is going to be $4,437. They ain't making it. They're not making it. So what they're going to have to do is they're going to tell their kids, honey, we're not paying rent this month or they're going to go underground. They're not paying their taxes. They're not going to do it. I cannot imagine. That's what Mitesh told me. He's like Jigar, this is going to be a bad problem.

So what we are proposing. And now, look, I'm not proposing this through the Asian Chamber, okay. I'm proposing this as a friend. We have a lot of work, there's a lot of math, there's a lot of legal stuff that we got to figure out. But what we're saying is that right now let's get rid of -- well, Mitesh

first said let's make sure we keep the receipts part of the tax, the BIRT tax. There's a receipts component where you got to pay .010141. Let's keep that part. So if you're making $100,000 that's $141 actually you're going to have to pay that you didn't pay before. Okay.

The other part of it though he said was that eliminate the income component of that BIRT, because what this does today and what it's going to do is that you're going to have a double tax on income when we get rid of this exemption. All right. So you're going to get the tax on -- first you have the receipts tax, but then you're going to have an income tax on the BIRT, but now they're also going to be paying the NPT tax. All right.

Now, what happens that

they're going to have to try to figure out this -- okay. They're going to have to figure this out. They're not going to be able to figure it out, so they're going to have to hire a lawyer, they're going to have to hire an accountant. I just know the people that we grew up with, the immigrants that we grew up, I know the guys that have been just as impacted, they're not going to do that. They're not going to be able to do it.

So we're asking is to keep the receipts tax, eliminate the BIRT for income, and then maintain the NPT equivalent to whatever the folks that are working are paying. So that's basically it. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Councilmember Isaiah Thomas.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Thank you, Council President.

I just want to say thank you for your testimony. What you have just communicated is something that I've been trying to get folks to understand for a few weeks now since the idea of us even discussing the possible elimination of the $100,000 exemption. I don't think we realize how catastrophic this is going to be, not just for small businesses, but someone earlier even testified about independent employee. Now, maybe I'm a DJ or I'm in a creative economy, right.

Us getting rid of the $100,000 exemption while simultaneously not reducing the net income portion of BIRT will make it so that everybody in the creative

economy will leave Philadelphia. They will say there's no point in being in the city of Philadelphia because not only are you going to tax me on my $15,000 promotional check because I got a lot of followers on social media, not only am I going to have to pay a wage tax on that later on, after that money is already spent, the City of Philadelphia is going to come back and we're going to tax you again not once, but twice.

So that means that a person who's just a content creator who has a lot of followers on social media will now be taxed three times. So I just wanted to put an exclamation point on this, Council President, because I've been hearing a lot of people come down and say that we're looking at tax cuts for big corporations and big businesses.

Unfortunately, when you cut taxes, the uniformity clause says everybody will benefit from it. But I can tell you firsthand that if this Council body doesn't do something, doesn't do something about the current tax structure that we are in and we adopt this proposal as is, we will look up and we will have pushed the entire creative economy out of Philadelphia. Musicians, filmmakers, artists, sports folks, tech people, gig economy is all going to go.

So your testimony inspired me. Someone earlier had similar testimony and I just wanted to put an exclamation point on exactly what you said. Because when we say it here, we're sell-outs. But this is a regular Philadelphian telling us this is what's going to happen to the

industry. So I appreciate you, sir.

Thank you, Council President, for the little bit of leeway.

(Applause.)

MR. MEHTA: Sir, can I make one comment? Can I make one comment, sir?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: (Gestured).

MR. MEHTA: You talked about uniformity clause. So that's the one thing that I was looking into. So this will meet the uniformity clause. Because what it is, is that there's two classes. He is a corporate, I'm unincorporated if we're talking about the gig people.

So we can just eliminate the income BIRT component for the unincorporated to save these guys. And still I love my brother, but

he's going to have to pay those taxes. That's okay. And we talk about law firms now. Law firms are unincorporated, but they were taking advantage of this complicated 60% tax credit so their reduction by us eliminating that net income component, the BIRT, is only going to be .00264. All right. That's not a windfall. They got a break. Good lawyers. That's why the -- I'm not going to get in it. But thank you. Thank you. Sorry about that.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes Councilmember Jeffrey Jay Young.

COUNCILMAN YOUNG: Yeah, that testimony just provided some clarity for me. One of my best friend's full-time job is he drives Uber and they get 1099s, right. So now, our Uber drivers are going to

now have to pay BIRT because they don't make $100,000 a year, right. So they're going to have to pay BIRT. So that's something I think we as a body need to really think about how we can provide some relief to some of our most vulnerable workers in the city.

So thank you, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Member Young.

THE CLERK: Next up we have Jovan Goldstein, Tyisha Beckham, Susan Segal, Rashida Price and Diana Coleman.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good afternoon.

MS. PRICE: Good afternoon. How are you today?

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Very well. How are you?

MS. PRICE: I'm doing great.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Great. State your name for the record and proceed.

MS. PRICE: My name is Rashida Price. I am here today speaking on behalf of One PA West Southwest Rising. I want to express our deep gratitude to the Office of Clean and Green Initiatives and its remarkable coordination across city agencies which have brought meaningful improvements to our neighborhoods, particularly in addressing blighted and vacant properties.

We are encouraged by the progress made and appreciate the openness of L&I's staff and City Councilmembers in supporting our community-driven efforts to report and resolve unsafe properties. We are also looking forward to seeing

how the Mayor's H.O.M.E. Initiative will address blight and vacancy.

I am here to highlight an urgent gap in our city's approach to property stabilization. While programs exist to clean vacant lots and demolish imminently dangerous buildings, there remains no program to address thousands of unsafe, abandoned properties that pose significant risk to residents that yet remain untouched.

In November 2021, City Council passed a bill creating the Necessary Urgent Repair program, adding it to the Philadelphia maintenance code. However, despite its passage the program has never been implemented. In the 3rd District alone where I'm a resident, there are over 400 unsafe abandoned properties, homes that deteriorate more each day, increasing crime and violence,

damaging neighboring homes and eroding the integrity of our communities, until demolition becomes the only option which is a wasteful and preventable outcome.

We believe that stabilizing these buildings aligns with the Mayor's goal of building and preserving 30,000 homes. We have spoken to neighbors forced to coexist with raccoon colonies, homes where leaking roofs have destroyed adjacent properties and streets that wreak of sewage due to unchecked leaks.

We urge the Council and the Mayor to consider allocating funds within the H.O.M.E. Initiative to establish the Necessary Urgent Repair program or at the very least to create programming that effectively addresses its objectives. Stabilizing these properties would

not only prevent unnecessary demolition but also contribute to the broader goal of preserving and expanding housing across Philadelphia.

By investing in urgent repairs and holding property owners accountable for costs, the City can take a proactive approach to protecting neighborhoods and ensuring safer, more livable communities.

(Applause.)

MS. SEIGEL: Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the Mural Arts program. I'm Susan Siegel. I reside in the 2nd Councilmanic District. Since 1993 I've had the good fortune to partner with Jane Golden in Mural Arts on a variety of projects, and that's 32 years of watching the organization grow.

I helped fund and commission a dozen neighborhood murals while running Philadelphia's Welcome America festival. And while working a corporate foundation, I helped fund two murals depicting the legacy of President Clinton, President Lincoln, that included working with five school district middle schools learning about the history of Lincoln and mural-making, and those are located in Center City at 8th and Market and 7th and Chestnut. And I hope we've done our part to help beautify and inspire.

I also helped oversee and fund the private-public partnership of their office on Mt. Vernon Street. And of course, I participated in numerous paint days and events. From this three-decade perspective, I come to you today to strongly advocate that Council not

only support the 3.7 million budget requests but increase the allocation by $1.5 million for a total funding of 5.2 million.

You have heard testimony from others about the impact of their work on artists, students, the incarcerated and the community writ large. In addition to this impact, the amount of publicity Mural Arts has garnered for Philly is priceless, including national and international articles, news, features and awards. They are an economic driver for tourism and artists. The impact of these tourist dollars is invaluable. Artists and civic leaders throughout the country and world come to Philadelphia to learn from Mural Arts.

Mural Arts is a best in class organization. As others have testified, for every dollar they

receive they churn out way more value. We know how important Mural Arts is to Philly and how lucky we are to have their creativity, energy and care here. Their program aligns well with Mayor Parker's safety, economic opportunity, education and clean green initiatives. It's a wise investment and I thank you for making the full investment at 5.2 million. And I thank you all for everything you do for the city.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: State your name for the record and proceed.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: Good afternoon, Councilmembers. My name is Jovan Goldstein. I'm here today to advocate for aggressive tax reductions, not just as a fiscal policy but a necessary step to revitalize our economy, support

existing businesses and attract new ones that will create much-needed jobs for Philadelphia residents.

I speak from both professional experience and personal commitment. I am the managing partner and founder of JT Goldstein, which is a full service CPA firm based in Philadelphia in the Logan Square section of the city. We provide audit, tax and business advisory services to clients across the country.

I have been practicing as a certified public accountant for 25 years. I was born and raised in Philadelphia, a proud product of the Philadelphia school system and I still call this city my home. And full transparency, I am also the Board Chair of the African American Chamber of Commerce of PA, New Jersey and Delaware. I sit on the City's Tax

Commission appointed by Council President Kenyatta Johnson and contribute on several boards, including PIDC, the Economic League, to help move our city forward.

I share this background not just to establish my qualifications to speak on tax policy, but to underscore my deep roots to Philadelphia. I'm committed to this city. But let me be clear, that's a personal decision. If I were deciding strictly from a business perspective, I would have already moved just my firm a few blocks away to City Line Avenue, where the tax burden is significantly lower.

Now, I don't get paid to offer personal advice. I earn a living by helping businesses make smart business decisions that have to be efficient. And I want to

share three real-world scenarios I encounter often to illustrate how Philadelphia tax environment is costing us jobs and economic growth: Scenario 1, the out-of-town business owner. A prospective client from out of town will call me and ask, should I headquarter in Philadelphia? And after analyzing the cost-revenue potential and most critical tax implications, I cannot in good conscience recommend Philadelphia, unless 100% of their revenue is generated here. Most businesses will have substantially saved significantly by just moving to other jurisdictions in our suburbs.

