

Committee of the Whole

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

City Hall, Room 400
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, April 21, 2026
10:00 a.m.

PRESENT:

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

HELEN LOUGHEAD, The Clerk

Committee of the Whole

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Good morning, everyone. Good
4 morning, everyone.

5 I see Donovan West over
6 there. Good morning, sir.

7 This is the public hearing
8 and public meeting of the Committee
9 of the Whole, regarding Bills No.
10 260199, 260200, 260201, 260202,
11 260203, 260204, 260205, 260206,
12 260208, 260209, and Resolution No.
13 260227.

14 Ms. Loughead, would you
15 please call the roll and take
16 attendance?

17 THE CLERK: Councilmember
18 Squilla?

19 Councilmember Gauthier?

20 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

21 Present.

22 THE CLERK: Councilmember
23 Jones?

24 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:

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1 Present.

2 THE CLERK: Councilmember
3 Young?

4 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:
5 Present.

6 THE CLERK: Councilmember
7 Driscoll?

8 COUNCILMEMBER DRISCOLL:
9 Present.

10 THE CLERK: Councilmember
11 Lozada?

12 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:
13 Present.

14 THE CLERK: Councilmember
15 Bass?

16 COUNCILMEMBER BASS:
17 Present.

18 THE CLERK: Councilmember
19 Phillips?

20 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
21 Present.

22 THE CLERK: Councilmember
23 O'Neill?

24 Councilmember Gilmore-

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1 Richardson?

2 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

3 RICHARDSON: Present.

4 THE CLERK: Councilmember
5 Thomas?

6 Councilmember Harrity?

7 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

8 Present.

9 THE CLERK: Councilmember
10 Ahmad?

11 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD:

12 Present.

13 THE CLERK: Councilmember
14 Landau?

15 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

16 Present.

17 THE CLERK: Councilmember
18 Brooks?

19 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:

20 Present.

21 THE CLERK: Councilmember
22 O'Rourke?

23 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

24 Present.

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1 THE CLERK: Council
2 President Johnson?

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 Present.

5 A full house today. Thank
6 you, Ms. Loughhead. A quorum of the
7 committee is present, and this
8 hearing is now called to order.

9 Ms. Loughhead, will you
10 please read the title of the bills
11 and resolutions?

12 THE CLERK: Bill No.
13 260199, an ordinance adopting the
14 operating budget for Fiscal Year
15 2027.

16 Bill No. 260200, an
17 ordinance to adopt to Fiscal Year
18 2027 capital budget.

19 Bill No. 260201, an
20 ordinance to adopt a capital
21 program for the six fiscal years
22 2027 through 2030, inclusive.

23 Bill No. 262202, an
24 ordinance amending Chapter 19-2400

1 of the Philadelphia Code, entitled
2 Hotel Room Rental Tax, by providing
3 for an additional excise tax on
4 hotel room rentals, all under
5 certain terms and conditions.

6 Bill No. 26203, an
7 ordinance amending sub-code A, the
8 Philadelphia Administrative Code of
9 Title IV of the Philadelphia Code,
10 the Building, Construction, and
11 Occupancy Code, by adding and
12 revising zoning board adjustment
13 fees and provisions regarding
14 hearing scheduling, all under
15 certain terms and conditions.

16 Bill No. 260204, an
17 ordinance amending Title III of the
18 Philadelphia Code, entitled Error
19 Management Code, to modify the
20 amounts of license and permit fees
21 under certain terms and conditions.

22 Bill No. 260205, an
23 ordinance amending Section 19-1806
24 of the Philadelphia Code, entitled

1 Authorization of Realty Use and
2 Occupancy Tax, to clarify the
3 imposition of the tax on the use or
4 occupancy of real estate with
5 respect to cell towers, all under
6 certain terms and conditions.

7 Bill No. 260206, an
8 ordinance amending Chapter 6-600 of
9 the Philadelphia Code, Asbestos, by
10 adding and revising provisions
11 related to various fees, all under
12 certain terms and conditions.

13 Bill No. 260208, an
14 ordinance amending Chapter 19-1800
15 of the Philadelphia Code, entitled
16 School Tax Authorization, to add a
17 new Section 19-1808, entitled
18 Authorization of Rideshare Use Tax,
19 to authorize the Board of the
20 School District of Philadelphia to
21 levy a tax upon the use by a
22 passenger of a transportation
23 network company for a pre-arranged
24 ride that originates in

1 Philadelphia, all under certain
2 terms and conditions.

3 Bill No. 260209, an
4 ordinance amending Title 19 of the
5 Philadelphia Code, entitled Finance
6 Taxes and Collections, to add a new
7 chapter, 19-4800, entitled Retail
8 Delivery Tax, to establish a tax on
9 orders for the delivery in
10 Philadelphia of retail consumer and
11 other tangible goods, all under
12 certain terms and conditions.

13 And Resolution No. 260227,
14 providing for the approval by the
15 Council of the City of Philadelphia
16 of a revised five-year financial
17 plan for the City of Philadelphia,
18 covering fiscal years 2027 through
19 2031 and incorporating revisions
20 with respect to Fiscal Year 2026,
21 which is to be submitted by the
22 mayor to the Pennsylvania
23 Intergovernmental Cooperation
24 Authority, pursuant to an

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1 intergovernmental cooperation
2 agreement by and between the city
3 and the authority.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Thank you very much.

6 Today, we hold the public
7 hearing of the Committee of the
8 Whole to consider bills read by the
9 clerk that constitute proposed
10 operating capital spending measures
11 for Fiscal Year 2027, a capital
12 program and a forward-looking
13 capital plan for Fiscal Year 2027
14 through Fiscal Year 2032.

15 This morning we have
16 scheduled testimony from the
17 administration on the proposed
18 revenue adjustments and the Office
19 of Property Assessment.

20 Ms. Loughead, will you
21 please call the first panel to
22 testify from the administration?

23 THE CLERK: The first
24 witness to testify is Rob Dubow,

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1 finance director.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Good morning.

4 MR. DUBOW: Good morning.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

6 Rob, just state for the record your
7 name and please begin your
8 testimony, sir.

9 MR. DUBOW: Great.

10 Thanks. Good morning, Council
11 President Johnson, members of the
12 Committee. My name is Rob Dubow.
13 I'm a finance director. I am
14 joined by Revenue Commissioner
15 Kathleen McColgan, Executive
16 Director of the Office of Homeless
17 Services, Cheryl Hill, Streets
18 Commissioner Kristen Del Rossi, and
19 Chief Education Officer Dr. Debora
20 Carrera, and other administration
21 officials.

22 Thank you for the
23 opportunity to testify today on the
24 various revenue measures included

1 in the proposed FY27 budget and
2 FY27 to FY31 five-year plan. Our
3 proposed budget and five-year plan
4 include 642 million in crucial new
5 operating investments, over five
6 years to pursue Mayor's vision to
7 make Philadelphia the safest,
8 cleanest, and greenest big city in
9 the nation, with access to economic
10 opportunity for all.

11 The proposal builds on the
12 progress of the last two years, and
13 dedicates new resources to address
14 urgent needs facing Philadelphia.
15 As always, the administration
16 remains committed to fiscal
17 responsibility and long-term
18 stability as we maintain stability
19 through significant challenges in
20 this uncertain federal and economic
21 environment.

22 At the expiration of
23 federal COVID relief funding,
24 potential federal regulatory

1 changes, high legacy costs,
2 including a balloon payment in
3 FY29, careful planning is
4 essential. As part of the budget
5 process, every department prepared
6 1 and 2 percent cut scenarios, and
7 more than \$200 million in low
8 service impact cuts were
9 incorporated into the plan. Even
10 with those reductions, by FY29, our
11 reserves reached the bottom of our
12 target range.

13 Because of these
14 constraints, any new or expanded
15 key service investments require new
16 recurring revenue sources. The
17 proposals before you are targeted
18 to specific funds and dedicated to
19 funding for those key services.

20 Parker administration does
21 not take lightly proposals to raise
22 taxes or fees, but the revenue
23 generated through these proposed
24 changes will allow us to continue

1 the progress made over the last two
2 years and support efforts to end
3 street homelessness, keep our
4 streets safe, sustain key city
5 services, and avoid devastating
6 cuts to our schools. With that,
7 I'm going to turn over -- turn it
8 over to the people who joined me at
9 the table to give more specifics on
10 the services we will be funding and
11 we'll start with Cheryl Hill.

12 MS. HILL: Good morning.
13 Cheryl Hill, executive director of
14 the Office of Homeless Services.
15 As a key investment in homeless
16 services, the plan includes 110
17 million over five years to add
18 1,000 shelter beds with wraparound
19 services, expand hours and services
20 at the Hub of Hope, and increase
21 encampment resolution capacity.

22 To support this
23 investment, we propose a
24 two-percentage point increase to

1 the hotel room rental tax,
2 beginning August 1st, 2026,
3 generating approximately 20 million
4 annually. Even with this increase,
5 Philadelphia's rate remains aligned
6 with other major cities. In
7 addition, the administration
8 continues to have discussions with
9 the hospitality industry about the
10 proposal.

11 MS. DEL ROSSI: Good
12 morning, everyone. Streets
13 Commissioner, Kristen Del Rossi.
14 To improve our streets, the plan
15 proposes a \$0.25 retail delivery
16 tax on certain taxable retail goods
17 delivered in Philadelphia.
18 Essential medicine are exempt.

19 This revenue will support
20 the One Philly Pothole Squad and
21 strengthen our ability to deliver
22 proactive and reactive street
23 condition repairs.

24 DR. CARRERA: Good

1 morning, Council. My name is
2 Dr. Debora Carrera. I'm the Chief
3 Education Officer. As a key
4 investment in quality education,
5 the plan includes two proposals
6 generating more than 50 million
7 annually for the school district:
8 a \$1 transportation network company
9 tax on rideshare trips, beginning
10 January 2027, and a modernization
11 of the use and occupancy tax for
12 cell towers by basing it on
13 bandwidth rather than square
14 footage.

15 With this revenue and the
16 district's own efficiencies,
17 approximately 340 school-based
18 positions can be retained, avoiding
19 harmful cuts that would otherwise
20 be necessary. It is also our hope
21 that if the city approves this new
22 revenue, the commonwealth will
23 continue building on the progress
24 made in Harrisburg so our schools

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1 have the foundation they need to
2 succeed.

3 MR. DUBOW: And the
4 attached to the testimony, our
5 administrations -- oh, thank you.
6 The administration's proposed
7 amendments to certain bills for the
8 rideshare tax, the amendments
9 propose raising the tax to a dollar
10 and changing implementation date to
11 January 1st. And for the ZBA fees,
12 there are some technical
13 amendments. We're requesting
14 counsel adopt those amendments.
15 We're available for any questions
16 regarding the proposals. Thank you
17 very much.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 Thank you very much. The Chair
20 recognizes -- well, let me go back
21 to a question I was asked regarding
22 the rideshare tax from
23 Councilmember Jim Harrity some time
24 ago. He asked: is there a way for

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1 us to look at trying to find ways
2 where to -- the fees will impact
3 the actual rider? And at that
4 time, under the administration said
5 they will look into it. Has any
6 progress made in regards to what
7 that may look like?

8 MR. DUBOW: So I think --

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
10 Some level of relief for the actual
11 driver.

12 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. So I
13 think we are open to changes that
14 comply with the Uniformity Act.
15 But that does give a kind of a
16 fairly large constraint on what we
17 can do.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 And I didn't mean -- I didn't -- I
20 didn't mean to say driver; I meant
21 to say --

22 MR. DUBOW: The riders.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 The rider.

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1 MR. DUBOW: Yeah.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Okay. And also, I had another
4 question regarding when we look at
5 the hotel tax, right, and we know
6 sometime the market can be
7 volatile, it can go up; it can go
8 down. How is that taken into
9 consideration in terms of the usage
10 of our hotels?