Scenario 2, growing a Philly-based business. I have a client based in Philadelphia who provides national services. They've grown from 2 million to 23 million in just four years. They

love the city. But again, I'm hired to help them stay tax-efficient. We're currently analyzing their move right now and unless something significantly changes, they're likely to take their jobs, tax revenue and future growth with them. And what's sad about this circumstance, we're not just losing businesses. We're losing the businesses we help grow.

Scenario 3, the uncapitalized small business. Another client, small diverse business, she's fluctuating annual revenue. 150,000 they start, then they can go up to 300,000 and then drop back down to 150,000. They want to grow, but they're afraid to hire. Why? Because of the wage tax rate. It makes them uncompetitive when hiring talent that could just easily work in the suburbs and receive what we call a

raise. That fear of hiring stalls our growth and limits capacity and keeps them trapped in a cycle of unperformance -- I'm almost done. I'll close out.

These are not hypotheticals. These are daily conversations in my line of work. And in each case I must give sound business advice, not sentimental advice. If the numbers don't work, I can't tell someone to stay in Philadelphia just because I did.

In closing, I'm not here to argue that we shouldn't pay taxes. I believe in paying my fair share. I see the value of our government and what it provides, but I'm deeply concerned about Philadelphia's longstanding trend of job loss and reliance on nonprofits exempt from real estate taxes and the burden we place on wage earners and businesses

instead.

If we want to grow a city, we must make it competitive. That means making it easier, not harder for businesses to thrive here. That means growing the pie, not slicing it thinner. And that means acting boldly and urgently to reduce our tax burden or we will continue to lose to the suburbs despite having more assets, more talent and more potential.

Councilmembers, I will continue to live and have my business here. But without serious tax reform, I will also continue to advise my clients that Philadelphia might not be the best place for them to do business. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you for your testimony.

Please state your name

for the record and proceed.

MS. BECKHAM: Good afternoon, Councilmembers. My name is Tyisha Beckham and I'm the proud owner of Noire Hair and Wax Salon located in South Philadelphia. Since opening our doors in 2019 we've built more than a business. We've built a community. We currently employ four amazing individuals and serve a loyal clientele who see Noire as a safe space, a welcoming space.

I'm here today not only as a business owner, but as a resident deeply rooted in Philadelphia's economic future. I urge you to consider how critical tax reform is, especially for small minority business owners like me. Like many minorities, I started Noire with limited capital. Every year a large portion of our profits are swallowed up by city taxes,

Business Income and Receipts Tax, net profits tax and more, leaving very little to reinvest. That means delaying equipment upgrades, limiting staff raises and pausing plans to expand. And yet we keep pushing for it.

I'm currently preparing to open a second business, a coffee shop in West Philadelphia set to launch in 2025. But in the current tax climate I have real concerns about whether I can grow this dream into reality. We're not asking for favors. We're asking for a fighting chance. Every extra tax dollar is a missed opportunity to hire, to invest, to give back. Tax relief would allow us to reinvest in our neighborhood, support other small vendors and drive local job creation. Philadelphia has the opportunity to lead with policy that supports growth, equity and

sustainability. Tax reform isn't just about tax dollars and cents. It's about creating space for all business owners to succeed. Thank you for your time, your continued commitment to our city's future.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you for your testimony today.

THE CLERK: Calling up Ben Clark, Diana Coleman, Karen Lee, Antonio Lewis, Nancy Garrick.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good afternoon.

MR. CLARK: Good afternoon.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Please state your name for the record and proceed.

MR. CLARK: My name is Ben Clark. I'm a resident of the 2nd District and I'm an attorney at

Community Legal Services. I help low-income clients maintain access to life essential utility services, including by getting access to much-needed home repair programs in our city.

I'm here today with several current and former clients that we've assisted to urge you to fully fund our city's home repair programs in this year's budget. The need for home repairs runs deep and wide. As you've heard today and in recent years, Community Legal Services has represented nearly 1000 low-income homeowners with serious repair needs. These clients come from every single Council District. They're young adults in their 20s, single parents in their 40s and homebound seniors in their 70s.

CLS's multiple units assist these clients with a wide

range of legal needs, and that means we're uniquely positioned to see how a repair need today can cause a crisis tomorrow. I want to paint a picture for you of what that can look like.

For one client of ours, a busted pipe meant they almost lost their children. An unexpected plumbing malfunction and subsequent water shut off led DHS to open an investigation and threaten custody of their children. In another, an elderly client's oil heater broke down this past winter and he didn't have the funds to replace it. When he reached out to us, he was confined to his bed because the cold aggravated his arthritis. Blankets and a space heater were the only sources of heating in his home.

Other clients face a heartbreaking choice, go deeper

into debt or sell a family home passed down through generations just because they can't afford to fix a broken roof. And dozens of new cases arrive in our office every week from low-income Philadelphians threatened with electric and gas shutoffs. Often their high utility bills are caused by drafty energy efficient homes -- inefficient homes, excuse me.

Our city's home repair programs go right to the root of these compounding crises. Repairs save lives. They keep families together. They preserve generational wealth and repairs keep the lights on, the water running and the house warm. So I urge you to provide full and robust funding to Build to Last and the Basic System Repairs Program this year and long into the future until every Philadelphian lives in a

safe, dignified, energy-efficient home. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. CLARK: And if I may, I just want to note for the record that several folks were not able to come testify in person today because of work or health obligations. But, Councilmembers Bass, Gauthier, Lozada, Squilla and Young, you'll be receiving testimony from constituents of yours with home repair needs via email. Thank you very much.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you. We look forward to receiving it.

Okay. Please state your name for the record and proceed.

MR. LEWIS: Hello, everyone. My name is Antoine Lewis. I'm a member of One PA Southwest Rising. We are here -- I'm here today to talk about our

Safe Healthy Homes campaign. I've had friends in my neighborhood forced out of their homes. Unfortunately, there are other people in our shoes who are close to losing their family homes as well because their family can't afford to make home repairs.

To make matters worse, the current home repair list has a waitlist over 10,000. We don't want to move. We don't want to move. I've been living in West Philly for 25 years. This house has been in my family since 1963. We need Healthy Homes campaign to keep our family living into the community of West Philadelphia. At an alarming rate, people are being forced out of their homes. I want to stay in my home. Would you like to stay in your home?

The current budget proposal actually cuts funding for

home repair programs. That's why we are asking for $40 million for Basic Systems Repair and $10 million for Built to Last. Currently the Built to Last has no money in the budget. I want to stay in the community and I need home repairs, not fast cash for my home like most other citizens have to deal with. Does that make sense for a city battling homelessness to cut its budget for home repair programs? I think not. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

MS. LEE: Greetings. My name is Karen Lee and I'm a member of One PA West Southwest Rising. As a member of One PA, we applaud Mayor Parker's historical H.O.M.E. Initiative to address these problems. And with a few tweaks, this initiative will reach the people who need it most.

However, there is one area that One PA would like to focus on and hope that you support our efforts. Home repair programs like Basic Systems Repair and Built to Last are critical to preserving homes and combating gentrification. The current proposal would actually reduce funding for these programs while increasing home eligibility. That doesn't make sense.

The Basic Systems Repair program already has a backlog of more than 7000 households to receive emergency repairs that includes plumbing, heating and electrical problems. All of these are emergency issues that need to be addressed like yesterday.

Raising income eligibility to $100,000 further exacerbates an already extensive list of residents who have waited months, years to receive this

service. As a recipient of Basic Systems Repair more than a decade ago, my home was almost condemned before I was able to get the much-needed repairs that started out as minor but were almost catastrophic by the time my name came up on their list.

One PA also supports the Built to Last initiative because it too addresses home repairs, energy conservation and safe, healthy homes. We support the Mayor's vision through this new initiative. And in that support, we're asking $40 million for Basic Systems and also $10 million for Built to Last to assist those who need much-needed home modifications to city residents who want to maintain in their homes. Thank you for this opportunity. And, yes, redevelopment and investment can be beneficial but never would it

prioritize its profit over people.
Thank you.
(Applause.)
COUNCILWOMAN BASS:
Thank you for your testimony.
State your name for the record and proceed.
MS. GARRICK: Hi. My name is Nancy Garrick. I'm a member of One PA West Southwest Rising. I want to reiterate the previous request that there be a hearing for the Healthy Homes Renters initiative, proactive rental inspections, that it be scheduled very soon.
I'm here to talk about BLT -- basic -- BLT and BSRP. Philadelphia is a city of rowhomes. When one home falls into disrepair or is demolished, there are problems with the adjacent homes. There was an article in The Inquirer this week about the

problems one family had to deal with when the home next to them collapsed. We have to remember that we have wonderful housing stock here in Philadelphia and we need to preserve the homes that we already have.

There's no way that we can build our way out of the current housing -- current housing shortage. Programs like Built to Last and Basic Systems Repair allow folks to stay in their homes, and we've already heard very compelling testimony of why this is important. It's also essential that we focus on the folks who earn less than $30,000 a year because they have less resources to fall back on.

And finally, the reason these things are important it's -- and this is really important. If people can stay in their homes, it preserves the social fabric of

their neighborhood. It provides generational wealth for them to pass on to their children and it also counteracts gentrification.

In closing, I just want to say people who have benefited from Built to Last and Basic Systems Repair can confidently say this is my home and I'm not going anywhere. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

THE CLERK: All right. The next group up is Cheryl Dondero, Cherie Brummans, Lesley Corey, Javi Alvarado, Jeannine Lisitski, Mia McGuire, Jordan Brogan and Michael Pearson. And apologies for any mispronunciation.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good

afternoon. Please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MS. BRUMMANS: Hi. Good afternoon. I'm Cherie Brummans. Thank you, Council President Johnson and esteemed members of City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today so that we can talk about a pressing issue and, that is, the urgent need for increased human services funding at the city level.

My name is Cherie Brummans. I live in the city of Philadelphia in the Fairmount section. I serve as President and CEO of the Alliance of Community Service Providers. We are an association located in Philadelphia that works with Philadelphia-based nonprofits and we represent organizations that serve children and families, adults living with

mental health conditions, substance use disorders, intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism.

Our member organizations form a vital part of Philadelphia's human services infrastructure. Most of their funding comes through Medicaid, which as we have all been paying attention to recently, is currently under tremendous threat at the federal budget reconciliation process. Although this is a fluid situation, we're unlikely to know exactly the extent to which Medicaid cuts will occur by the time this body passes its budget.

While the full impact of potential Medicaid cuts is still unfolding, we must be prepared for the reality that fewer dollars and greater barriers to access are ahead of us. Federal Medicaid cuts

would reduce funding for providers and reduce or eliminate some services altogether. This will have a debilitating and destabilizing impact on the entire human services ecosystem in the city of Philadelphia.

Think hospitals -- this will weaken the safety net and increase systemic burdens downstream. So think hospitals, jails, foster care, all of the other systems that are impacted when human services are not delivered to people in an effective way. We also compromise the values of equity, dignity and accessibility that these organizations strive to uphold.

We understand that no city, Philadelphia included, can completely absorb the impact of deep federal or state funding cuts. What we are asking for is budgetary

flexibility so that the city can step in strategically where support is most critical, despite the challenges we face. I want to acknowledge and appreciate the intentional work that this Council and Administration have done to support our sector, from the Kensington Caucus to the Majority Leader's Nonprofit Task Force and the Committee on timely payments, we've seen a genuine commitment to recognizing the value of human services and those who provide them.

Thank you again for your time and leadership and your continued partnership. I'm proud to be joined today by several of our provider member organizations who will offer their own perspective on what's needed to protect and strengthen the safety net in Philadelphia for the

individuals who are the most vulnerable among us. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you for your testimony.

State your name for the record and begin.

MS. DONDERO: Hi. I'm Cheryl Dondero, Director of Government Affairs for Gaudenzia. Thank you, Council, all of you that are here. I am very pleased to represent Gaudenzia and offer this testimony. Gaudenzia was founded in Philadelphia in 1968 with a single treatment program. Today we are the largest Commonwealth's largest nonprofit provider of substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders and housing programs. We work with so many of you. We have programs in 8 out of 10 of the Philadelphia districts.

We join with the other

providers of the Alliance today to express deep concern regarding any reductions of federal funding for the Medicaid program and its impact on Philadelphia's budget and its citizens in Philadelphia. Gaudenzia employs many people at our facilities where we provide vital treatment for substance use and mental health disorders and provide housing.

Our treatment programs not only benefit those in need of care, but they also have a significant economic impact in the local community through taxes, contractors, supplies and personal spending. Systemwide nearly all of Gaudenzia's revenue comes from Medicaid funding. Any cuts to Medicaid would significantly jeopardize the livelihoods of our staff and put many, if not all, of these jobs at risk. Simply

Medicaid cuts will close programs due to the nature of the progression of mental illness and substance use disorder.

Many of our patients have already lost everything without Medicaid. They're simply not going to disappear. They're going to show up in emergency rooms and homeless services and foster care and criminal justice systems and emergency response. Behavioral health treatment breaks the cycle of disease and dysfunction, enabling individuals to return to productive lives. Any savings from Medicaid cuts would far out be outweighed by the increased burden on our communities. Rooting out fraud, abuse and waste in public programs is admirable, but must be approached thoughtfully and precisely.

In closing, please know

that Gaudenzia is available to you to discuss creative solutions with the City and follow-up meetings as the Medicaid situation evolves. We encourage and hope you will build flexibility into the City's budget. In anticipation of these cuts, Medicare cuts put at risk every program and person who testified today.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you for your testimony.

DR. LISITSKI: Good afternoon --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good afternoon, Jeannine.

DR. LISITSKI: -- City Councilmembers. Good to see you all.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good to see you. Please state your name for the record and proceed.

DR. LISITSKI: Yes. My

name is Dr. Jeannine Lisitski, President and CEO for Mental Health Partnerships. We've been transforming mental health care for nearly 75 years, beginning with advocates with lived experience who helped to close state psychiatric hospitals and push to reinvest in community-based care.

We believe recovery is possible for everyone, especially with support from peers who have walked similar paths. Today our peer-driven model supports nearly 9000 individuals and families annually, from homeless outreach and mobile peer support to residential care, case management, family advocacy and much, much more. We're also a national leader in training certified peer professionals, helping people move from disability to employment and from isolation to empowerment.

This work strengthens our communities. It reduces the pressure on emergency services and builds a pipeline to stability. But as you know, that pipeline is under threat.

Flat city contracts have made it impossible to sustain prior service levels, leading to reduced access. Further cuts would jeopardize our ability to operate and endanger critical services for those who need them most. As federal and state cuts loom, I urge City Council invest now in the community-based providers who keep Philadelphians housed, healthy and safe. And I invite you to meet with us as the Medicaid landscape evolves to explore solutions together. Let's build flexibility into this year's budget to weather the rainy days ahead and ensure our communities continue to thrive.

Thank you for your leadership, your amazing commitment to the well-being of our entire community. Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you for your testimony.

Okay. Please state your name for the record and proceed.

MS. BROGAN: My name is Jordan Brogan. I am the CEO at Center for Families and Relationships. We're a nonprofit outpatient mental health organization providing individual and family therapy services along with psychiatric evaluations and medication management to families all across the city. We specialize in family and trauma counseling.

Through our outpatient we serve an average of 800 clients, families a week. Our focus is working with the family system not only to reduce symptoms in the

individual, but to help break patterns in the system that perpetuate those symptoms, helping lead to lasting change for the family as a whole.

97% of the work we do is supported through Medicaid. We also have a grant-funded program called Together through Trauma, which is a systemic approach to gun violence treatment. This program provides trauma counseling, community workshops and trauma-informed staff training in six Philadelphia recreation centers located in zip codes most impacted by gun violence.

Our final program, Children Deserving Services, provides counseling services to uninsured children and families based on their legal status of immigration. Cuts to funding to eliminate any of these programs

would be detrimental to the community, especially at a time when things are so uncertain and the experience of trauma and the need to support are at an all-time high.

CIFAR values systemic thinking and collaboration. I stand here today to ask to be a partner with the City to develop creative solutions as the Medicaid situation evolves and ask that flexibility is built into the budget to ensure these programs can continue to help the community thrive and continue to exist. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony today.

And please state your name for the record and proceed.

Ms. McGUIRE: Hi. Good

afternoon. My name is Mia McGuire. I'm the Chief Operating Officer at SpArc Philadelphia. SpArc Philadelphia is the parent organization for Spark Services and the Arc of Philadelphia. We are located in the North Philadelphia section of the city and provide both support services and advocacy for individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism.

We are currently facing a crisis as we look at the possibilities of funding cuts across our industry because of Medicaid. The services that we provide to individuals with disabilities allow them to live an everyday life. They are able to get up each day and go to work, be with their friends and participate in meaningful activities that not only enrich their lives but allow them to be in a safe environment

while their families and caregivers go off to their own jobs.

SpArc Services currently supports 43 individuals with disabilities who work in competitive jobs. They are the people who collect your carts at the market, clean up the trash after the Phillies game, keep the PennDOT locations clean so that you can be comfortable waiting to get your ID and numerous other jobs that are meaningful throughout the city of Philadelphia. Without job supports, many of these folks would be in jeopardy of losing their own jobs.

The impact of funding cuts goes beyond the people that we support at SpArc. SpArc Philadelphia employs 115 people who primarily live within Philadelphia County. Without funding for the programs and services that we

provide for our organization, the services and others like ours, we will no longer be able to continue normal operations and risk closure or personnel cuts.

At this point in time we don't know the full impact of the funding cuts, but we do know that this will hit our industry that is still recovering from the COVID pandemic, especially hard. And we ask for your support as we move forward through this.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you for being here and thank you for your testimony today.

Please state your name for the record and proceed.

DR. COREY: Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Lesley Corey and I represent Step By Step and our dedicated Philadelphia employees and consumers. Step By

Step provides vital residential and nonresidential community services to adults with mental health, behavioral health and intellectual disabilities.

I'm here today to advocate for the flexibility in the city's budgetary process, particularly as we face the potential impacts of federal Medicaid cuts on our programs and the individuals we serve. The proposed Medicaid cuts could severely impact access to critical healthcare services. Specifically, reductions could lead to fewer covered services, including essential mental health and disability services, increased hospitalizations as individuals who lose access to preventative care and outpatient services will have to rely more on emergency care, financial burdens for

Philadelphians, especially those with low incomes who may struggle to pay for alternative care or go without services entirely,

Job losses as organizations like Step By Step are forced to reduce staff or scale back programs due to financial deficits.

At Step By Step we are already beginning to feel the strain from our current contracts and are being forced to reevaluate our ability to continue providing services even before any Medicaid cuts have taken effect. If these cuts go through, it will exasperate existing challenges and create new barriers to care for the most vulnerable members of our community.

The consequences of these cuts will disproportionately affect the people who rely on

Medicaid the most, low-income families, children, elderly individuals and people with disabilities. This will lead to worse health outcomes, more significant health disparities and long-term financial strain on the city.

I'm urging you to consider these potential impacts as you develop next year's budget. We need flexibility and foresight in these difficult times to ensure that our most vulnerable populations do not suffer due to federal funding cuts. I ask that the City Council consider maintaining or even increasing local support for these services to help offset the impacts of any Medicaid reductions. Thank you for your time and continued commitment to all Philadelphians' well-being.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

Thank you for being here today and for your testimony.

MR. BECKER: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jake Becker and I have the privilege of serving as the Managing Director for Health Services at Public Health Management Corporation. It's now 2 to 1. The Phillies are going into the bottom of the 9th in the first game of the doubleheader.

So we're here in the afternoon. I want to simply say thank you on behalf of Mike Pearson, the CEO of Public Health Management Corporation. I grew up in Olney, a couple blocks from Olney High School, product of the Philadelphia public school system and I'm a Germantown resident, Councilmember Bass.