11 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. And
12 when we looked at that rate, the
13 additional 2 percent, and looked at
14 what it would mean for a room of
15 \$200, it's a 4 percent -- \$4
16 change. So we didn't think that
17 was going to have a major impact.
18 We've also seen that there are
19 other places that are looking at
20 their hotel tax, Chicago just
21 announced proposal to raise theirs
22 to 19 percent, which would be
23 higher than what we're proposing.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

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1 And I think there was data that
2 talked about when we look at --
3 there is a claim that 1 percent of
4 low-income residents relied on
5 rideshare for community -- for
6 commuting. And so what way does
7 that data come from? Or could you
8 provide that data to members of
9 Council just for us to review?

10 MR. DUBOW: Yes. It comes
11 from the Census Bureau, and we will
12 definitely provide that to you.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
14 And does that include late night
15 workers?

16 MR. DUBOW: Yeah, that's
17 all workers.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 Just in general?

20 MR. DUBOW: Less than 1
21 percent of workers making under
22 \$50,000 used rideshare to commute.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 And just in general, in the event

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1 that this is moved forward, is
2 there any consideration for
3 exemptions for seniors and those
4 who have disabilities?

5 MR. DUBOW: So I think
6 we're open to anything that's
7 consistent with uniformity clause,
8 so long as it doesn't eat into
9 revenue by too much.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Okay. The Chair recognizes
12 Councilmember Katherine Gilmore
13 Richardson.

14 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
15 RICHARDSON: Thank you, Council
16 President. I'll reserve the
17 balance of my questions for OPA.
18 Thank you.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 Thank you. The Chair recognizes
21 Councilman Dr. Anthony Phillips.

22 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
23 Thank you, Council President. I
24 have a -- the question regarding

1 for the ZBA fee amendment. The
2 Zoning Board of Adjustment
3 application fee is proposed to
4 increase from \$300 to \$811, which
5 is -- which is 170 percent
6 increase. So that's a significant
7 jump, particularly for homeowners
8 and small applicants who are
9 already navigating the complex
10 process. I want to know what cost
11 analysis determine this increase
12 and justifies it, and where does
13 the revenue generate from these --
14 where will this new revenue that's
15 coming in will, where will it go?

16 MR. DUBOW: Yep. So
17 that's a -- these are fees that had
18 not been increased in a while, and
19 as you know, fees -- the fees
20 cannot exceed the cost of the
21 service, so we did an analysis of
22 those costs. We also are exempting
23 one and two building properties.
24 So we did take into account that

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1 affordability for the smaller
2 developments.

3 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

4 And the revenue. You want --

5 MR. DUBOW: The revenue
6 goes into the general fund from
7 that.

8 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
9 It just goes to the general fund?

10 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. Yes.

11 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
12 And based on how much additional
13 revenue is the city projected to
14 receive as a result of this, into
15 the general fund? I mean -- I
16 mean, that's a -- that was a huge
17 jump.

18 MR. DUBOW: It's about
19 \$500,000 annually, about
20 two-and-a-half million over our
21 five-year plan.

22 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
23 Okay. Can we count -- you said, is
24 it 500? Say it again.

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1 MR. DUBOW: Yes, 500,000
2 annually, about two-and-a-half
3 million over the five-year plan.

4 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
5 And that's different from what was
6 -- what was the previous revenue?

7 MR. DUBOW: Hold on one
8 second. I'm sorry.

9 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
10 Oh, she's back. I don't want to --
11 as you're coming, I just want to
12 quickly ask, are we expect to see
13 improvements in service timelines,
14 in communication to applicants, in
15 return for this increased cost?

16 MR. DUBOW: Yes. We
17 should see -- we should see
18 improved performance.

19 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
20 Can we get on record in terms of it
21 later on and now, like what that
22 will look like?

23 MR. DUBOW: Yes, we can
24 get you that.

1 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

2 Okay. And then my next question
3 was just around the rideshare tax.
4 I'm just curious about it. I'm all
5 about children and kids, but I just
6 want to understand what does the
7 track -- what does the track record
8 rideshare taxes in other cities
9 tell us about long-term revenue
10 stability. After implementation,
11 do -- did those cities see revenue
12 remain stable over time or did they
13 see a decline in usage?

14 MR. DUBOW: Yeah, I can
15 tell you the -- what's happened
16 here with the state tax, the 1.4
17 million, other than in the
18 pandemic, it's been relatively
19 stable with some growth.

20 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

21 Okay. And were there -- were there
22 conversations with the rideshare
23 companies prior to this decision
24 being made?

1 MR. DUBOW: There have
2 been discussions with them since we
3 introduced it.

4 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
5 So just recent. Okay. So I'm just
6 trying to make sure that we can
7 work it out, where if this does --
8 if this tax does go through, it
9 could go -- the companies would
10 take on the tax as a -- as support
11 as opposed to the riders. But like
12 you said, the uniformity clause may
13 not allow that; is that correct?

14 MR. DUBOW: No.
15 Uniformity clause doesn't allow us
16 to do, you know, different rates
17 for different types.

18 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
19 Right. That part, yes.

20 MR. DUBOW: But in terms
21 of the rideshare company deciding
22 to assume those costs on behalf of
23 their customers, the uniformity
24 clause doesn't have anything to do

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1 with that.

2 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

3 Right. And so they're choosing not
4 to do that, and now it's going to
5 impact the customers. Right? And
6 I think that right now as a dollar,
7 I just want to make sure, are we
8 going -- are you going to be
9 advocating in years to come anytime
10 soon for it to go up above a
11 dollar?

12 MR. DUBOW: We have no
13 plans to do that. Our projections
14 are for it to stay at the dollar.

15 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

16 Okay.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

18 The Chair recognizes Councilmember
19 Jeffrey J. Young.

20 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:

21 Thank you, Mr. President. I just
22 -- it's a point of information when
23 it was just mentioned that the
24 rideshare companies are choosing to

1 pass that on to the rider, but the
2 legislation itself specifically
3 states that the transportation
4 network companies are acting as the
5 board of -- agent for the Board of
6 Education and shall collect the tax
7 from the passenger. So the
8 legislation says that they have to
9 collect the tax from the passenger.
10 So --

11 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. They
12 can then decide how they want to
13 pass that on. Right? They can
14 decide whether they're going to
15 increase their feed account for
16 that or whether they're just going
17 to basically hold their riders
18 harmless. That's a decision they
19 can make.

20 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
21 So are you saying, Rob -- oh, I'm
22 sorry.

23 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: No,
24 you're good.

1 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

2 Are you saying, Rob, legally you
3 can't say that the rideshare
4 company has to take on this
5 particular tax --

6 MR. DUBOW: Yes.

7 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

8 -- as opposed -- okay. I just want
9 to make sure that that was clear to
10 folks.

11 MR. DUBOW: I think we
12 have more information on the ZBA
13 question you had.

14 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
15 Yeah, yeah.

16 MS. MAYNARD: Yes. Good
17 morning. Sabrina Maynard, budget
18 director. So the current estimate
19 in the current year for ZBA fees is
20 just under about 300,000. So we're
21 really behind in collecting the
22 cost of providing this service. So
23 that's what we're bringing in now,
24 about 300,000. And I should add

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1 that with the increase, we will
2 actually still be behind the rates
3 of the surrounding counties. So we
4 will still be comparatively low,
5 even with the increase.

6 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

7 Yeah. That's incredibly helpful to
8 understand. I -- I'm just more --
9 you know, more concerned about
10 whether or not we're going to see
11 for sure the revenue that we
12 expect. How confident are you that
13 we're going to get that revenue?
14 Because if it's for the children,
15 we got to make sure we have that
16 revenue, right?

17 MR. DUBOW: Are you
18 talking about rideshare?

19 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

20 Yeah.

21 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. So, you
22 know, based on where ridership is,
23 we are -- we are fairly confident
24 of receiving that revenue.

1 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

2 Okay. And why does -- why do --
3 why do you believe comparisons to
4 cities like Chicago and New York
5 are appropriate when our residents
6 have different earning levels,
7 right, comparison to those cities?

8 MR. DUBOW: Those are
9 places that have the facts of
10 those?

11 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
12 Yeah.

13 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. Those
14 are places that have --

15 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
16 How did you come up with that
17 number based off of that? Based of
18 what, like, our city is different
19 in that capacity. Is that why is a
20 dollar compared to New York's 2.75?

21 MR. DUBOW: Yes. They're
22 higher. We did look -- we wanted
23 to look at cities that had the tax,
24 and you're right, we are lower.

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1 The amount of the tax was based on
2 the amount of revenue that we
3 wanted to generate, and that was
4 based on saving those school
5 district positions.

6 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

7 And 10 seconds, I just want to say,
8 you exhausted all -- I just want it
9 to be on the record. You exhausted
10 all options. There was no other
11 way to get to that \$50 million this
12 year?

13 MR. DUBOW: Right. So we
14 looked -- you know, looking at our
15 financial position, we looked at
16 the cuts we could make to save
17 money without impacting our
18 services. So we went through all
19 of that before we proposed any
20 increases in taxes.

21 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

22 Okay. Thank you, Councilor. No
23 further questions. Thank you.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

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1 Thank you very much. The Chair
2 recognizes Councilman Curtis Jones.

3 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:

4 Thank you, Mr. President. We just
5 left a school, Lankenau, up in the
6 21st --

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 Member Jones, could you speak in
9 the microphone, sir.

10 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: We
11 just left a school, a press
12 conference, Member Thomas, Member
13 Gauthier, Nina Ahmad, where
14 students and parents were concerned
15 about what we are getting for what
16 we are paying. And the question
17 becomes, if we raise you an
18 additional 48 million annually
19 based on Uber rideshare, and then
20 extra money by way of the hotel
21 tax; and that those numbers are
22 projected to make them on balance
23 within three years; is that
24 correct?

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1 MR. DUBOW: So they would

2 --

3 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Deal
4 with the \$300 million?

5 MR. DUBOW: They would
6 deal with the 340 positions
7 immediately.

8 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: So
9 the question I have and the parents
10 that we just left is how much of
11 the school closures would save
12 money in that regard to help reduce
13 that deficit? What is the
14 projected number for everything?
15 If they got everything they wanted,
16 closed every school in some of our
17 districts, what would that save
18 them?

19 DR. CARRERA: So again,
20 Dr. Debora Carrera. That is a
21 great question, Councilmember.

22 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: I'd
23 only ask great questions.

24 DR. CARRERA: You do. And

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1 I want to say that these are two
2 buckets, right? When we're talking
3 about the facilities master plan,
4 and we're talking about the plan
5 that the school district has
6 presented, and we're talking about
7 how the school district has
8 presented the needs to provide our
9 students with quality with better,
10 this is -- this is different,
11 right? The rideshare tax is
12 talking about saving 300, 400
13 positions.

14 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: I
15 get that part, because I'm on a
16 clock.

17 DR. CARRERA: Right.

18 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: The
19 specific question is how much would
20 all these closures save?

21 DR. CARRERA: So I would
22 defer to the school district to
23 answer that question.

24 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: All

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1 right. We'll put a pin in there.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Can I -- can I do a point of
4 information?

5 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:

6 Good. Go ahead.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

8 You know, Dr. Dubow, you know I'm a
9 fan of yours.

10 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: We
11 are -- we -- I'm a fan.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

13 I'm trying to understand, you are
14 the Chief Educational Officer for
15 the City of Philadelphia, and
16 there's a school facilities plan
17 for the closure of schools on the
18 table. You represent the
19 administration. I know the school
20 board is an independent body,
21 right? You have the Chairman
22 Streeter, you have Dr. Watlington.
23 Right?

24 But I also know that when

1 we start off this process in the
2 beginning, like there were
3 conversations with everybody at the
4 table. So I would think that you
5 at least come in and would know
6 those numbers. So I'm just being
7 up front. Just for the simple fact
8 that it would be under your purview
9 as a part of overall what we are
10 trying to accomplish, because the
11 support for keeping the 340
12 positions moving forward is also
13 tied up into the overall plan as it
14 relates to school closures.

15 I know you may say it's
16 different, but I think members of
17 the body feel like it's also --
18 we're asking to do one thing on one
19 end, but at the same time address a
20 school facilities plan that had
21 dire effects in some areas.

22 And so I just think when a
23 member asked that question, I would
24 just think that, at least on the

1 numbers side, because from what I
2 understand about the school
3 facilities plan, some of it is
4 going to academic performance,
5 modernization of schools.