As someone committed to

the health and well-being of the city, I just want to say thank you for your support and hanging in there on a late afternoon on a Wednesday. I want to talk about our city's strained health care system. And I want to explain what's at stake, in particular for community hospitals and service providers who don't have access to reliable funding and how cuts to reimbursement efforts such as Medicaid exacerbate existing challenges providing health care services in critical social service settings to communities where this is needed most.

To illustrate this, let's actually talk about something positive. The Public Health Campus for PHMC at Cedar, which was developed in partnership with the hospitals of the University of Pennsylvania as well as CHOP. This

was an innovative risk-taking activity that was an effort to prevent what's happening at Crozer in Chester, to prevent what happened at Hahnemann six years ago.

Organizations even as large or as collaborative as Penn and CHOP and PHMC are really being attacked by all sides. And this isn't a big versus small organizational situation. This is the integral fabric of health care in Philadelphia for our communities that are most vulnerable. That's why we're here at the Alliance and something that we're very proud to be part of. And so, we really want to make sure that you and Council are really aware of the public health fabric that takes all of us.

It's not one organization. It's not one health system. It's not one group of

behavioral health versus mental health and so on. And so, I just simply want to say thank you for your support to this point. We know that your attention is necessary as we continue to move forward with the budgeting process and we're dealing with all the nonsense from the federal government on top of that. I think that's public record, nonsense from the federal government. I said that -- all right, we get this, Phillies. We can do it.

So I just simply want to say that there is a real funding threat. Big organizations are dealing with it, even as we try and protect these necessary community based hospitals like what's happened in cedar. Thank you to Councilmember Gauthier. Thank you to Councilmember Ahmad. Thank you to Councilmember O'Rourke and all

of you who have been invested in community-based solutions, 257. There we go.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you for your testimony.

Chair recognizes Councilwoman Ahmad.

COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: I have a question for you actually. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just wanted -- I know the partnerships, you mentioned CHOP and Penn and you and obviously we're facing draconian cuts, problematic, deeply problematic. However, CHOP and Penn do have deep reserves. And I want to know how we're leveraging that. And I don't know what PHMC has --

MR. BECKER: PHMC does not have deep reserves.

COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: So if there was to be public-private

partnership set up for having a fund that we could draw on in terms of filling the gap, is that something that we could get these entities. And it could have a sunset, it could be -- because we're also strapped, right,

MR. BECKER: Of course.

COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: We are strapped for dollars, how we allocate across the board. And because we have heavy hitters in this space, and we're grateful that you are looking at community health and these services, but I just want everyone to dig a little deep to see what can we do, how creative we can be to stand in this gap.

I'm hoping this is not forever, and we can sunset a fund like that, and there could be a capital piece because I know there's some renovation needs in that space, which I'm a little

curious why we have them in the first place in terms of how it was built. That's a whole other conversation because there was an (inaudible) cap involved with that. So I'm a little concerned that we have so many building issues when there was public money involved in putting that together in the first place. But that ship has sailed at the moment. So we still have people to take care of.

So I am asking -- as you're asking us, I'm asking you and your partners to actually look to see what can you do in terms of leveraging resources you might have to come to some joint solution on that because we are strapped.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

MR. BECKER: Absolutely. In this particular project, just as with the Alliance it really requires us getting along well with

each other in order to make sure that we can get along well with our public partners, whether that's at the city level, the state level or even at the federal level with conversations that I have around the federally qualified health center program. That's an important part of what happens at Cedar as well as in four other locations.

And so, it really does require three large organizations with track records across the city that haven't always played well in the sandbox together with others, who had the audacious vision during COVID to try to engage and support this really essential community resource at 54th and Cedar. And it's one thing to have the honeymoon energy once you get started in the midst of a crisis and COVID on the heels of what

happened at Hahnemann. It's another thing to really figure out how to sustain that. And that's a really important conversation that we need to continue to have and maybe having public engagement, the engagement of relevant Councilmembers really would be helpful for us to continue to make sure that all three parties sit at the table effectively for the right community solutions that are necessary.

COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: I agree that we need to do that. So I'm just asking because there's an urgency of time and the urgency of how we're going to pass this budget, so in this interim space we need to come up with an ask that is more in line with what we can afford. So if you can take that back, and then we can have further conversations to push the public-

private conversation.

And again I said, it can be sunsetted. It can be a limited partnership to get us through this time. But I do think we need a little skin in the game from everyone.

MR. BECKER: I got my mortgage on the line to make sure all this gets worked. I got all the skin in the game on my end. But really what it takes, I know that a request was submitted to Councilmember Gauthier's office about a month ago. If that request is not really appropriate from where you're at in terms of how to manage, we want to continue to be at the table and how to engage.

I mean, this is a very large, you know, six-, seven-, eight-figure type of conversation that we really want to have collaboratively because

collaboration is what started it. Collaboration is what it'll take to be successful as well. Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

Thank you.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Gauthier.

COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Councilmember Ahmad, for your comments. I agree that everybody has to have skin in the game, but I wanted to be on record with my support of this request.

I just want to also make sure that people understand what's going on at this site. This is a community hospital that mostly serves people who don't have insurance. It's also a hospital that has had a dark history. It had a lot of troubles under Mercy. It had a lot of troubles when it was Misericordia. People called it

Killercordia.

Misericordia, my grandmother died at this hospital. You know, it's a place that West Philadelphians had learned to fear and not to trust. And this could have been a Hahnemann situation. Penn Medicine stepped in. Kevin Mahoney promised me personally that this wasn't going to be a Hahnemann situation. And I think the partnership that has evolved there among Penn Medicine, CHOP and PHMC is really important and that you all are bringing a higher level of quality than has ever existed there.

And I also appreciate Penn Medicine reopening the Crisis Center that had closed at that site and not even asking the City for any funding. And so, the point is well-taken. But I want to be on record that this will be a part of

my budget push and my budget request and is sorely needed within our community. Thank you so much.

(Applause.)

MR. BECKER: Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

THE CLERK: Next panel to testify is Kateri Andriole, Jane Allen, Elena Brunner, Cinthya Hioe. That group will be followed by Diane Payne, Erica Ezold, Darnelle Radford and Nell Bang-Jensen.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you for being here today. Please state your name for the record and proceed.

MS. BRUNNER: My name is Elena Emelchin Brunner. And I'm just opening my doc because my phone died while I was standing here. Okay. Thank you to the

Councilmembers who are still here today and were here to listen to all the testimonies yesterday, especially in the afternoon sessions.

Many of us who are able to be here to testify represent our communities and families who are unable to take the day off to participate because of work and family commitments. We may be some of the last on the list and come from communities not often in the room. So thank you for hearing us. I'm speaking today as the eldest daughter of a mother who was naturalized after coming here with my grandparents, my aunts, uncles, cousins as refugees. We are an indigenous people from the (inaudible).

My mother was lucky enough to attend Girls' High while also living through the loss of

siblings and cousins from gun violence, substance abuse and unintended medical needs, all of which could have been prevented if our family community and communities across the city had access to resources needed to actually survive, to thrive instead of access to immediate band-aids to cope from day-to-day.

I am asking the City to invest in $1.9 million in three newcomer programs, reinstate the multicultural assessment centers and hire more multi-lingual counseling assistants at a livable wage and the full $1.8 million for PAIFUP, which provides more of our community members currently in detention access to legal representation.

And it's important to note that immigrant communities aren't just immigrants. Our

community members are also workers, taxpayers, business owners, community leaders, parents, youth, students who are also struggling for medical care, housing stability, access to reliable public transportation. So I'm also asking for the City to invest in equitable tax policy, safe healthy homes, investment in the Zero Fare SEPTA program, restorative justice grants, community-based violence prevention and Citizens Police Oversight Commission, public spaces. These are all part of the people's budget demands.

Instead of investing in harmful punishment and surveillance tactics that keep our communities in a cycle of incarceration and active addictions that we know circle back into each other, we need a budget that invests in actual transformative, equitable

solutions that meet the people where they're at in a community-based, culturally-competent way and stop the cycle. Can we count on you this time to invest in our needs? Will you commit to the budget that actually funds the people?

(Applause.)

MS. HIOE: Hi, everyone. My name is Cinthya Hioe. I'm a member of Asian Americans United and I live in South Philly. I'm here because I'm concerned about the proposed city budget. Public health and behavioral health services are only going to receive $193 million while the City is planning to upgrade the police force's new bikes and uniforms at a whopping $872 million budget. That is a slap in the face to all Philadelphians.

My father is disabled

and has battled chronic illness for the last 15 years. Getting seen by a doctor at a City Health Center is one of the most difficult and time consuming parts of managing his health. We often can't get an appointment for months. My friends say by the time we get seen we'd already been healed, so what's the point.

Last year my mom had a cancer scare. The cost of testing scared her more than the scare itself -- than the cancer itself, to the point that she decided to hold off on getting treatment. Now, imagine if the City Health Centers had the funding they need for adequate staff, a city budget that equips them to serve people and their needs. No more delaying appointments, no more cancer scares that go untreated. Isn't that vision of Philly beautiful?

But none of that is possible if City Council goes through with the proposed tax cuts. Cutting taxes for big corporations means stealing from the pockets of people like my family. It means forcing moms like mine to suffer in silence instead of being helped by our city. It means families like mine being scared that my father will be trapped in appointment waiting lines forever. Let's choose better. Do not codify 13 years of tax cuts that benefit mega corporations that most and gut our public services. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you for your testimony.

MS. PAYNE: Good afternoon. My name is Diane Payne. I live in Northeast Philadelphia 19111 and I'm a member of 215 People's Alliance. I'd like to

thank Anthony Phillips, my City Council rep for his advocacy around illegal dumping and to Mayor Parker for the Clean and Green Initiative.

I'm here today to tell a story and make an ask. I'm 75 years old. I've lived in my house for 40 years. I vote in every election. And as a member of 215 PA, I have been involved in many cleanups of our legacy dumping site on Snake Road in Lawncrest.

My story: As part of the April 5th citywide cleanup effort, the massive tire dump in Tacony Creek Park was on the agenda. I was part of the human chain that descended into a muddy ravine in the park to roll out 4000 illegally-dumped tires, despite cameras being in place.