6 But we also know from
7 being around this body for a while,
8 some of it is economically driven,
9 meaning in some cases, you're
10 shutting down a school projected
11 wise because you're spending so
12 much on overhead for a small
13 footprint of educating students.

14 And that's a dollars and
15 cents decision that's being made.
16 Not distinctive members
17 specifically saying there is a
18 number out there, somebody
19 calculated a number and there will
20 be some savings, because that's the
21 same conversation with the general
22 assembly folks, on the house side
23 in Harrisburg, as well as on the
24 state side. They say you have a

1 structural deficit that you must
2 address, and I know there's going
3 to be savings that's going to come
4 out of it.

5 And so I just would think
6 that we will have those numbers as
7 the head education person, or at
8 least they -- I'll put it this way,
9 out of respect, they should be
10 providing you all that data so you
11 can just have on your own as the
12 Chief Education officer for the
13 city, but I'm going to digress to
14 the time back to Member Jones.

15 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: No,
16 well said, Mr. President. So the
17 math has to math. We -- you have
18 to make it make sense to us that
19 why on one hand we are going to tax
20 people and then take away from
21 people educational opportunities
22 for their kids. We -- I can't
23 knock on the door, say, I'm taxing
24 you and I'm closing your school

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1 because of some nebulous number
2 that we don't know.

3 So one of the cries from
4 the kids was slow it down. And,
5 you know, they're rushing this
6 thing to help us. We -- they want
7 us to make a whole decision on half
8 information, which I'm just -- as
9 one independent elected official,
10 just not prepared to do that.

11 I support fully funding
12 our schools. I support fully
13 educating our kids that those two
14 things can be true at the same
15 time. But what you're not going to
16 do, what I'm not going to do is
17 raise taxes on one hand, cut
18 services on the other, and tell
19 them that makes sense. So --

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 The Chair recognizes Majority
22 Leader --

23 DR. CARRERA: Can I -- can
24 I respond? May I respond to that,

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1 Council President?

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 One second. The Chair recognizes
4 the Majority Leader Gilmore-
5 Richardson.

6 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

7 RICHARDSON: Thank you.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Point of information?

10 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

11 RICHARDSON: No, Council President.
12 I'm raising a question of privilege
13 for this hearing. My question of
14 privilege relates to the request --
15 the immediate request of the
16 presence of the School District of
17 Philadelphia to respond to the
18 questions that the members of
19 Council have during this important
20 hearing relative to tax bills that
21 relate to figures and dollars that
22 we need answered as the Council
23 deliberates Bill No. 260208.

24 So I raise a question of

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1 privilege for the district to
2 appear in this hearing immediately.
3 Thank you.

4 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: I
5 second.

6 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:
7 Second, but third.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Thank you very much.

10 Dr. Carrera?

11 DR. CARRERA: So I just
12 want to say this very clearly, and
13 I know that I respect this body.
14 And I'm going to be very quick.
15 The district is underfunded. And
16 that's really important to continue
17 to say, and I'm going to continue
18 to say that. The district is owed
19 a billion, \$1 billion.

20 And I need people to
21 understand that because when we're
22 asking the district, right, to make
23 cuts, and they're making those
24 cuts, they're making central office

1 cuts, they're making cuts to
2 contracts, we understand.

3 Like if we were owed what
4 we should have received, even in
5 three years, right, the -- this was
6 a three-year decision, that was --
7 the courts found that the
8 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is
9 underfunding this state, but the
10 District of Philadelphia, \$1
11 billion. We would have had \$3
12 billion already, Councilman. Could
13 you imagine what we could have done
14 with \$3 billion?

15 The district has presented
16 this plan, and they've said from
17 the onset, and I hear you
18 Councilwoman, they've said from the
19 onset, this is not a budget plan.
20 This is a plan about giving kids
21 what they need.

22 I have been -- and you
23 know my -- I've been an assistant
24 superintendent, I've been -- I've

1 manage 19 schools across the city
2 of Philadelphia. I've been to
3 Southwest, I've been to Comegys,
4 I've been to Bartram, I've been to
5 Rush, I've been to Central. I have
6 seen it all for years and it's not
7 equitable. It is not fair. Our
8 children need the best, because you
9 can have a brand-new building.
10 Amen.

11 If you have a brand-new
12 building, that is wonderful. But I
13 was at Elkin Elementary. I was at
14 Elkin Elementary, where it was hot
15 the other day. And so my point
16 today is that we cannot forget. We
17 are thankful for our legislators,
18 but we have a \$1 billion deficit.
19 And we have to do all that we can.

20 And I hear you, the
21 district has said this is not a
22 budget plan; it's about more
23 preschool. It's about more arts.
24 It's about more music. It is about

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1 sciences, advanced placement
2 classes. And I know that is not an
3 easy decision and it is difficult,
4 but we cannot forget that we are
5 severely chronically underfunded.

6 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: So
7 you are filibustering on my time.
8 Let me just --

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
10 One second, Member Jones.

11 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: You
12 know I love you.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
14 Member Jones.

15 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: But
16 however and nevertheless --

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 Member Jones?

19 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Yes.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Just real quick, there's a point of
22 information.

23 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:
24 Okay. I'm sorry.

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1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
2 Member Dr. Phillips.

3 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Go
4 ahead, Doc.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
6 Briefly, sir.

7 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
8 Real brief. I just want to say
9 that just the point of information
10 is everyone agrees that we have to
11 find a way to get to the funding
12 for our district. It's about how
13 do we find that way collectively,
14 right? We care about the children,
15 we care about our schools, but it's
16 collectively.

17 You all had time to
18 deliberate this, but all of us have
19 not had the time to deliberate this
20 to collectively. And we just don't
21 want to go in blindly supporting
22 something without truly
23 understanding the ramifications of
24 that. So that's why we're asking

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1 these questions. And if you don't
2 mind, we just want to get to the
3 numbers of how we get to that
4 point, right? And we want to be
5 supportive of you and the mayor,
6 but I think we could find a way to
7 get everything done in a cohesive
8 way.

9 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: So
10 I'm not --

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 The Chair recognizes Councilmember
13 Jones.

14 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: I'll
15 yield to --

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
17 The Chair recognizes Councilmember
18 Bass.

19 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
20 you, Mr. President. I just wanted
21 to echo the sentiments of my
22 colleague, because it's really
23 quite infuriating that all these
24 decisions are made without

1 including us. And I want to make
2 sure everyone knows the viewing
3 public and the public in general
4 that City Council was not consulted
5 in any way before these decisions
6 were made. We were not -- it was
7 not discussed, you did not talk to
8 the community, you did not talk to
9 parents, you did not talk to
10 students.

11 And so now here it comes,
12 I'm in trouble, here's my bill and
13 fix it. And it just shouldn't work
14 that way. I understand there's not
15 a funding request for the school
16 district that I haven't supported
17 since I've been in Philadelphia
18 City Council, but this is
19 ridiculous to some degree.

20 When we talk about the
21 other things that are in here, it
22 doesn't make sense that we're
23 talking about, you know, using
24 these funds to pay parking tickets

1 and, you know, we're going to
2 charge for the rideshare tax, and
3 saying that the rideshare company
4 has the option of basically turning
5 over the money to the -- to the
6 City of Philadelphia.

7 Because from the
8 legislation, as it was pointed out
9 from Councilmember Young, as it
10 reads, the Rideshare Company is
11 being required to tax the
12 passenger. So it's not that they
13 could ever say, well, you know,
14 we're not going to tax them. This
15 is legislation that we're requiring
16 them to put a tax on the passenger.
17 So, I'm sorry, Councilmember Jones,
18 but I know --

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 The Chair -- in terms of time, back
21 to Member Jones.

22 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: I'm
23 going to wind it down,
24 Mr. President. What I would

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1 suggest is the school board, the
2 superintendent, the administration
3 should read the room. This is DOA.
4 And, you know, a lot of people --
5 all of us want to support the kids,
6 but not at the chagrin of the kids.
7 And so -- and it's not just in this
8 chamber. We had a lot of state
9 reps, a lot of state senators that
10 are fed up to hear with the math
11 not adding up.

12 And so I know Thursday
13 they want to quickly approve the
14 final, final, final. I wouldn't do
15 that. That would be drawing a line
16 in the sand that I think they -- by
17 not reading the room, will regret.
18 So take it back to them. I like
19 Member Bass have been a constant
20 vote for extra school funding. We
21 -- there's not a tax bill that I
22 ever voted for, but this may be the
23 first. If there is not equity,
24 balance, and reciprocity to our

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1 children, I'm not doing it. All
2 right?

3 DR. CARRERA: So I'll just
4 say that I will definitely take the
5 concerns back to the
6 administration.

7 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:
8 Thank you.

9 MR. DUBOW: I just want to
10 add one more thing, and we will
11 definitely take that concern back.
12 That the solution to the district's
13 funding requires both local and
14 state funding. The local funding
15 on its own is not going to math out
16 because we don't have enough
17 ability to do that. But if we
18 don't do our part, it will be
19 harder to get the state.

20 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: So
21 we want to do our part. We've
22 always done our part, but we have
23 partners at the state level that
24 need to be held accountable. We're

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1 like the custodial parent and, you
2 know, they're asking for increased
3 child support, what we getting for
4 it? And so that's where we are.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
6 There's a point of information,
7 Councilman Lozada.

8 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: I'm
9 just trying to figure out this
10 perception that City Council
11 doesn't want to support children or
12 that we are going to be the reason
13 for 292 people to lose their jobs
14 is absurd. Lawsuits have stated
15 time and time again that the state
16 legislature failed to fund the
17 schools.

18 So where's the public
19 outcry? What -- who's holding the
20 state legislature accountable? All
21 of those billion dollars, where is
22 the -- where is the conversations
23 at? Because they're up right now.
24 They're in communities asking

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1 people to support them, but we --
2 and we talk about, you know, this
3 intergovernmental approach, but
4 where are we -- when have we been
5 brought to the table together to
6 try to figure this out? Not once.

7 Now, so where's the
8 accountability and why is it all
9 falling on Council people? Why are
10 we the ones that are put on blast
11 about not supporting children? No
12 one in this -- on this floor has
13 ever said that we don't support
14 teachers, that we don't support
15 children, that we don't support
16 climate staff. We recognize the
17 importance of that. We know this
18 is about children, but we also
19 represent people that are
20 struggling in their communities who
21 cannot afford to pay another tax.

22 MR. DUBOW: And we --

23 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:

24 This is crazy.

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1 MR. DUBOW: We've never --
2 to be clear, we've never said that
3 Council doesn't support children,
4 and we never would. What we are
5 saying is that the district needs
6 more support, both from the city
7 and the state. And that part of
8 that solution has to be more
9 funding from the city to move the
10 state.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 The Chair recognizes Councilmember
13 Katherine Gilmore-Richardson.

14 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
15 RICHARDSON: Thank you very much,
16 Council President. I'm back to my
17 question of privilege on behalf of
18 the body relative to the question
19 of us being able to perform the
20 official duties of our positions as
21 it relates to Mason's manual
22 legislative procedure, Chapter 21,
23 Questions of Privilege.

24 I have requested an

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1 immediate response from the
2 witnesses here relative to ensuring
3 that the school district
4 representatives come to the hearing
5 today.

6 I am aware that they are
7 scheduled to be before us tomorrow.
8 I'm aware also that the district is
9 scheduled to take a vote on this
10 proposed final plan on Thursday.

11 It is not okay for us to
12 deliberate in this fashion, in this
13 forum, in this body without the
14 district sitting at this table to
15 respond to the questions that you
16 all are unable to answer. You all
17 are precluding us from doing the
18 performance of our official duties.

19 And so therefore, I
20 respectfully raise the question of
21 privilege again to this body and to
22 the witnesses to please give us an
23 official response relative to the
24 School District of Philadelphia,

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1 financial officers, whoever can
2 come to respond to the questions of
3 these members today. When will
4 they be here? Today?

5 MR. DUBOW: Yeah, they
6 will be here today.

7 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
8 RICHARDSON: Today, right now
9 during this hearing?

10 MR. DUBOW: Yes. We've
11 contacted them. They're coming.
12 As soon as we know when they'll be
13 here, we will let you know the
14 timing. But they will be here.

15 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
16 RICHARDSON: Thank you very much.

17 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:
18 Thank you, Mr. President.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 Yes, sir. The Chair recognizes
21 Councilmember Jones.

22 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: No,
23 thank you.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

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1 Oh, you said thank you?

2 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Yes.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 The Chair recognizes Councilmember
5 Cindy Bass.

6 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
7 you, Mr. President. And, you know,
8 we're still in the -- in the same
9 spot because so much of this really
10 just doesn't make sense. And so
11 I'm curious as to a couple of
12 questions that I have. Originally
13 the charge, the request for the
14 charge, the tax on Uber and Lyft
15 rides was \$0.20.

16 The change, I think it was
17 like a week later, went to a
18 dollar, which is like, you know, an
19 \$0.80 increase. What happened, and
20 why did that change occur? Because
21 I still don't have an understanding
22 as to how that happened.

23 MR. DUBOW: Sure. So we
24 had had conversations with the

1 district and understood that they
2 had financial challenges. What
3 changed in that week was we got
4 information about what the cuts
5 would look like -- what the cuts
6 would look like, those 340
7 positions.

8 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: So
9 you made a decision to tax or to
10 request tax without asking that
11 question before? We didn't have
12 that --

13 MR. DUBOW: So they were
14 still developing that. We did --
15 they didn't -- they were putting
16 that together.

17 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: When
18 did we request that information
19 from them?

20 MR. DUBOW: We had -- we
21 had ongoing conversations, but they
22 have to go through their process
23 too. And the timing worked out
24 that they were finished putting

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1 that information together just
2 after we finished our budget.

3 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Yeah.

4 That sounds odd. We didn't ask,
5 you know, like the idea that they
6 knew -- everyone knows where the
7 mayor's budget address is. The
8 school district certainly knows the
9 date of the budget address, and the
10 idea that they didn't find it, you
11 know, important enough or, you
12 know, just moving to that date to
13 make sure we have a drop that date,
14 even if you got to work nights,
15 even if you got to work weekends.

16 But what is the amount?
17 And we have to have it by X date.
18 The idea that we change the
19 numbers, I hope you understand
20 undermines consumer confidence. It
21 undermines the confidence in
22 government because it looks like
23 we're all over the place.

24 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. And I

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1 would say once we heard the level
2 of cuts, we knew that wasn't
3 acceptable and we wanted to do
4 something to address it.

5 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Does
6 -- did the administration look at
7 the fact that there was no input
8 from the community and no input
9 from City Council with these
10 requests? Is that -- is that a
11 factor?

12 MR. DUBOW: When you say
13 no input, you mean on the
14 facilities plan, or?

15 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Yes.

16 MR. DUBOW: Do you want to
17 talk about the process they used,
18 the legislative plan?

19 DR. CARRERA: So can you
20 ask the question again? You're
21 saying that there was no input from
22 the community on the facilities
23 master plan?

24 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Well,

1 let me move it -- you know, move
2 fast forward, because I know there
3 were a series of community
4 meetings, but there was no input on
5 the decision making to apply this
6 tax or to close these --
7 potentially close these schools.
8 So there was no input on that as
9 decisions were being made?

10 DR. CARRERA: So the
11 district, as you said, right, they
12 conducted a pretty two years of
13 getting information and input from
14 families. From surveys, they
15 received about 13,000 survey
16 responses. They had about 40 plus
17 different meetings in the
18 communities, and they also had
19 about -- I know there was a
20 facilities plan project team of
21 which I was one of members from
22 this body as well. I'm just -- I'm
23 just trying to walk us through the
24 process.

1 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: I
2 understand. But when it was time
3 to make a decision about what
4 schools were going to stay open and
5 what schools were going to close,
6 because a lot of these schools --
7 school closures really just don't
8 make sense. And we know that the
9 reason for the closures, the reason
10 that the population and a lot of
11 these schools has diminished is
12 because of action taken by the
13 school district in which special
14 admit schools were changed in terms
15 of how you get into these schools.

16 So you had a special admit
17 school, let's say with -- as an
18 example, like Parkway, let's say it
19 had 500 students, and then the
20 following year it had 250 students
21 based on the changes the district
22 made. So there has been no attempt
23 to go back and correct their
24 changes before you make these

1 drastic decisions.

2 DR. CARRERA: So I will
3 share that you are correct. And
4 when the district --

5 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Let's
6 stay right there.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 Ma'am --

9 DR. CARRERA: Let me
10 finish. Let me finish,
11 Councilwoman. Let me finish.
12 You're correct in that there were
13 changes made, and I -- I don't -- I
14 want to make sure I get the year
15 right, whether it was 2021 or 2022.
16 That is correct. However, after
17 that, Dr. Watlington and his team
18 worked very closely with the
19 principals on rectifying that. So
20 those special admit principals were
21 at the table the following years to
22 help develop the criterias for
23 their schools.

24 What I want to share, just

1 quickly again, is that our build --
2 there is a 65 percent utilization
3 rate. That means that we have
4 buildings that are underutilized.
5 Some of them have a 25 percent
6 utilization rate. And when we
7 think about fiscal management,
8 that's not fiscally responsible to
9 operate a facility that is
10 underutilized. And the key is --
11 and I think what gets lost in this
12 --

13 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: So
14 let me -- let me pause you right
15 there. And I know my -- the bell
16 has rung. But when you shift
17 educational options, if you look at
18 a map of the city of Philadelphia
19 and sort of slice it right down
20 Broad Street, most of the
21 educational options that are alive
22 and thriving and actually
23 overpopulated are in the northeast
24 and -- or -- basically, east of

1 Broad Street, for the most part.

2 And so when you look at
3 where the closures are, they have
4 been mostly west of Broad Street.
5 So what you are doing is really
6 taking away options for a whole
7 section -- a whole -- almost half
8 of the city, when you close schools
9 in our neighborhoods, rather than
10 -- where these schools are
11 overpopulated, rather than
12 providing transportation and moving
13 them into some of these spaces.

14 You have schools on the
15 east side that are having
16 classrooms and closets, from what I
17 hear. I mean, this is just really
18 quite unacceptable, some of the
19 learning conditions, because of the
20 overpopulation. This is fixable,
21 is my point. This is fixable. And
22 I don't understand why we're not
23 having those kinds of
24 conversations. But, Mr. President,

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1 I'll respect the bell.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Well, thank you very much. The
4 Chair recognizes Councilmember
5 Jamie Gauthier.

6 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: I
7 had questions for OPA, but I think
8 this conversation is more
9 important. I will cede the time to
10 my colleagues.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 Okay. Thank you very much. The
13 Chair recognizes Councilmember
14 Nicholas O'Rourke.

15 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
16 Thank you, Mr. President. Good
17 morning to all who are here this
18 morning. Thanks for being with us.
19 I want to ground us in what this
20 moment requires. The needs in our
21 community, in our city are urgent:
22 housing, schools, infrastructure.
23 And I agree that meeting those
24 needs requires real recurring

1 revenue.

2 But we also have to be
3 honest about how we raise that
4 revenue and who we're asking to
5 carry the weight of that revenue
6 raising. Because for many
7 Philadelphians, the cost of living
8 is already too high; it has been
9 too high. And when we talk about
10 new taxes on rides, deliveries, and
11 everyday transactions, people are
12 going to feel that. I just been
13 thinking about this all week and I
14 guess since all the news broke, I
15 -- it's important I think for me to
16 say that as a -- as a -- as a
17 progressive, however you define
18 that, I am against as a principal,
19 regressive taxes.

20 However, the school's
21 needs money. I think everyone
22 agrees on that point. So I sit
23 back and I consider the
24 administration's argument. This is

1 a billion-dollar corporation or
2 companies that we're talking about.
3 And they could -- and they -- I
4 would even emphasize they should
5 actually absorb the cost. They do
6 not have to pass it on to the
7 riders. That is an -- is an
8 important thing to say.

9 But what we also know
10 because of history and because of
11 what they have said to me directly,
12 is that they are not going to
13 absorb it; they are going to pass
14 it on. I have to appreciate my
15 colleague, Member Young, who lifted
16 the point earlier, which I -- it
17 was beyond me, but I'm glad he made
18 that point: If the legislation, if
19 a tax literally says, you got to
20 pass it on the riders, that flies
21 in the face of the argument in the
22 first place, and that's got to be
23 rectified.

24 But then, I consider that

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1 if we know that they won't -- they
2 won't absorb the cost, they're
3 going to pass it on. If we know
4 that, then where else can we get
5 the \$50.4 million that we're
6 looking for?

7 My progressive decarceral
8 mind looks at the billion-dollar
9 police budget that you continue to
10 hold deep respect for. You can --
11 I think you can continue to hold
12 deep respect for Commissioner
13 Bethel and for Chief of Staff Healy
14 and for President Poplar, and not
15 pretend that the police budget is
16 somehow untouchable or outside the
17 purview of this body's
18 appropriation powers. It is not.
19 We could get it from there, but we
20 won't. And we know that it's not
21 going to come out of there. So I'm
22 left to kind of figure out how we
23 navigate this moment.

24 Candidly, it's real hard

1 to separate this from last year's
2 decisions on the business income
3 and receipts tax. The city moved
4 forward with BIRT cuts that
5 primarily benefit large
6 corporations and while raising
7 taxes for our small businesses.

8 Now a year later, we're
9 considering revenue measures that
10 fall more directly on working
11 people. I support investing in our
12 schools, addressing homelessness,
13 maintaining city services. We owe
14 quality services to our citizens.
15 Everyone deserves housing and we
16 know the schools need money.

17 And also, I want to make
18 sure that we're building a tax
19 structure that reflects our values.
20 One that is fair and that doesn't
21 deepen the inequities that we're
22 actively trying to solve. So my
23 questions are about how the
24 administration weighed those

1 tradeoffs and whether more
2 equitable options were fully on the
3 table.

4 Last year, Minority Leader
5 Kendra Brooks and I introduced a
6 proposal to explore a local wealth
7 tax focused on ultra-high net worth
8 individuals.

9 Can you walk us through
10 whether the administration
11 evaluated more progressive revenue
12 options like that this budget
13 cycle?

14 And if not, what has
15 prevented the administration from
16 more seriously pursuing revenue
17 strategies that more directly
18 target billionaires and large
19 corporations who we agree ought to
20 pay that tax?

21 MR. DUBOW: I can answer
22 it in like one sentence:
23 Uniformity clause. Uniformity
24 clause prevents us from doing what

1 you would want to do with wealth
2 tax.

3 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

4 Okay. I heard the bell. I'm going
5 to get two more on, if you don't
6 mind, Mr. President. On the
7 proposed \$1 rideshare tax, can you
8 clarify how this interacts with the
9 existing state-imposed fee on
10 rideshare trips? And does this
11 stack on top of the current state
12 fee? And if so, what does that
13 mean for the total cost per ride
14 for consumers?

15 And relatedly, have there
16 been any conversations with state
17 partners about adjusting how
18 existing rideshare revenue is
19 allocated? Right now, a portion of
20 that funding is split with the
21 Philadelphia Parking Authority, has
22 the administration explored
23 directing a larger share or all of
24 that existing revenue to the school

1 district of Philadelphia, instead
2 of creating a new tax burden with
3 this regressive tax?

4 MR. DUBOW: Can you just
5 repeat the first part of your
6 question?

7 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
8 On the proposed \$1 rideshare tax,
9 can you clarify how this interacts
10 with the existing state-imposed fee
11 on rideshare trips?

12 MR. DUBOW: So it is on
13 top of that tax, kind of like our
14 local sales tax is on top of the
15 state sales tax.

16 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
17 And so what does that mean for the
18 total cost per ride for consumers?

19 MR. DUBOW: Combined, it
20 -- depending on the cost of the
21 ride, but an average ride is about
22 \$19. So it would be about 6
23 percent of the ride with those two
24 combined.

1 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

2 Okay. And the second part was
3 relatedly, have there been any
4 conversations with state partners
5 about adjusting how existing
6 rideshare revenue is allocated?
7 Right now, a portion of that
8 funding is split between PPA. Has
9 the administration explored a --
10 directing a larger share or all of
11 that existing revenue to the School
12 District of Philadelphia, instead
13 of it creating this particular new
14 tax?