By 3:00 p.m. that day, I began having stomach pains. By 7:30 p.m. that evening, my daughter

took me to the local ER and by midnight, I had emergency hernia surgery which my doctor characterized as lucky I came in when I did.

Our coalition stories: Legacy dumping and litter are as much Philly culture as hoagies and cheese steaks. Our coalition members' stories involve citizens of all ages and backgrounds fighting to reclaim our streets and neighborhoods. There are countless stories from across the city of volunteer anti-dumping armies.

Between the World Cup and the 250th anniversary, our city will be showcased far and wide. Now is the time to expand and strengthen the Clean and Green platform. My ask: Only 4% of the City budget is allocated for dumping prevention. We at 215 PA and the Clean Philly Now Coalition

applaud increased cleanup efforts in the advent of the DA Quality of Life Department with a goal of enforcement, but a focus on cleaning will not engender a culture change and is not sustainable.

We need resources put into serious enforcement and prevention strategies like small hauler convenience centers and education to begin to change the culture of Philadelphia from filthy to fresh. Please increase the budget allotted to prevention to invest in a sustainable, clean and green Philadelphia. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. ALLEN: Good afternoon, Council President Johnson, members of Council, staff and everyone else watching today. My name's Jane Allen and I'm providing testimony in my capacity

as Government and External Affairs Director for the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations. This budget season PACDC has been advocating for three items.

We saw during COVID just how important CDCs and NACs are in helping people with essential program applications like rental assistance. PACDC's number one priority this budget cycle is passing the Community Capacity Building Fund, Bill No. 250324, which would create a reliable, flexible source of financial supports to qualified nonprofit CDCs. These organizations provide a familiar place for our neighbors to go for help during uncertain times.

Second, any tenant who is evicted because they can't afford to pay rent in a Federally

Subsidized Low Income Housing Tax Credit project is a policy failure. But thankfully, this local government has implemented a successful intervention. Philadelphia's existing Shallow Rent program makes affordable units actually affordable for tenants renting subsidized apartments that still leave them cost-burdened.

Mayor Parker has included funding to expand this program to 4.69 million in her proposed allocation plan for H.O.M.E. bond proceeds and PACDC encourages Council to increase this investment slightly more to a level of 5.25 million. We also request your continued support in ensuring these dollars go to the renters who need them the most.

Third, as many of us who have tried to purchase a home within the last decade know

firsthand investors who offer cash make it nearly impossible for the rest of us to compete, especially in changing neighborhoods. According to a 2024 Federal Reserve Bank study, once institutional investors have purchased a property these speculators tend to jack up the rent by a rate that is nearly more than double what a noninstitutional landlord would, and this trend is associated with neighborhood-wide rent increases.

To keep more property in the hands of the people and organizations that care about the long-term health of our neighborhoods and more importantly, the people who call Philadelphia home, PACDC is advocating for the City to seed a quick strike property acquisition and stabilization fund designed to help nonprofits compete with deeper

pocketed investors. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and please let me know if you have any questions about these three priorities.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

THE CLERK: And we'll also call up Taibi Magar, Lee Goldenberg, Casey McMillan and Anne Gardner. You can make your way to the podium.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

THE CLERK: You can go ahead and state your name and proceed with your testimony.

MS. EZOLD: Great. We're sort of all a whole group together so I was just waiting for the rest of us. Hello. I'm Erica Ezold. I'm the Executive Director of Quintessence Theater in Northwest Philadelphia. Happy to

be here today at the end of the day to talk about our creative economy. We're glad that that came up in conversation earlier.

I want to start by thanking the Whole Council for welcoming us here and in particular, Councilmember Landau for encouraging us to come today and advocate. As Philadelphia's text-based, actor-focused theater Quintessence re-envisions the classics and inspires our community to consider what is essential in theater and in human nature.

Our work allows people to ponder the big questions and creates access points for all Philadelphians to see themselves reflected in classic stories. I'm here today to ask for your increased support for arts and culture. SMU data art shows that between 2020 and 2024, years that

included the pandemic when operations were depressed, arts and culture organizations provided nearly $2 billion in direct expenses to our economy and served 5.6 million people in the city.

In addition to the approximately 14,000 people in Philadelphia who see our plays, Quintessence serves about 3000 school children annually, many of whom only experience art through our theater and programs. Our work, as well as that of all theaters, helps create a more empathetic culture, something that is sorely needed right now.

Quintessence Theater lost a $25,000 NEA grant for an upcoming production highlighting the work of Black queer writers during the Harlem Renaissance. We are actively fundraising so this project can continue. Our theater

currently receives funding from the City through the Philadelphia Cultural Fund, and I thank you for that. It is critically needed.

However, as a growing organization we will soon surpass the current size restriction for this funding and we know that many other theaters do not receive any financial support from the city. As federal dollars are stripped away, it is more important than ever that we establish consistent funding on a city level that can adequately support all of our arts and culture institutions. There are many examples across our country and even in this state of dedicated funding streams for arts and culture.

I urge this Council to research how one could be established for Philadelphia. It will only serve to strengthen the

city we all love. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MR. RADFORD: My name is Darnelle Radford. I'm the Director of Operations at Theater Exile. I live in Point Breeze. Thank you to City Councilmembers for funding the Philadelphia Cultural Fund. We are Theater Exile, led by Producing Artistic Director Deborah Block, in the heart of South Philadelphia. We are at the end of our 28th season.

The support that we receive is crucial. We would like to urge the Council to find additional mechanisms in support of our stellar arts community. Small companies like ours and smaller have been enriching our communities on a shoestring budget for years. The uncertainty of when a grant

will be released often comes into play. When we know we have been granted, we can breathe easier. But when a grant is rescinded like our NEA grant of $25,000, we are left with few options.

We see the City's future with a plan to research how other cities have set up renewable revenue streams to fund arts and culture with a commitment to propose the new funding stream in the FY27 budget proposal this time next year.

Since our organizations tend to be supported by many of the same donors of our community who continue to show up for us, and we thank them for that, this uncertainty takes its toll on them as well, when the organizations they support start informing and inquiring about whether they have the ability to swoop in and save

the day.

Currently, Philadelphia supports the arts at less than $4 per person at a population of 1.5 million. While our peers in Pittsburgh for example, receive over $60 per person with a population of 303,000. We see the City's future with an expansion of the arts funding in the City budget at three times the current rate of the Philadelphia Cultural Fund to support both increased funding of cultural grantee organizations and the inclusion of more arts and culture organizations in the city. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MS. GARNER: Good afternoon. My name is Anne Garner and I'm the Managing Director at Interact Theater Company, grateful

recipients of PCF funding. Thank you. Our mission is to produce new plays that deal with the social, political and cultural issues happening in our world today and we are in our 37th season.

Let me tell you about the play that cemented our mission. In 1993, Interact produced 6221, a new play about the MOVE bombing. Local playwright Thomas Gibbons felt the coverage he was seeing wasn't telling the whole story so he gathered information from public transcripts as well as interviews with MOVE members, Mayor Wilson Goode, the police, journalists and West Philly residents among others.

On opening night, Interact held a talk-back featuring Ramona Africa and a policeman who had saved a child from the fire and whose life nearly fell apart in the aftermath. At times, the

conversation got heated. But in the theater, we know how to turn conflict into something useful and beautiful. Afterwards the officer said to our artistic director, Watching the show tonight helped ease my pain. And quite honestly, we get that kind of response a lot.

I know you have a lot of competing funding priorities, but theater should be among them. Theater is a hyperlocal event. Every performance we do takes place in the communities you serve. And almost every dollar we spend stays here too. Our work draws arts patrons who might not otherwise have a lot of reason to visit the city on to public transportation and into restaurants.

Funding theater in Philadelphia is an investment in our economy and it comes with the added bonus of teaching empathy and

offering healing. That is a bargain. So I hope City Council will find a way to fund theater more robustly, and I know all of us in the theater community would be happy to work with you to make that happen.

(Applause.)

MS. BANG-JENSEN: Thank you so much to the Councilmembers who are still here. I'm Nell Bang-Jensen. I am the CEO and Producing Director of FringeArts in Philadelphia. I want to say I do not envy any of your roles. It is very hard to weigh all of these different priorities and I really just hope that the arts can be among them.

It's hard to articulate the value of the arts, but there's more and more data being shown about its benefits to public health, to building social

connections and strong neighborhoods. I moved here 15 years ago to Philadelphia to make a show for the Philadelphia Fringe Festival and now really am in my dream job at this point in time.

Like so many other arts organizations, you'll hear from many of my colleagues we recently lost funding from the National Endowment of the Arts. As we all know in this room, the federal administration has an aggressive policy against care and civic spaces, which I really feel like are what these arts organizations do.

We are currently the largest Fringe Festival in the United States and we get $0 from the City of Philadelphia. We --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: What is --

MS. BANG-JENSEN: Fringe

Festival, so anyone can come make a show. We have shows at 110 venues every September over the city. Last year found us doing 343 shows. We engage with thousands of artists and technicians on a daily and annual basis.

We look to models of other festivals around the world, even around the country, and they've become a real economic driver for the city as our festival as well. We are in a very difficult position of not being a large enough organization like Mural Arts to receive funding from the city, but being too big for the threshold for the Philadelphia Cultural Fund. We have about a $2 million operating budget so we're just over the threshold. And many of my colleagues are in that position as well. So it means we're currently getting no funding

from the city and just had our funding cut at the federal level.

So that is my plea today, that you would reconsider additional funding in the City budget that goes beyond the PCF threshold to help out organizations like us who are really being attacked at a federal level right now. Thank you so much for your time.

(Applause.)

MR. DOBROWSKY: My name is Tyler Dobrowsky and I'm one of the Artistic Directors at Philadelphia Theater Company based at the Suzanne Roberts Theatre right here on Broad Street. We are celebrating our 50th anniversary this year. We this year received a $50,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to produce a brand new musical inspired by interviews with Philadelphia health

care workers and cancer patients. We brought the show directly into hospitals, community centers and libraries across the city completely free of charge so that anyone facing cancer could experience the show regardless of where they lived, how much money they had or whether they were in active treatment.