15 MR. DUBOW: And we have
16 not had those conversations. One
17 of the reasons that the local
18 option appealed to us is, one, we
19 control it locally, and two, that
20 none of it would go to the Parking
21 Authority.

22 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
23 So my time has been expired. I
24 have other things I would like to

1 ask, but I just want to emphasize
2 again what Member Young lifted up.
3 If it is in the text of the -- of
4 the -- of what's being proposed
5 here, that is a non-starter. I
6 think it needs to be -- that you
7 need to start there and fix that.

8 It is -- it is hard for
9 me, who was prepared to come in
10 today to, as a progressive, bolster
11 the argument the administration is
12 making that billion-dollar
13 corporations ought to pay and not
14 pass this on, even though I know
15 they're not going to do that. I
16 will -- I will -- I will ride for
17 that particular point.

18 But if your legislation is
19 saying that the riders are supposed
20 to be the ones that bear the brunt,
21 it undercuts the whole argument.
22 You've got to fix that. That is --
23 I think that is a non-starter.

24 MR. DUBOW: They --

1 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

2 Thank you, Mr. President. I'm
3 sorry, Rob.

4 MR. DUBOW: I was just
5 saying that companies still collect
6 it, and then they have a choice
7 about what they can do with their
8 pricing.

9 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
10 Okay. Thank you, Mr. President.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 There's a point -- there's a point
13 of information. And I want to be
14 clear, these are points of
15 information, is not an opinion. So
16 these are points of information.
17 Go ahead, sir.

18 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:
19 Sorry.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 No, that's cool.

22 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:
23 Thank you, Mr. President. But the
24 legislation says that it could --

1 they have to collect it from the
2 passenger. So I'm not
3 understanding what you are thinking
4 that it can be anything other than
5 that.

6 MR. DUBOW: They can make
7 a pricing decision, right, about
8 how they build in that dollar.

9 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: But
10 they still have to collect it from
11 the passenger. Whether they build
12 it in some way, they still have to
13 collect it from the passenger.

14 MR. DUBOW: And then --
15 you're right. And then they make a
16 decision about how they allocate
17 that dollar.

18 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: They
19 cannot. They do not have -- they
20 do not have the ability to make
21 that decision based on what the
22 words of the legislation says.

23 MR. DUBOW: They can do
24 that. If you want, we can get you

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1 something in writing from law,
2 explaining how that would work.

3 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:

4 Please. Because of the legislation
5 clearly just says, you know, we --
6 as we look at it, right? It
7 clearly says, "The TNC shall
8 collect the tax as agent for the
9 Board of Education from the
10 passenger at the time of the charge
11 for the ride and shall remit the
12 tax to the revenue commissioner."
13 So please explain any other, like,
14 interpretation of that.

15 MR. DUBOW: Well, then
16 they make the decision about how
17 they do their pricing after that.
18 They have a decision about to make.
19 And they're clearly making decision
20 that they're not going to offset
21 that cost to the riders, and
22 they're going to pass it on.

23 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:

24 That's not -- Thank you,

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1 Mr. President. I'm --

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Thank you very much. Councilmember
4 Dr. Nina Ahmad, Councilmember Jim
5 Harrity, then Member Brooks.

6 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: I'm
7 going to follow up on what you
8 said. Thank you, Council
9 President. I'm following up on the
10 point Councilmember Cindy Bass made
11 about full engagement in this
12 process. Dr. Carrera said that
13 this -- once this enrollment issue
14 was unearthed due to the problems
15 created by the district, principals
16 were asked to respond to it.

17 I know for a fact in
18 Lankenau, we'll talk about one
19 school, they asked for permission
20 to have multiple sections of the
21 allowed amount, 33 students, they
22 were not given that. They were --
23 they had asked for use of tier 1 or
24 tier 2, which would criteria to

1 create desirability. They were not
2 given that. And they asked for a
3 name change that would have branded
4 them in a specific way; they were
5 not given that.

6 So all I'm saying is you
7 asked these principles to do
8 things, they told you they wanted
9 to do these things, and the school
10 district didn't allow that, and now
11 they're being penalized for what
12 they were not allowed to do.

13 So how -- so that's one
14 point that I wanted to address that
15 Councilmember Bass brought up. So
16 it's incorrect when you say that
17 the principals did not respond.
18 What I'm saying is if you really
19 are concerned about this problem of
20 low enrollment, give these schools
21 a defined time to say a five-year
22 time period to do these things.
23 Show us. If you don't show us,
24 then you're gone. Right? But you

1 haven't given those options. You
2 haven't clarified what they have to
3 do, what permission they have to
4 do, and then they fail. That's a
5 different matter. But you have --
6 the school district has not laid
7 out clear guidelines as to how they
8 address the enrollment problem.

9 In Lankenau, it is nothing
10 else. They don't have a problem
11 with their building; they don't
12 have anything. They have a
13 curriculum that is land-based
14 curriculum that is based on it
15 being a forest, and you're trying
16 to shove that into a farm land.
17 That curriculum will not exist over
18 there because the land in the other
19 school doesn't allow itself to be
20 used in that manner. So if you are
21 thinking, Oh, we're going to merge
22 this and we're still going to have
23 the environmental curriculum, it'll
24 not work.

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1 So I don't know what
2 standards, what data, what you are
3 doing to come to these points
4 because it makes zero sense. Zero
5 sense to take the only
6 environmental school in the entire
7 school district, one of two in the
8 entire state, and you're trying to
9 say, we're going to shove it into
10 another school. That is not
11 happening. That is just so
12 irresponsible to have stewards of
13 tomorrow, our environmental
14 stewards of tomorrow, cut off at
15 the knees, because we don't know
16 why. Because you haven't explained
17 why. And I want to understand --
18 and I know Councilmember Katherine
19 Gilmore-Richardson asked them to be
20 here.

21 I want to understand how
22 they came to this. Each school,
23 they should have done a score for
24 the each school to say what are

1 they losing? What is the deficit
2 in each school? And how we -- can
3 we address it? They were not given
4 any options to address these
5 things. You're just saying done.

6 So I cannot understand how
7 you're asking for new taxes to help
8 the school district when they're
9 not operating in good faith.
10 Simple as that. Everything we've
11 seen this far, they are not
12 operating in good faith. We don't
13 know what is the motivation for
14 doing this, we cannot understand
15 the motivation. We are going
16 school by school by school, and we
17 do not understand the motivation
18 because there has been no
19 corrective action done. This is
20 how things proceed. You have a
21 problem, you've had a plan, you try
22 to correct it, doesn't work, then
23 you make this plan. But that has
24 not happened in the school

1 district.

2 So we cannot just take one
3 superintendent who wants to have a
4 different vision, suddenly lay it
5 on top. This happened before to
6 the school district. So this is
7 highly responsible to come to us,
8 to put this tax on poor people, on
9 elderly, on the sick, to say, now
10 you pay more because we don't have
11 a clear plan of how we're going to
12 use the money, because we're still
13 going to cry no money, no money, no
14 money. And then we're not going to
15 correct it.

16 So you guys have a
17 responsibility before you come to
18 us to say, how are -- the numbers
19 that we wanted, how are you
20 allocating this? What are the
21 corrective measures? What worked,
22 what didn't work? How much
23 timeframe was involved in that? I
24 cannot fathom how you can get in

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1 front of us and ask us to do these
2 things. And our constituents are
3 telling us they're going to be
4 deeply penalized by everything you
5 have said today without a
6 rationale, without a way forward.

7 Thank you, Council
8 President. There's really no -- I
9 cannot understand this whole
10 process at all.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 Thank you. The Chair recognizes
13 Councilman Jim Harrity, then
14 Councilmember Brooks, then
15 Councilmember Rue Landau.

16 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
17 Thank you, Council President. Good
18 morning. Rob, I've been sitting
19 here with the Beatles song stuck in
20 my head all morning. One for you,
21 23 for me. I'm the tax man. You
22 know --

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 Excuse me, point of information.

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1 What's the name of that song again?

2 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

3 It's a Beatles song. Yeah. The
4 Tax Man. Yeah. I'm not going to
5 be known as the tax man. I'm
6 really --

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

8 The Tax Man --

9 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

10 I'm really kind of appalled that
11 the way it's being played here is
12 that if you're not for this tax,
13 you're not for children and you're
14 not for teachers. I'm a union guy;
15 everybody knows that. I'm a 100
16 percent for teachers all the time.
17 We don't treat our teachers right.
18 But throwing bad money after bad
19 money and keep on piling on, as my
20 colleague said, another poor tax,
21 just like the soda tax.

22 So I like that Councilman
23 Phillips was asking and my
24 colleagues are all asking the --

1 around the same questions, too.
2 Yeah. How do we know the
3 projections are the projections and
4 we're going to get this money?
5 Because I remember the soda tax was
6 supposed to pay for all this stuff
7 too, but we're putting \$49 million
8 out of the general fund every year.

9 And when I asked about it,
10 you told me that that's the way it
11 was always supposed to be. We knew
12 we were going to have to put up
13 money. So that's where I -- comes
14 into just piling more and more on
15 my neighbors. I can't do it.

16 At numbers; 30,000
17 residents in Philadelphia are
18 driving for either Uber, Lyft, or
19 some kind of food delivery service,
20 right? Data shows that the
21 driver's pay is cut 4.5 percent in
22 cities that imposed the rideshare
23 tax. 80,000 trips last year were
24 to or from Kensington, where I

1 live. Sixty percent of all Uber
2 rides, and 61 percent of all Lyft
3 rides in Philadelphia originate
4 from low-income areas. All right.

5 Have we considered the
6 impacts this will have on
7 low-income neighborhoods, both in
8 increasing cost and reducing driver
9 pay as a result? It's like a
10 double whammy for the people in my
11 neighborhood and other
12 neighborhoods around this city,
13 because not only are the drivers
14 going to get less pay and less work
15 out of this because people are
16 going to find other options, but
17 also the people that still use the
18 ride are going to get taxed.

19 Again, I'm for the kids,
20 I'm for the thing, but I don't --
21 how are we supposed to -- how am I
22 supposed to look at my neighbors in
23 the face and tell them I'm going to
24 hit them with another tax? Since

1 I've gotten here, I've -- man, I
2 voted for just about everything
3 that has come down to when it came
4 to the school board, because, you
5 know, that's the right thing to do
6 for the kids, right? But when is
7 enough enough and when are we
8 actually going to fix something?
9 Fix it. Like, can you answer any
10 of that?

11 MR. DUBOW: Yeah, I can
12 answer -- I can answer a lot of
13 that. And I'll also ask
14 Dr. Carrera to answer the question
15 about progress being made at the
16 school district. So I can go back
17 to the commuting question. We
18 looked at census data, less than 1
19 percent of people who earn less
20 than \$40,000 use rideshare to
21 commute. When we looked at
22 patterns of who used rideshare,
23 that usage went up with income so
24 that, you know, the higher income

1 you had, the more people were using
2 rideshare.

3 So I understand your
4 concerns. And it was stuff that we
5 looked at. Two, in terms of the
6 school district, and they will be
7 here in a few minutes. They have
8 been making real progress, and we
9 really want them to be able to
10 build on that progress. And we're
11 concerned that if they have to make
12 the cuts they were going to make,
13 that process would start to
14 reverse. And I'll ask Dr. Carrera
15 to fill in more of that
16 information.

17 DR. CARRERA: Yeah. Thank
18 you so much Councilman for your --
19 for your question. And we thank
20 you for all the support that you
21 have provided and all council
22 members here throughout the years.
23 We know you care about the kids.
24 We know you care about the

1 teachers. We know you care about
2 the administrators. And I want to
3 make sure that that goes on the
4 record.

5 The 340 positions, these
6 were -- these were positions that
7 were purchased with COVID dollars,
8 and those positions were used to
9 support students in really
10 underperforming schools. The money
11 is gone, as we know. And the
12 school has made progress because in
13 many of these schools, there have
14 been math interventionists, there
15 have been reading coaches, there
16 are schools that have coaches that
17 are working with teachers.

18 These are all practices
19 that work; that move the needle for
20 instruction. That -- and we've
21 seen that. The district has made
22 progress in reading; they've made
23 progress in graduation rates. So
24 these positions are what we are

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1 talking about today, and that is
2 why the rideshare tax is being
3 proposed to support these dollars
4 that were used -- COVID dollars,
5 they're not -- they're gone. And
6 we want to make sure that the
7 progress that the district has been
8 making continues.

9 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: So
10 if we close these schools, we are
11 not going to see any teachers lost
12 from the schools that are closed.
13 What happens to those teachers?
14 Where do they go? What happens to
15 the principals of those schools?

16 DR. CARRERA: Thank you.
17 That is an excellent question.
18 Thank you so much, Councilmember.
19 Every year, the school district --
20 every year, the city of
21 Philadelphia has a 2000 teacher
22 shortage. I'm going to say it
23 again. Every year, the city of
24 Philadelphia has a 2000 charters,

1 school districts. And you might
2 say, well, how does that happen?
3 Why is that happening?
4 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania used to
5 be the state where Virginia, other
6 states would come here to get
7 teachers. The decline has been so
8 dramatic because we're seeing many
9 people do not want to go into this
10 profession.

11 So the answer to your
12 question is, as the Superintendent
13 has said, resources are spread
14 thin, because we have, again, over
15 200 plus buildings, we don't have
16 the enrollment. So you -- now
17 what's going to happen, as the
18 Superintendent said that teachers
19 are not going to lose their job.
20 But there are schools that have
21 vacancies. There are schools that
22 have math teacher vacancies,
23 science teacher vacancies. So this
24 is going to help fill those

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1 vacancies --

2 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

3 Numbers are numbers. I just want
4 to know, now you just said it, if
5 we're short 2000 teachers, where
6 were we firing 300 or getting rid
7 of 300 and something teachers?
8 We're already short. Like, I --
9 numbers are numbers. And do you
10 understand? It doesn't add up.
11 Like I'm not a -- I'm a fairly
12 simple man.

13 DR. CARRERA: That's
14 right.

15 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

16 And if it doesn't add up for me, I
17 know it's not adding up for my
18 neighbors. But numbers -- remember
19 you're saying we're short 2000
20 teachers --

21 DR. CARRERA: Every year.

22 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: --
23 but if we don't do the rideshare
24 thing, we're going to lose 340

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1 teachers, right? Like where --
2 well, if we're short the 2000
3 teachers, how are we losing 340
4 teachers?

5 DR. CARRERA: So let me
6 explain that. So those teachers,
7 when we're saying that they would
8 be cut, that means that they would
9 be moved to other buildings. So
10 I'll say it again --

11 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: So
12 they wouldn't lose their jobs?

13 DR. CARRERA: They
14 wouldn't lose their jobs.

15 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
16 They would be moved to other
17 buildings.

18 DR. CARRERA: They would
19 be moved to other buildings. And
20 so --

21 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: So
22 no teachers' jobs would be lost?

23 DR. CARRERA: That is
24 correct. But what we're talking

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1 about is --

2 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

3 With or without the tax? Is that
4 -- that's what you just said. No
5 matter what.

6 MR. DUBOW: Just clarify,
7 there would be no --

8 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: No
9 jobs lost, no matter what.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Excuse me, one second.

12 MR. DUBOW: There would be
13 no layoffs.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 One second.

16 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
17 Right. Add the numbers --

18 MR. DUBOW: There would be
19 --

20 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: --
21 2000 vacant, 300 and something that
22 we want to get rid of --

23 MR. DUBOW: There would be
24 no layoffs. There would be 340

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1 fewer positions in the district.

2 DR. CARRERA: I think the
3 point also is -- that I want to
4 make clear, right?

5 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
6 But they would be 2000, so where is
7 --

8 DR. CARRERA: But let me
9 explain. Very clear --

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Excuse me, one second.

12 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
13 We've set --

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 One second. Just give me one
16 second --

17 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: --
18 thousand seven --

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 Member Harrity, just one second,
21 sir.

22 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
23 I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

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1 No, don't be sorry. Chair
2 recognizes Councilmember Isaiah
3 Thomas, for a point of information.

4 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
5 I'm already last in the order, so
6 it's no big deal. I want to be
7 very clear, you're saying that no
8 matter if we vote for the tax or
9 not, nobody will be laid off?

10 MR. DUBOW: There would be
11 no --

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
13 Whether we enact the tax or not,
14 nobody will be laid off?

15 MR. DUBOW: Nobody will be
16 laid off. But there would be 340
17 fewer positions, so there would be
18 less going on in classrooms.

19 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
20 But we need 2,000, so --

21 DR. CARRERA: And can I
22 add to that? Can I add to that?
23 There will be a disruption --

24 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

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1 You get what I'm saying? You get
2 what I'm saying?

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 So -- one second. Member Harrity?
5 Member Harrity, the floor is yours,
6 sir. And then Ms. Debora Carrera.

7 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
8 That was all I was to -- Council
9 President, I got what I wanted
10 there. There would never going to
11 be any job loss here we are short
12 of teachers as it is, we need all
13 the teachers that we can get, and
14 can't afford to lose not one of
15 them. And we're not going to lose
16 not one, but because we're short,
17 we need to make up those jobs. The
18 money is there. I'm sorry.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 Chair recognizes Debora Carrera.

21 DR. CARRERA: So I just
22 want to -- I just want to make this
23 very clear. Those 340 positions
24 are in schools right now, making

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1 progress and supporting children.
2 Let's say for example, Mr. Chuck at
3 Elkin Elementary, climate staff
4 teacher. He has been there for
5 nine years, right? His position
6 would be cut. That means he would
7 go to another school, but they
8 would not have that position in
9 their school anymore. So the
10 important thing that we have to
11 understand --

12 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: 18
13 schools anyway.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT: Member
15 Harrity, we going to do this
16 you-all, right? Now, first and
17 foremost, I'm going to point the
18 individuals to speak, right? So we
19 can do this in decency and
20 everybody can have the opportunity
21 to express themselves. And if you
22 have a point of information, I'll
23 point at you and you can give your
24 point of information regarding the

1 issue.

2 If it's an opinion, you
3 will wait until your time on which
4 you are called, because you do have
5 other members who have been waiting
6 patiently also to participate in
7 this round. And so with that being
8 said, member Carrera, please
9 respond to Member Harrity.

10 DR. CARRERA: Right. So
11 if I'm a -- if I'm a principal, and
12 I was given five teachers to reduce
13 class size through these dollars,
14 and now I have classes at 20 kids
15 each, you take three teachers away,
16 they're going to get -- they're
17 going to go to another school.

18 But I'm still going to
19 have those vacancies in the sense
20 that now I'm going to have classes
21 with 30 something children. So the
22 goal of these COVID dollars was to
23 support the schools that need the
24 help the most. That is very

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1 important. I don't want that to
2 get lost here. And so, climate
3 staff, teachers, reading coaches,
4 those positions are gone. Our kids
5 are going to regress. And that is
6 -- that's -- that is going to be
7 the unfortunate truth that our kids
8 are going to go backwards because
9 they've made a lot of progress with
10 the support that they've had.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 I want to take a moment of personal
13 privilege to point back to Member
14 Harrity. Now, Member Harrity your
15 brief response, sir, to your line
16 of questioning.

17 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
18 Yeah. Look, I -- the numbers just
19 don't add up for me, Council
20 President. Like I said, I'm not --

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Speak into the microphone, sir.

23 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
24 You know, I don't think anybody's

1 going to consider me a rocket
2 scientist. But math, simple math,
3 is math. And if we're short 2,000
4 teachers and they said that we
5 would have to lay off 300 and
6 something teachers, where does that
7 come in at when you're already
8 short 2,000 teachers? Teachers are
9 not going anywhere. They're
10 already saying that it's a choice.

11 Your choice was when you
12 decided to shut those 18 schools
13 down, 20 schools in the beginning,
14 whatever it was, that was when you
15 made the decision that people would
16 be moved around, right? So telling
17 us that people are going to be
18 moved around if we don't apply this
19 tax, for me, just doesn't add up.

20 Council President, I will
21 wait till second round or when the
22 school board gets here to ask some
23 more questions of them. I didn't
24 even get to the fact that we're

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1 going to let people get away
2 without paying their tickets, when
3 other people are paying tickets
4 every day. It's one of the biggest
5 complaints we get in my office.
6 Thank you, Council President.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

8 You are welcome, Member Harrity.
9 Chair recognizes Councilmember
10 Kendra Brooks then Councilmember
11 Rue Landau, then dear Member Young.

12 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:

13 Thank you, Council President. I
14 just want to channel some of my
15 members' energy around education.
16 My questions -- I did not come
17 directly to education questions.
18 However, just in -- just a little
19 history. Historically, the
20 district has given false data to
21 close schools in the past. I'm
22 really excited to see the energy in
23 this current Council body around
24 school closures, because when I was

1 a parent fighting for schools, we
2 didn't have that same energy.

3 So I really would like to
4 applaud my colleagues for stepping
5 up in this moment, because this is
6 crucial to communities across the
7 city. And it's very important that
8 we shouldn't get this information
9 or have to ask these questions
10 right now. A lot of this data
11 should have been presented school
12 by school. If it was 20 schools
13 stated to be closed, we should have
14 had detailed information about the
15 why.

16 And those conversations
17 should have been held at individual
18 school communities, so the
19 communities, the teachers, and the
20 elected officials understand
21 exactly what's going on. And we
22 don't have to play these
23 shenanigans right here in a budget
24 hearing. So that's my thought on

1 that.

2 But my questions. I want
3 to talk about the tax system in
4 Philadelphia that I have been
5 fighting for. Since I came into
6 Council, I have advocated for a
7 wealth tax. This is 0.04 percent
8 tax on stocks and bonds that would
9 generate over \$2 million a year,
10 according to Penn Policy Center.

11 Last year, along with
12 Councilmember O'Rourke, we
13 introduced the People's Tax Plan.
14 We felt it was important to put an
15 initiative -- I'm sorry, an
16 alternative vision out for the
17 city. The plan was called for a
18 wealth tax and expanded wage tax
19 fund and doubling the BIRT
20 exemption. I have concerns about
21 the decade plus tax cuts that were
22 put into law during the last budget
23 season. This is part of why I did
24 not vote on the budget last year.

1 So as we sit here today, I
2 find it surprising that we are
3 looking for new taxes. Many of
4 them that would fall on the backs
5 of working people. I worry our tax
6 system is moving in the wrong
7 direction; eliminating small
8 businesses. BIRT exemption made
9 our overall tax system even more
10 regressive. We are seeing
11 increases in energy bills and the
12 cost of living, yet we are
13 continuing to cut tax on the most
14 profitable corporations in this
15 city.

16 And I want to state this
17 clearly; I am for more funding for
18 the school district. That has been
19 my lifelong fight. I've been
20 fighting for school funding since
21 my daughter, who is now 35 years
22 old, has been in this public school
23 system. And I'm still here today,
24 just in a different capacity doing

1 the same. So I really pushed back
2 on the fact that if I don't support
3 this Uber tax, that I don't support
4 schools when all of my children
5 have benefited from public schools,
6 including myself and now my
7 grandchildren. That is not fair to
8 us to do that.

9 Anyway, organizations like
10 Lift Every Voice have demanded an
11 immediate \$75 million to stop
12 layoffs. And I think we need to
13 find the funding, but I'm skeptical
14 of the way this administration has
15 proposed to do it. So with that, I
16 want to ask a few questions. I'm
17 going to just get all my questions
18 in sequence and then you can
19 respond. So I want to ask the
20 question, has the -- in -- the
21 administration looked into the
22 possibility of the wealth tax? I
23 heard it what you said to
24 Councilmember O'Rourke but

1 according to our attorneys it does
2 not fall into the uniformity
3 clause.

4 And we could debate that
5 later on, but from our information,
6 that's not what we understand. And
7 why would a tax on rideshare and
8 delivery service be preferred over
9 a tax that would target the
10 wealthiest amongst us? And what
11 taxes -- what other taxes did
12 administration look at when trying
13 to figure out how to support the
14 school district?