This project only happened because we believed in good faith the NEA support would come through. Now, after we've already finished the project and spent the money the NEA is walking away from that commitment. At a time when the arts are fighting to survive, this feels like more than a funding cut. It feels like a betrayal.

That's why we're asking the City of Philadelphia to step in today. I know how lonely it could

be to care for a loved one afflicted with cancer. I'm sure some in the room do too. I also know how powerful it is to sit in a room with others who know that loss and how important it is to laugh, to cry, to find communion with each other in a shared experience. Theater creates that space. It gives us the chance to feel less alone, to feel seen, to feel human.

The arts aren't a luxury. They are a public good. And if the federal government is abdicating its responsibility to fund the arts, then we must take it up here at home. Philadelphia is one of the greatest art cities in the country. We are urging our elected officials to increase funding for the arts now when we need it most so it stays that way. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I want to -- excuse me, sir. Just real quick. I just want to thank you for the work that you do with the Suzanne Roberts Center, which is located on the Avenue of the Arts in the 2nd Councilmanic District. I learned recently that that's the family of Brian Roberts as well. That's named after his mom actually.

And so, I know a lot of work that they do in terms of the arts along Avenue of the Arts. And it's a great theater so keep up the good work. Thank you very much. Thank you.

(Applause.)

THE CLERK: And I also wanted to call up the next panel, Fabiola Davila, Jan LaSuer, Phoebe Bachman and Patrick Houston.

MS. GOLDENBERG: Hello. I'm Lee Goldenberg. I'm the

Managing Director of the Wilma Theater also on Avenue of the Arts --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay.

MS. GOLDENBERG: Yeah. Thank you --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: 1st Councilmanic District on the east side of Broad. Okay.

MS. GOLDENBERG: Yes, just on the other side. Exactly. But we serve all of the city.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes, you do.

MS. GOLDENBERG: Thank you all for your time, and I just want to thank all of my incredible colleagues, the community of artists. I'm just so moved to hear all of you talk about the work you do.

This time last year you may remember that I was here in

these chambers with my colleague Lindsay smiling as you, Council, proudly recognized the Wilma is Philly's first regional theater Tony Award winner. This honor came with proclamations from all levels of government, our moment in the national spotlight and lots of shared joy with our community of artists and audiences.

And yet in that year the Wilma has not received a single dollar from the City of Philadelphia. We're supported at the state level by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts for general operations and RACP for much-needed building upgrades.

Our only source of federal funding, as you've heard, the National Endowment for the Arts rescinded our grant too on May 2nd alongside dozens of colleagues locally and hundreds nationwide.

This was $25,000 spent in accordance with the guidelines on our production of the Half God of Rainfall, a beautiful play that ran on our stage in February. And we were simply waiting for the reimbursement that will now never come.

We know that arts in Philadelphia must exist as an ecosystem. As such, we are grateful that Council supports the Philadelphia Cultural Fund and the Illuminate the Arts program. We are grateful for Creative Philadelphia and the Cultural Plan in development under Val Gay's leadership. We appreciate that arts organizations, including Mural Arts, receive direct funding through other programs. And you have demonstrated that you believe the arts contribute to a thriving Philadelphia. And yet dozens of

mid-size organizations like the Wilma, who pay millions each year in direct wages to city residents and generate millions more in economic impact, are left out of this city budget.

You can choose your own reason to support the arts because there are so many of them. We provide arts programs in public schools. We combat the loneliness epidemic. We cultivate spaces for free expression and complex conversations at a time when our First Amendment rights are under threat, or maybe you just like that we drive tourism, keep streets safe at night, fill restaurants and parking lots.

Whatever your reason, I encourage Council to increase support of the arts. This request is for this year at a critical time for us and our country, and this is

a request for ongoing dedicated funding -- I'm almost done. The arts are human infrastructure just like housing or transit or schools, and they all need support accordingly.

We urge you to look to peer cities, including Pittsburgh, to develop a dedicated funding stream for arts and culture. I look forward to being back in this chamber for future celebrations of our city's great arts community. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MS. McMILLAN: Hello. Good afternoon. My name is Casey McMillan. I'm Artistic Director of Inis Nua, a theater company here in Center City. Inis Nua produces compelling contemporary plays from Ireland, England, Scotland and

Wales.

These plays are the lens through which we explore important ideas affecting Philadelphia right now, economic and education inequity, changing neighborhoods, health care and housing insecurity, addiction. We believe that seeing our challenges reflected in the context of other cultures gives us as Philadelphians new insight into our own conflicts and our opportunities.

We produce four shows a year for over 5000 patrons annually and we do it all with a full- and part-time staff of only four because we drive much of our budget going to dozens of freelance artists who are our backbone. We're a small company with real impact. Because unlike cities where large and small theaters rarely intersect, small companies

like Inis Nua are key contributors to Philadelphia's ecosystem, sustaining artists' careers and allowing diverse artistic community to put down roots, to buy homes, to raise families, to be civic participants.

While we were not among those who had funding rescinded last week, we currently have an application out to the NEA, $15,000 of critical funding for next season. And given the federal government's likely demands that we renounce our commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, we will be forced to withdraw our application as it undermines initiative Inis Nua's values and our commitment to a vibrant, diverse Philadelphia.

(Applause.)

MS. McMILLAN: Thank you. We have to stick with our

values --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Time out, pause. I wish Councilmember Jamie Gauthier was down here. And I see Councilmember Dr. Nina Ahmad and my colleagues took the task certain institutes of higher education, notably the University of Pennsylvania, unfortunately my alma mater, for not standing up and speaking truth to power when it come to diversity, equity and inclusion. So they could take a page out of your book and know what standing up to bully stands for.

So I just want to personally just say thank you because you said, we withdrew our application because that's not what we represent in terms of moving forward and their restrictions on DEI. So thank you for just standing up.

(Applause.)

MS. McMILLAN: Yes. Thank you, Council President Johnson. It's now where we have to live our values. That's their job and that's the job of theater. But this loss of federal funding is likely to affect passthrough funding offered by the state as well, and that would mean a total loss of more than 15% of our annual budget next year making it possible to do our work, to plan, and that represents jobs for Philadelphians and loss of our economic and artistic impact.

Thank you, Council, for supporting the Philadelphia Cultural Fund. Their support has been vital to maintaining operations for us in this volatile period. But with the loss of state and federal funding, we ask you please will you deepen your

commitment to the arts right now this year at this critical time. Thank you so much for your consideration.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MS. DAVILA: Good afternoon and thank you very much for your time. My name is Fabiola Davila and I'm a Senior Program Associate with the Vera Institute of Justice. I'm testifying regarding Bill 250196 or the operating budget for Fiscal Year 2026, specifically the Office of Immigrant Affairs under the Managing Director's budget. I've also submitted written testimony.

The Vera Institute urges the City to support a $1.8 million investment in the Pennsylvania Immigrant Family Unity Project or PAIFUP. The Vera Institute also

urges the City to transition the administration of PAIFUP from the Nationality Service Center to the Defender Association of Philadelphia.

PAIFUP is a successful publicly-funded program that provides lawyers for immigrants facing deportation. Unlike in the criminal legal system, people facing deportation don't have the right to an attorney if they can't afford one. Since 2019, PAIFUP has represented hundreds of Philadelphian residents.

PAIFUP has won legal relief for their clients, kept families together and helped Philadelphians return to their jobs. But the need for representation is great and requires increased funding. Without a lawyer, immigrants are more vulnerable to Trump's mass

detention and deportation agenda.

His Administration has issued executive actions that expand the use of immigration detention, gut access to federally-funded legal programs and vastly expand immigration enforcement, including right here in Philadelphia. The city must increase PAIFUP's funding to ensure that Philadelphians who face detention and deportation have a meaningful opportunity to defend themselves and remain at home with their families.

The Vera Institute also supports the proposed transition of the program administration from Nationality Service Center to the Defender Association. With the Nationality Service Center's full support, the Defender Association would use the increased funding to create an immigration unit that

specializes in deportation defense.

My organization, the Vera Institute, oversees the safe network which is a national network of publicly-funded deportation defense programs. And we have seen this model be very successful within other large public defenders offices in places like New York, San Francisco and Cook County, Illinois. We urge Philadelphia to protect immigrant communities by increasing its investment in PAIFUP to 1.8 million in Fiscal Year 2026 and by transitioning this important program to the Defender Association. Thank you again for your time.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MR. HOUSTON: Good afternoon. My name is Patrick Houston. Thank you for this

opportunity to testify, and I noticed many of the Councilmembers have been here all day. That's deeply appreciated. Talk about public service, sitting in these chairs all day and listening to our testimonies.

I'm here testifying on behalf of the housing equity repair and electrification for Climate Justice Coalition, Here for Climate Justice. The Here for Climate Justice Coalition brings together community organizations, home repair providers, workforce and community development partners and climate justice groups across Philadelphia to fight for safe, affordable, fossil-free housing for all.

We urge City Council to provide $10 million for the Philadelphia Energy Authority and the Built to Last Whole Home Repair

program. Built to Last is a popular, effective and unique program serving hundreds of low-income Philadelphia households with essential home repair and energy efficiency services.

The program is a critical complement to the Basic System Repair Program. Built to Last fills critical gaps that BSRP does not cover. Philadelphia needs both Built to Last under the Philadelphia Energy Authority and BSRP. Defunding Philadelphia Energy Authority, as the mayor's budget proposes, would be a step backward for affordable, equitable, synchronized home repair and energy efficiency services in Philadelphia.

Thousands of Philadelphians are on the waitlist for Built to Last. And here are the numbers district-by-district.

These are the waitlist numbers, the numbers you're about to hear. District 1 Squilla's, 92 on the waitlist.

District 2 Johnson, 226. District 3 Gauthier, 425. District 4 Jones, 366. District 5 Young, 254. District 6 Driscoll, 114. District 7 Lozada, 312. District 8 Bass, 445. District 9 Phillips, 348. District 10 O'Neill, 35. In total, 2617 low-income households across Philadelphia are on the waitlist for the Built to Last program. Many Philadelphians apply to this program because they know how thoroughly it has already served hundreds of families.

Lastly, the Here for Climate Justice Coalition wants to express gratitude to those Councilmembers who have expressed support for this program in varying ways. Councilmembers Johnson,

Gauthier, Young, O'Rourke, Ahmad, Landau and Brooks, please keep that up, all of City Council. We are counting on you to make sure we can fight for a livable future where every Philadelphian can enjoy lower energy bills, critical repairs and a safe and healthy place to call home. Please secure this $10 million for the Built to Last program through the Philadelphia Energy Authority. Thank you.

(Applause.)

THE CLERK: Also want to call up the next panel at this time. Julian Burnett, Sam Tower, Christopher Setz-Kelly, Jaritsa Hernandez Orsini.

(Witnesses approached Witness table.)

MS. LeSUER: Hello. Thank you, Council President Johnson and Council. My name is Jan LeSuer. I'm from the 8th

District and I'm here representing the Friends of the Free Library of Philadelphia. I'm president of the Friends of the Chestnut Hill Library.

I think we all understand and recognize the importance of libraries. I want to emphasize that they're more important now than ever. We still are feeling the fallout of the effects of the COVID period for our kids in school. And the advent of AI and high tech things, it's more important than ever that we have educational opportunities and places for study, for reflection and for learning to exist.

We have these institutions, these branches within our communities. They are suffering and we should not let them become stranded resources. They're there. We need their

support and they will be used if we continue to have them.

I was here this morning and heard the staff complain about not having enough to do their work. And from the public side, we feel that very strongly. There is nothing more disappointing or dispiriting than walking or taking the bus or biking up to your local library only to find that once and again it is closed. This happens far too frequently across the city, particularly in communities that need the resource more than ever and may not have those in the home.

What are the causes of this? Staff shortages which was brought up this morning. We were promised Saturday hours. That just hasn't happened. Too often the libraries are closed because somebody is sick or because the air quality in the library is not good.

The other things that go on are air-conditioning is not sufficient. We know that these have provided shelter and cooling spaces for the public in the summers and too often in the winter the boilers aren't working. So these kind of -- we don't need new buildings. We just need regular, considerate maintenance of them.

And, look, thank you very much for listening to us and look forward to working with you in the future. I have to say the staff has been very supportive of the librarians themselves, they're terrific. They're community-oriented. They want to do their best. They have fantastic programs.

We've worked with the capital improvements. Ty Dupass has been fantastic. They just need the funding for staff and for

materials. I want to thank Councilmember Bass in particular. We've had partying going on outside the Chestnut Hill Library. There's been defecation and tissues left and liquor bottles, and her staff was just terrific and getting that cleaned up. And thank you very much for your time.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Thank you very much. Thank you, Councilmember Bass.

All right. Please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony. And we ask that you please keep it to two minutes because we have a few additional witnesses who are here. Thank you.

MS. BACHMAN: Thank you. My name is Phoebe Bachman. It is great to be with you all today. Thank you so much, Council, for sticking it out. I'm apparently

No. 96 so I'm impressed.

So some of you may know me from my work with Mural Arts. I work in a couple of different fashions with them. I work in Restorative Justice as well as the People's Budget Office. And today I'm going to speak to you specifically about the People's Budget Office.

We're a project that aims to imagine what a fully-funded city could look like. We use public art education and advocacy to empower residents to engage in the budgeting process. We facilitate Budget 101 and 201 workshops, teaching Philadelphians about the city budget both in neighborhoods and online. We run an interactive office at LOVE Park, and we created a survey that captures how people feel about the budgeting process and what they

want to see funded.

Unknown, opaque, obscure, confusing; these are the words that we hear over and over again when we ask Philadelphians what is one word that comes to mind when you think about the city budget. Overwhelmingly, respondents to our survey tell us they don't know how to get involved and they don't feel like their voices matter.

You have said on your mailers, billboards and in emails that this is your city, your budget. But at this point in the budgeting process, the public can only do so much. Under the previous administration, we worked closely with the City's Budget Office and there was a willingness to reimagine the City's budget process from the beginning. They piloted participatory budgeting,

which has later transformed into intimate focus groups.

These opportunities are not only vital for residents but also for City Hall to gather nuanced feedback that cannot always be captured through public testimony. The City budget process can and should change. It should be a people-first approach informed by engagement. We are asking for the City to invest in a true participatory budgeting plan that allows Philadelphian's voices to be integrated into every step of the City budget, which includes the formation of the documents themselves and the priorities and lenses that guide the process.

The City should allocate funding specifically for direct participatory budgeting, host regular feedback sessions on the City budget, restore these

budgeting for racial equity and add an environmental justice budgeting lens.

We often say that the City budget is an ecosystem. We each play a role in making it possible. We can work together to make sure that the budgeting process is transparent, accessible to ensure that all Philadelphians regardless of background, age or experience can have a say in how their city is built and resourced.

And I just want to say thank you too so much to the Councilmembers who have worked with us in this process. A special thank you to Councilmembers Brooks O'Rourke, Gauthier, Bass, Landau. It's really been a pleasure working with you and we hope to continue it in the future.

(Applause.)

MR. SETZ-KELLY: Good

afternoon. My name is Christopher Setz-Kelly. I'm a Managing Attorney at Highest Pennsylvania. I'm also a resident of District 1. Highest Pennsylvania is one of the region's immigration legal services agencies. On behalf of Highest PA, I'm writing to urge the City of Philadelphia to increase funding in the 2026 budget for deportation defense legal services by investing $1.8 million in the Pennsylvania Immigrant Family Unity Project also known as PAIFUP under the general budget Bill 250196.

Myself and my organization also support the Defender Association's proposal to take over this program as the fiscal sponsor and home of the PAIFUP program. PAIFUP is a program that provides no-cost legal representation to members of Pennsylvania's immigrant community

that had been detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement also known as ICE.

Additional funding for FY2026 would allow PAIFUP to increase its staffing in a moment when the Trump administration has prioritized the arrest and deportation of our immigrant community members. Legal representation for those who are detained by ICE is critical to protecting immigrant families. Often it is the primary breadwinner that is detained by ICE. When this occurs, the family is left without financial support until the individual is released.

The Vera Institute reports that immigrants with an attorney are 3.5 times more likely to be released on bond. Thus, supporting universal representation programs like PAIFUP is one of the

best ways to ensure that families remain intact and stay out of poverty.

The other legal benefits of legal representation are numerous. ICE often institutes removal proceedings against long-term permanent residents who are not deportable under governing law. Often it is only an inexperienced immigration attorney that can identify those charging mistakes by ICE and intervene to prevent an unjust deportation.

I also support the transition of the PAIFUP program to the Defender Association of Philadelphia. Moving the program out of a collaborative patchwork of small nonprofit agencies and into the Defender Association will make the program more sustainable in the future and would align with deportation defense programs housed

in public defender offices of several other big cities, including New York and Chicago.

I've represented detained immigrants in both private practice and now with Highest PA. I can attest that most immigrants detained by ICE cannot afford private counsel to represent them. Programs like PAIFUP are critical for ensuring due process and I urge City Council to allocate $1.8 million to PAIFUP in 2026 and support the move of the program to the Defender's Association. Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

MS. TOWER: Good afternoon, Councilmembers. Thank you for your attention. Thank you for staying some extra time. Let's imagine a couple minutes ago we were hearing from all those arts and culture workers. I'm here to

advocate for them.

My name is Samantha Tower. I'm a West Philadelphia homeowner and constituent of District 4. I'm the Executive Director of Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation as well as a theater artist, an educator and a cultural producer and advocate.

I made my home in Philadelphia for the last 19 years since I moved here to go to University of the Arts. As a private foundation, Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation provides grants to small and medium nonprofits who provide arts education to communities they're in deep relationship with.

We offer trauma-informed training to independent teaching artists who work in and out-of-school time and operate programs in community spaces and activate

libraries and recreation centers. The educators we serve are vital changemakers in their communities, providing youth and adults across the city with access to traditional cultural art forms, valuable life skills and a supportive place to grow and learn outside of work and school. The demand on our arts educators is massive and it is only getting bigger as more resources are cut from other areas.

Our communities benefit enormously from clear and direct resources for the community arts, so that means initiatives like the Neighborhood Arts Program, the Illuminate the Arts Fund and the Philadelphia Cultural Fund. So I thank you for maintaining the stability in those programs through Creative Philadelphia. They also rely on a fully-funded SEPTA transportation system to get to and

from work.

I want to reiterate what my colleagues mentioned about the loss of the NEA funding and it's begun to affect our independent arts educators who already have precarious access to resources, who are gig workers and contract workers. I was going to tell you about all the amazing impact that they're making, but I'm going to keep that short now.

So what impact for us looks like is young people in North Philadelphia practicing bomba, young people in Northwest Philadelphia studying theater in a church, veterans coming together to write poetry, a collective of Black women filmmakers sharing creative entrepreneurial skills, young people in South Philadelphia studying Cambodian classical arts. When young people ask me -- I'm

sorry. When I ask young people what they want from their city, they always say safer places to gather, and that is what our arts educators provide.

So I ask you to continue increasing support for the arts and culture so that our young people have a safe and supportive place to go after school and outside of work, and we have that 1.5 million people calling Philadelphia home. Let's give them some good, because the presence of risk is bad but the absence of good is devastating. Thank you very much for listening to me.

(Applause.)

THE CLERK: We have Greg Holston, Latoya Ayers, Lisa Bonitatibus, Jean Spence, Colleen Ott, Andre Dawkins, Paulette Whitfield and Jeremy Blatstein.

(Witnesses approached

Witness table.)

REVEREND HOLSTON: Good afternoon. My name is Reverend Gregory Holston. I'm here with the Just Nation organization and also a member of the Tax Advisory Committee to the Tax Reform Commission. I'm here to talk directly about Philadelphians don't need another tax cut or across-the-board tax cut. It needs deeper investment in the people who live here.