15 And my next question was
16 similar to Councilmember Harrity.
17 I'm wondering how the proposed
18 rideshare tax would affect Uber and
19 Lyft drivers? In other cities,
20 we've seen labor unions like SEIU
21 partner with you Uber to give their
22 workers a voice on the job. And I
23 was surprised that this
24 conversation around taxes, we

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1 haven't focused on the drivers at
2 all.

3 What is the city doing to
4 ensure that Uber and Lyft drivers
5 have better working conditions?
6 And have you had discussions with
7 labor advocates about how to
8 improve driver working conditions
9 and pay as Councilmember Harrity
10 suggested? And those are my
11 questions.

12 MR. DUBOW: I think the
13 first question was about --
14 actually can you go back to the
15 first question?

16 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: The
17 first question was about what other
18 taxes did you look at when
19 considering how to support the
20 school district and why would the
21 tax on rideshare and delivery
22 services be preferred over a tax
23 that -- over a tax that would
24 target the wealthiest amongst us in

1 the city?

2 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. So we
3 did not want to do a broad-based
4 tax. We didn't want to do an
5 increase in property tax or the
6 wage tax. We wanted to do taxes
7 that we could target at the
8 services we could provide. And
9 since there was -- the rideshare
10 tax already went to the school
11 district, we went to that tax.

12 We can't target the
13 wealthy in our taxes; we are not
14 allowed to under the uniformity
15 clause. And we did look at
16 rideshare usage and did see that it
17 went up with income. But we can't
18 target the wealthy in our tax
19 system.

20 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: The
21 other question -- so those are the
22 only taxes that you looked at when
23 it came to funding the school
24 district, the ones you just

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1 mentioned?

2 MR. DUBOW: The broad-
3 based -- yeah. Yes, that's what we
4 looked at.

5 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:
6 Okay. And my other question was
7 around, did we -- did you -- what
8 did you do to ensure that the Uber
9 and Lyft drivers have better
10 working conditions in the
11 discussion? Or have they had
12 conversations with the labor
13 advocates around improving driver
14 working conditions and pay,
15 considering that they're also going
16 to be impacted by the increase in
17 fare this passed off to driver -- I
18 mean, to the community?

19 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. We have
20 not had those conversations.

21 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:
22 Thank you.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 O'Rourke, there's a point

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1 of information, correct?

2 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

3 Yes, sir. Isn't it true that you
4 can target specific industries with
5 taxes?

6 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. Do you
7 want to take this?

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Just state your name for the
10 record, and please begin.

11 MS. MCCOLGAN: Good
12 morning. Kathleen McColgan,
13 revenue commissioner. We do have
14 per legal guidance. We have the
15 ability to tax BIRT by NAICS codes;
16 industry codes.

17 However, that is not
18 something that -- those codes
19 merely reflect the industry and
20 does not make any distinction
21 between a large business versus a
22 small business. So for example,
23 that industry code would capture a
24 small corner store as well as a

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1 large grocery chain.

2 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

3 Thank you, Mr. President.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

5 Thank you very much, sir.

6 Councilmember Rue Landau then

7 Councilmember Jeffrey J. Young.

8 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

9 Point of information.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 There's a point of information.

12 Member Jones.

13 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:

14 Yeah. To my colleague's point,

15 this body has often identified

16 specific taxes towards industries,

17 whether it was tobacco, whether it

18 was the beverage industry. You

19 just cannot separate the big from

20 the little. And I don't know if we

21 fully explored all of the

22 possibilities of places that we

23 might be able to levy a fare tax

24 onto people.

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1 And I just urge us to keep
2 all of our options open before we
3 double down on our kids, double
4 down on closures, and double down
5 on a poor people's tax towards
6 rideshare. Thank you,
7 Mr. President.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Thank you very much, sir.
10 Councilmember Rue Landau. Then
11 Councilmember --

12 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:
13 Thank you. Thank you, thank you.
14 I want to take a first -- just one
15 second to kind of comment on a lot
16 of what is being said here. I
17 agree, we have done some very
18 creative taxes in the past.

19 And I just want to -- most
20 importantly, what's happening here,
21 what I've seen happening since the
22 times the school district comes and
23 talks to us, especially this year,
24 is a sheer lack of communication,

1 honesty, working with us as
2 members, and working with community
3 people when it comes forward to
4 what they're trying to do.

5 And what happens is we
6 start distrusting. We are severely
7 concerned about what's happening,
8 and then we start hearing different
9 answers. And I've got to tell you,
10 without building that trust and
11 that understanding and giving us
12 real numbers and real facts, we are
13 automatically going to be against
14 what you're talking about, because
15 we don't think you're telling us
16 the truth. So I got to tell you
17 that that's what's happening here.

18 We have taxed many things
19 in the past. Though it is -- it is
20 not as simple to say every element
21 of the -- of Council Members
22 Brooks' and O'Rourke's wealth tax
23 are all impossible to do based on
24 the uniformity clause. I don't

1 believe that is true. And I do
2 think we can be creative, and we
3 can come up with this money.

4 So I'm going to start with
5 some broad questions and get into
6 more specific. But I do want to
7 lean into what Councilmember Lozada
8 was asking about whether or not the
9 city is continuing to push the
10 state on the \$1 billion that is
11 owed to us. We are -- we have a
12 Commonwealth Court decision from
13 2023 that said -- says that the
14 school district of Philadelphia
15 must be equitably funded.

16 It's clear as day. You
17 get -- you just -- they worked two
18 decades on this -- on this campaign
19 to get this court ruling that tells
20 them exactly what we should do.
21 And they backtrack by saying, oh,
22 we're going to create a commission
23 and come up with a formula and do
24 the best that we can. The state

1 owes us this money; they must pay,
2 and then we will have all the money
3 that we need to make our children,
4 and our teachers thrive.

5 DR. CARRERA: Yeah. Thank
6 you so much, Councilmember. Yes,
7 to what you're just saying. So we
8 are working with the state. We
9 brought partners together to talk
10 about the adequacy funding. We've
11 thanked legislators. Again, we got
12 \$135 million last year, 135 million
13 -- this year. And it's \$1 billion,
14 right? And so we are working to --
15 as the mayor has said, when we go
16 to Harrisburg, we also have to show
17 what we're doing as the city
18 because it's important.

19 I worked at the state,
20 I've been at the General Assembly.
21 I worked for the -- I was the
22 executive deputy secretary for the
23 Secretary of Education. We need to
24 show that we are also doing our

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1 part as a city to provide those --
2 that local revenue within the
3 limitations, as you've heard Rob
4 Dubow talk about. So I know the
5 district has just walked in and I'm
6 sure that people want to hear from
7 them as well. But Council
8 President, can I make a point of
9 clarification? Thank you.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Absolutely.

12 DR. CARRERA: So I just
13 want to make sure that the
14 positions that we're talking about,
15 the 340, they would be transferred
16 to other buildings. But that would
17 impact the schools that they're in
18 because they have been serving
19 those schools; working with the
20 children and making the progress.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 So just for clarity, those 340
23 positions, they would just be
24 transferred somewhere else, and

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1 they wouldn't actually be in the
2 current schools that they're in?

3 DR. CARRERA: Right. And
4 I -- but I don't want to lose that
5 point because that is a big issue.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
7 I think the way it's being conveyed
8 is that in the event that this
9 funding isn't approved, that 340
10 positions will be totally
11 eliminated. That's different from
12 being transferred. So those people
13 will still have a job, they just
14 will have it somewhere else, and
15 they just won't be in the current
16 positions that they're in. Is that
17 what I hear you saying?

18 DR. CARRERA: Yes.

19 MR. DUBOW: That's
20 accurate. But that school would
21 now have fewer positions. So they
22 would have fewer teachers, fewer
23 counselors, fewer climate staff.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

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1 Point of information, Member Isaiah
2 Thomas.

3 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

4 Just so I can understand clarity,
5 why would the 340 people being
6 moved under your recommendation be
7 more important than the staff at
8 Parkway, Lankenau, MCS, Robeson,
9 and all the other schools that's
10 been moved in the past?

11 So if I'm understanding
12 correctly, you're telling us that
13 we need to do this so those 340
14 staff members don't get moved. But
15 in your same Facilities Plan,
16 you're going to move the staff at
17 Lankenau, you're going to move the
18 staff at Parkway West, you're going
19 to move the staff at Parkway
20 Northwest.

21 You're going to move the
22 staff at Robeson; you're going to
23 move the staff at Overbrook
24 Elementary School. If I add up all

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1 the staff in those schools, that
2 equal more staff than the 340
3 you're mentioning. So please
4 explain to me, why would we care
5 that you're moving 340 staff
6 members when your buck -- your
7 Facilities Plan moves more than 340
8 staff members point of information,
9 I just don't understand it. Can
10 you please explain?

11 DR. CARRERA: Can I
12 respond to that?

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
14 Yes, ma'am.

15 DR. CARRERA: Thank you,
16 Councilman Thomas.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 The floor is yours.

19 DR. CARRERA: When I was
20 here the last time I talked about
21 how I moved Kensington Capa into a
22 new facility. And I'm not sure if
23 you remember that. When I was at
24 Cumberland and Coral, we moved from

1 Cumberland and Coral, an entire
2 school to Front and Berks, a brand
3 -- we moved into a new building,
4 right?

5 My entire staff moved with
6 me. I moved, my teachers moved, my
7 climate staff moved, my counselors
8 moved, my students moved. The
9 Superintendent has said repeatedly
10 that next year, '26, '27, is a year
11 of transition and planning. These
12 are the pieces of information and
13 the work that has to be done,
14 because we don't want to disrupt
15 children. That is not the -- that
16 is -- we want to give children what
17 they deserve and what they need.

18 And when you're talking
19 about resources being spread thin,
20 a kid cannot have Algebra 1 if
21 there's no math teacher in their
22 school. They cannot -- they can't
23 use a lab if there isn't a lab.

24 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

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1 You're testifying for me. You did
2 not answer any of my questions.
3 You just proved my point. I agree
4 with everything you're saying. So
5 why does the 340 you are talking
6 about matter more than the 400 that
7 I'm talking about? I agree with
8 everything you're saying. So why
9 are we moving any of them?

10 DR. CARRERA: So here's
11 the --

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: How
13 can you testify here today -- a
14 point of information. I'm trying
15 to get clarity. How can you
16 testify here today that the problem
17 that you have and you need this tax
18 is that we can't disrupt 340 staff
19 members, but simultaneously ask us
20 to approve a Facilities Plan that
21 disrupts more than 340 staff
22 members? I'm just trying to get a
23 point of clarity.

24 DR. CARRERA: So he's a

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1 point of clarification, Councilman,
2 and I appreciate you and I honor
3 you today, and you know that. You
4 move the 340 adults that are now in
5 schools, those kids will not have
6 that math interventionist. They're
7 not going to have that reading
8 coach.

9 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

10 Neither will Lankenau kids --

11 DR. CARRERA: They do if
12 they --

13 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

14 Neither will the Warrington kids.

15 DR. CARRERA: Those
16 teachers from Lankenau, the
17 counselors can go to the school --
18 they can go to Saul High School.

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
20 can the 340.

21 DR. CARRERA: Say it
22 again.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
24 can the 340. Every point you make

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1 about Lankenau, Robeson,
2 Warrington, Overbrook Elementary.
3 I'm making the same point --

4 DR. CARRERA: No. But
5 they would --

6 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: --
7 about the 340.

8 DR. CARRERA: They would
9 -- they would follow --

10 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I
11 got to stop, Council President,
12 because I'm not getting my point of
13 information clear. So I'll move
14 on. Thank you, sir.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
16 Point of information, Councilmember
17 Jim Harrity. Point of information,
18 sir.

19 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
20 Since they brought it up. Point of
21 information, right? Farming and
22 environmental do not go together.
23 Do you -- environmental people
24 protest farming people sometimes.

1 Do you understand? Methane, all
2 kinds of other things. It's not
3 always the same. And it's not
4 interchangeable. The environment
5 is the environment.

6 Farming and small animal
7 husbandry is something completely
8 different. And that's what Saul
9 is. So you're talking to putting
10 at Saul, which is a farming school
11 directed for small animal husbandry
12 and avenues of that sort, and then
13 throw environmental kids in there
14 that are supposed to be studying
15 something else, and the effects of
16 the farm animals and the farming
17 are going to affect their
18 environmental studies. But again,
19 I'm not a rocket scientist. Thank
20 you.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 The Chair relinquish time back to
23 --

24 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

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1 Thank you, Council President.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 -- Member Rue Landau.