What we have recognized over the last four years is that investment in community works. We took a situation on gun violence that went from 563 homicides to 260 last year and even lower this year, a 60-year low because we invested $60 million, 30 million from here in the City of Philadelphia, another 30 million coming from the state, an historical level of

investment that we have never done before and it produced results. It immediately started to reduce the homicides in the city, to reduce crime in the city to make us a safer place.

Public safety is all about investment. We had only -- we had less than 1000 officers that were not available for us during that whole time period. We had the lowest number of police officers we ever had and we still reduced gun violence.

So what does that mean? That means if you do taxes and you do an across-the-board tax cut of $1.3 billion, you're taking those dollars out of the city that could be used for investment. We can really start talking about looking at 0 as a real number for gun violence if we double that $60 million investment or tripled it

instead of moving a tax cut for 1.3 trillion -- 1.3 billion.

And even that 1.3 billion is only going to create 13,000 jobs according to the PA Policy Center, it is not going to produce the kind of jobs that we're already producing in this city. The last 10 years we've produced 200,000 new jobs. So we're not a basket-job case. We are creating jobs. We are making a difference here in this city.

But if we really want to address long-term poverty, if we really want to address Black and Brown poverty in the city, we need direct investment in Black and Brown communities. We need to support directly Black and Brown small businesses and we can do it.

As one professor said, and I'm done, one professor from Temple University said it this way,

you're trying to solve a problem of business with a hatchet when if you just could use a scalpel, you could get a whole lot more done. We do not have to destroy our city budget to be able to build businesses and at the same time build safety in our community. Thank you so much.

(Applause.)

MS. OTT: Good evening, Councilmember Richardson and everybody else who is here. I'm going to utilize my ADA right and have my phone speak again for me. But it won't be as long as April. I'm the autistic founder of the Autistic Art Coalition of Philadelphia, some Councilmembers know, which is also a nonprofit.

We are a community partner of Mural Arts Philadelphia. Our programming can be found on Tuesdays in the Mural Arts Tacony Lab Community Arts Center from 6:00

to 8:00 in the evenings or on Thursdays in Liberty Resources from 1:00 to 2:30.

I am also one of the founding core members of City Year of Philadelphia, an America Corps program during my service year in 1997, 1998 with Council President Johnson. I served with Mural Arts Philadelphia. Back in the day City Year wasn't just only in the schools of Philadelphia.

During this year of service, I had learned so much from scouting walls on rainy and overcast days just like this day in North, South, East and West to getting up on the scaffolding the old way and painting a mural from start to finish, doing the grid work, first for the artist to office paperwork for Jane Golden. And then on bright and sunshiny days, I would get up on the

scaffolding versus with the parachute cloth today with the artist and volunteer and paint. I even helped during the Presidential Summit in 1998.

Mural arts and working with is one of the most wonderful feelings ever for this Philadelphia right here in my hometown, the city I love no matter what. Murals also help with mental health matters too.

Later on in life I did go to art school. I am a professional photographer. During that time, I did still occasionally paint. Today I am the autistic founder and CEO of the Autistic Art Coalition of Philadelphia because of my lived experience directly with Mural Arts.

Keep hearing about this current Administration taking on the art sector. Since Philadelphia

is known for its art, whether it's singing, drawing, painting or just being a mural capital of the world, I still see a lot of sore spots. As an autistic individual who picks up the detail that others don't, and maybe you do but you just don't know what to do about it, now is the time to do something about it. Now is the time to do those not-so-easy projects.

Now is the time to rebeautify the city as we know because I know for myself that a community mural brings together neighbors who might not necessarily come together. We have the ability as Philadelphia fans from what I have noticed during large scale events like when the Pope came, Philadelphia pulled it off.

I think that it is imperative that we act on the arts and not shut it down. I think it's

imperative that we turn out the spice and show the world who we are. Come on now, the 250th is coming. FIFA is coming. Now is the time to act. Now is the time to invest in the arts, not take away the arts. Oh, and I also support Vision Zero. Have a great day. Peace.

(Applause.)

MS. SPENCE: Hello. My name is Jeannie H. Spence. I am the Executive Director of the JSJ Food Bank. I am the first registered nurse woman-led organization for the SFSP program sponsor, which is the Summer Food Service Program sponsor, and a Child and Adult Care Food Program sponsor.

I have been approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to provide Healthy Minds Healthy Hearts program with the

Free Philadelphia libraries. It's a no-cost service. It helps provide nutritional education for students and their families.

The JSJ Food Bank is here to help. We discussed the different increased tax cuts and the budget cuts. However, we are here to help the small local businesses through product purchasing, through food purchasing, through hiring local chefs to help with our nutritional educational programs.

However, we are eager to render these services to the Free Philadelphia Library, but it has been difficult with navigating the bureaucracy. But despite the frustrations, the ongoing emails, I can definitely say that Isaiah Thomas, Councilmember At-Large, and Quetcy Lozada has been extremely helpful with understanding how to

maneuver the process and we are here to help the Free Libraries of Philadelphia.

So my issue raised is how can we have a solidified agreement or some type of partnership accessible to understand the policies and processes for nonprofit organizations that is just here to help the city. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. BONITATIBUS: Thank you for being here. My name is Lisa Bonitatibus and I'm speaking on behalf of Toxic Free Philly, a broad coalition urging you to fully fund Parks and Recreation, especially to support the transition away from toxic herbicides and towards full compliance with the Healthy Outdoor Public Spaces law.

Twelve years ago I was

diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer. Today it's Stage 4 and incurable. My surgeon told me it likely came from exposure to chemicals, chemicals such as Glyphosate and 24D, the same pesticides the City reports spraying over 16 tons in our parks. That's per year, not per day.

These are endocrine-disrupting chemicals. They don't just stay on the weeds. They contaminate the air, soil and water. My oncologist says flat out we should not be spraying. My story is becoming more common. Cancer and chronic illness are on the rise, and our public parks should never contribute to that harm.

All due respect for the good things that Parks and Recreation does, the public must be served without poisoning us. We

ask City Council to fully fund Parks and Recreation so they can protect public health, protect city workers and comply with the law you passed. Let's make Philly clean and green by making it toxic free. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. BLATSTEIN: No goofballs? Okay. Good afternoon, Council President, members of City Council. My name is Jeremy Blatstein. I'm here to speak about the 2026 budget and Mayor Parker's H.O.M.E. Initiative.

The Mayor's Housing plan identifies the right goal, expanding housing opportunities. But the current structure spreads money across too many programs without making a meaningful dent in supply. If we're serious about solving Philadelphia's affordable housing crisis, we need to focus

less on short-term assistance and more on long-term production.

Right now too much of the H.O.M.E. Initiative is demand side, vouchers, repair programs, rental assistance. These are important, but they don't create new homes. They chase too few units with too many dollars. That only drives up prices.

What Philadelphia needs is a supply side engine, a revolving loan fund dedicated to financing new affordable housing construction. This isn't speculative. It's been proven to work in places like Montgomery County, Maryland, where a revolving fund has created thousands of units and paid itself back over time. It's a fiscally-responsible approach that turns one-time dollars into permanent solutions. Let's stop putting band-aids on a

supply problem. Let's build.

I urge this Council to allocate real capital, $100 million, into a revolving loan fund as part of the 2026 budget. If we want results, we need to stop subsidizing scarcity and start investing in production.

A few more quick points: Stop gaslighting the public when it comes to the Philadelphia Sheriff's Office. Disband it. Do not give it another dollar. Jobs, jobs, jobs. Need to create a better environment for businesses. End the BIRT and Use & Occupancy. It isn't about billionaires. It's about small businesses.

Grow Philly to 2 milli. Why 2 milli? That's what the population of Philadelphia was in 1950. Today we are at a population of 1.6 million. How? Upzone transit corridors, end parking

minimums and CMX-3 as well. Bring back the tax abatement. Change the RCO/broken ZBA process. Cut red tape. And of course, we're talking about SEPTA. Fund SEPTA. It's crucial for our city. It is the lifeline of so many people who get around it and ride their ride. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

Is there anyone else here to provide public testimony on the FY26 budget?

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: This concludes the public meeting of the Committee of the Whole to consider the FY26 budget.

The Chair recognizes Majority Leader Katherine Gilmore Richardson for a motion of the public hearing and meeting on the bills and resolution before the

Committee today stand in recess --
The Chair recognizes Councilmember Cindy Bass.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

Thank you, Mr. President.

I just had a question in regards to callbacks next week. Madam Chair for Health and Human Services and I were just conferring on the recent information regarding Department of Human Services. We just wanted to make sure that there was going to be an opportunity to have them come back?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I don't think we have it on our schedule at this moment, but we can talk offline. I have a recommendation in terms of how I think best to address it.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

Thank you so much. Very good.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You're welcome.

The Chair recognizes Majority Gilmore Richardson for a motion that the public hearing and meeting on the bills and resolution before the Committee today stand in recess until Wednesday, June 4, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. in Room 400 City Hall.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: So moved, Mr. Chairman.

(Duly seconded.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It has been moved and properly seconded that the public hearing and meeting on the bills and resolutions before the Committee today stand in recess until Wednesday, June 4, 2025, at 9:00 a.m., Room 400, City Hall.

All those in favor will signify by saying aye.

(Aye.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT

JOHNSON: Those opposed?

(No response.)

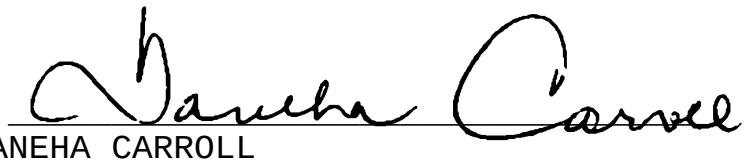
COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: The ayes have it and the motion carries.

The Committee will stand in recess until Wednesday, June 4, 2025, at 9:00 a.m., which we will reconvene in Room 400. Thank you very much. And, colleagues, thank you for your very, very hard work and your dedication showing up as we evaluate the FY26 proposed budget.

(Committee of the Whole concluded at 4:45 p.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence noted are contained fully and accurately in the stenographic notes taken by me in the foregoing matter, and that this is a correct transcript of the same.



TANEHA CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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