4 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: I

5 appreciate my colleagues. I'm -- I

6 feel I'm not getting to the

7 questions I want to get to, because

8 I've got to say that I'm feeling

9 the tone and the tenor today. And

10 I know the school district just

11 came. So I do want to ask a couple

12 of large, big picture questions,

13 which are; one, Uber and Lyft and

14 other rideshare companies and

15 package delivery companies are

16 multi-billion-dollar corporations.

17 Did you have any

18 conversations with these entities

19 about whether or not they would

20 perhaps donate some money to our

21 school district of Philadelphia?

22 Did you have any

23 conversations with them to ask

24 whether or not when it starts to

1 rain a little bit, that they
2 wouldn't do surge pricing that
3 would make somebody's ride three
4 times the amount that it is?

5 Would you -- did you have
6 any conversations with them that
7 when you had a ride that might take
8 a little longer because you've got
9 a wheelchair that they don't add
10 some sort of fee on -- you know,
11 some sort of a surge pricing onto
12 that as well?

13 The question is, did you
14 go to the billionaires and ask for
15 a little bit of support here before
16 this happened?

17 And my second question is
18 going to be whether or not --
19 because we've talked to a lot of
20 constituents in this process and a
21 lot of colleagues.

22 Is there a thought that we
23 can offset just now some of this
24 funding with the fund balance that

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1 we have which is millions of
2 dollars?

3 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. So let
4 me do that second part first. So
5 you know we have to do five-year
6 plans to be balanced in each year
7 of the plan, for the reasons I was
8 talking about in my testimony. By
9 the end of the plan, our fund
10 balance is only in the 40 -- it's
11 like 46 million. So we don't
12 really have room in our fund
13 balance to -- for this.

14 In terms of -- we've had
15 some conversations with Uber. The
16 issue with their contributing money
17 is that's not recurring and
18 predictable money, which is what
19 the district needs.

20 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:
21 Okay. So just one more, by the way
22 don't we have a fund balance of
23 this year at 391 million now?

24 MR. DUBOW: We do, but

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1 like you said, we have to do -- we
2 have to do a five-year plan so that
3 projects out for the five years --

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Excuse me, Rob, real quick. Just a
6 quick point of information. We're
7 going to be pointing all day.

8 MALE VOICE 1: I'm sorry.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
10 Sorry, sir. That's what we are
11 here for.

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
13 Quick point of information. The
14 fund balance is only that number if
15 we approve the budget as is. As of
16 today, the fund balance is over a
17 billion dollars. Thank you,
18 Council President.

19 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

20 Thank you.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Thank you, sir.

23 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

24 This is a -- it's a good tag team

1 day we're doing here today. I
2 appreciate that. I also wanted to
3 know whether or not there was any
4 considerations for -- I'm kind of
5 torn about this, I've got to say.
6 There's a whole transit community
7 that is looking for support for
8 transit as well. And there's ways
9 in which there's -- they've been
10 fully left out of this
11 conversation.

12 And I -- have there been
13 conversations and considerations
14 for any other place that funding
15 could go? And would you share your
16 list of potential revenue
17 generators, of which rideshare was
18 on that list; would you share the
19 entire list with Council?

20 MR. DUBOW: So the first
21 part about transit in our five --
22 proposed budget and five-year plan
23 there's almost \$900 million for
24 SEPTA including our annual subsidy,

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1 zero fare, the SEPTA Key program.
2 So there's a -- there's a
3 substantial commitment to mass
4 transit in the five-year plan
5 already. On the list of proposed
6 -- the list of options, we can get
7 you something.

8 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

9 Thank you. I'm done for now.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Thank you very much. I'm going to
12 -- I'm going to do this; I'm going
13 to stick in this round. And - but
14 at the inquiry, Majority Leader
15 Gilmore-Richardson. I'm going to
16 as for the chairperson of the
17 school district -- sorry it's the
18 Chair of the Board of Education,
19 Mr. Chairman Reginald Streater, to
20 please approach the table. As well
21 as the Superintendent of the School
22 District of Philadelphia, Dr. Tony
23 Watlington.

24 I'm going to still stay in

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1 queue during this round. The Chair
2 recognizes Councilmember Jeffrey J.
3 Young, then Councilmember Jamie
4 Gauthier, then Member Thomas. And
5 I just want to -- just kind of put
6 it into context. We kind of spared
7 this conversation for you to also
8 be here is based upon some numbers
9 that we requested after questioning
10 -- the questioning of Councilmember
11 Curtis Jones Jr. regarding how much
12 savings will the district save as
13 it relates to the shutting downs of
14 the schools that are proposed?
15 What's the dollar amount, just for
16 the record.

17 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:

18 Thank you, Mr. President. So I
19 didn't expect these witnesses to be
20 here, but I'm going to ask
21 questions based on that anyway. So
22 we are asked to support a rideshare
23 tax that is equal to roughly one
24 percent of the school district's

1 budget.

2 Can you tell us what has
3 the school district done internally
4 to try to come up with this one
5 percent before asking taxpayers to
6 pay that additional one percent?

7 MR. STREATER: Thank you
8 for being here and apologies for
9 not being in a suit. I was
10 expecting to be here tomorrow and
11 took time from my day to day
12 because the Council President
13 himself asked me to be here, and I
14 respect you. We have a really
15 great working relationship. So if
16 my answers aren't as full as they
17 will be tomorrow, I will do the
18 best that I can with what I have in
19 my head.

20 That being said, before
21 Dr. Watlington answers this
22 question. We have a \$300 million
23 budget shortfall. The Board of
24 Education and Dr. Watlington have

1 presented for the last five years a
2 pie chart that clearly shows a
3 deficit, a looming deficit, that
4 was coming and signaled the type of
5 changes that would have needed to
6 be made as well.

7 From my understanding, the
8 Clayton Center, which is the
9 organization -- the part of the
10 organization that services and --
11 our schools is half the size it
12 should be for a district this size.

13 It's my understanding
14 Dr. Watlington is implementing a
15 hiring freeze as well. And
16 Dr. Watlington it's my
17 understanding, you will obviously
18 add me to the bone to that.
19 There's already been some work
20 internally to try to save as it
21 relates to not renting out spaces
22 and spaces instead of using spaces
23 in the district for things like
24 professional development and things

1 like that. So that's the problem
2 we're having.

3 And then I heard, when I
4 came in, Councilmember Rue Landau
5 talk about the \$1.2 billion of
6 being -- of being historically
7 underfunded as well. So again, we
8 are pushing a boulder up a hill
9 with no shoes on, sliding as we
10 can, trying to get this thing up
11 the hill. And any amount of money
12 that can help us to protect the
13 positions and things like that will
14 be helpful -- be helpful for the
15 school district of Philadelphia.

16 But Dr. Watlington, the
17 time yours.

18 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank
19 you, President Streater. Good
20 afternoon, Mr. President, members
21 of council. And Councilmember
22 Young, we've taken several steps to
23 address the \$300 million structural
24 deficit. On the one hand, we are

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1 making significant cuts to the tune
2 of 130 positions in the central
3 office. It is starting there
4 because we want to do everything we
5 can to protect the classroom.

6 I will say to you, No. 2,
7 we're taking a look at all of our
8 contracts in the school district to
9 cut where we can. Three, we're
10 taking steps like we no longer use
11 the Pennsylvania Convention Center
12 for principal meetings; we've made
13 Strawberry Mansion High School our
14 professional development center.
15 We are curtailing staff travel,
16 including the Superintendent.

17 And instead of sending
18 four teachers to a reading
19 conference, we may just send one,
20 or we may send nobody and just
21 bring professional developers to
22 the school district.

23 We're also looking at
24 every opportunity for efficiencies

1 that we can find in the budget. I
2 do want to note that when we had
3 the COVID 19 dollars from 2020,
4 when the pandemic hit 2021 through
5 20 -- through September 2024, we
6 didn't have to make cuts because we
7 had a much higher funding level.

8 The reason we've got to
9 make cuts now, and this is
10 completely separate from the
11 Facilities Plan. There are two
12 separate issues on the table as I
13 see it. The structural deficit --

14 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: We
15 don't see it that way. So I just
16 want to put -- make that make that
17 clear. We don't see it as two
18 separate -- two separate things
19 because the pot of money is still
20 coming from the same place.

21 MR. STREATER: But that's
22 actually not accurate. You have a
23 capital budget, and you have an
24 operating budget, right? A

1 percentage of our operating budget
2 can be used to bar up -- to borrow
3 as it relates to our -- as it
4 relates to debt service. They are
5 two different issues.

6 One issue is 70, 80 years
7 of deferred maintenance, and the
8 other is of reoccurring things that
9 we have to do to support student
10 learning outside of our buildings.
11 They are different topics; they are
12 different situations.

13 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: So
14 thank you for that. So the City
15 Controller mentioned that the
16 transfer of the percentage from the
17 millage shift and plus some
18 increased revenue from the state
19 made up for the COVID losses,
20 right? This is from the City
21 Controller.

22 Can you explain to us if
23 this is -- is the City Controller
24 accurate here in this assessment,

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1 in this statement? Or is there
2 something that she's missing when
3 this was issued back in August?

4 DR. WATLINGTON:

5 Councilmember Young, I think it is
6 accurate and appropriate to say
7 that changes in the millage rate
8 helped to offset some of the
9 funding that we no longer have.
10 Just -- I would just note for the
11 record that this district received
12 approximately \$1.8 billion from the
13 period 2021 to September 2024.

14 Once all those "once in a
15 lifetime opportunity," COVID 19
16 dollars, are gone, we are unable to
17 completely make up that revenue
18 shortfall.

19 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: And

20 --

21 MR. STREATER: Can I add
22 briefly that the Board of Education
23 with the use of the COVID dollars
24 often had to come here to City

1 Council and defend our being tight
2 fisted with the -- with the fund
3 balance and things like that.

4 Because we knew this day
5 was going to come and we
6 strategically used our resources in
7 a way and had to tell the babies no
8 when we wanted to say yes, because
9 we knew at one point we're going to
10 be here when those funds run out
11 and have to answer these questions.
12 While also trying to communicate as
13 every year coming before City
14 Council at our meetings as well,
15 there is a huge structural deficit
16 issue coming as well. That's not
17 included -- that's not the same as
18 the facilities issue as well.

19 So I just want to also put
20 that on the record that the Board
21 of Education has been good stewards
22 of public dollars. We tried to
23 support learning and sometimes
24 we've gone against our own

1 willingness to kind of not go into
2 the fund balance to do things such
3 as -- that made sense, that matter,
4 that have been requested by City
5 Council. Well, I'm happy to go
6 into that list as well if needed.

7 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: So
8 over the past couple of years so
9 the school district has dipped into
10 the -- its fund balance in order to
11 kind of maintain itself, it seems
12 like. So that deficit -- knowing
13 that you'll have this type of
14 structural deficit, what did you do
15 internally to try to avoid having
16 this \$300 million deficit?

17 MR. STREATER: This is --
18 I'm happy to answer that question.
19 So there was a -- there was a
20 strategy within the strategy. The
21 Board of Education, Superintendent,
22 Dr. Watlington and Dr. Hite
23 invested in student learning
24 because there was a nationwide

1 strategy to not just use the funds
2 for capital investments, of which
3 we actually did use those funds to
4 build facilities, add drinking
5 water, clean drinkable water in our
6 facilities and things of that
7 nature.

8 But the board also doubled
9 down on student achievement. And
10 the strategy was, had the last
11 election gone a little differently,
12 that perhaps those funds, those
13 COVID funds, that we -- that we
14 would have got from the federal
15 government would have been
16 reoccurring. But as we all know,
17 elections have consequences. And
18 we decide -- we thought that
19 strategy would have been a more
20 prudent strategy, not just for
21 Harrisburg, but also for the
22 federal government.

23 And we can show you right
24 now with data. I know it's not the

1 gains we want to have, but it's
2 about student achievement. And we
3 believe that in addition to all of
4 the things we're talking about here
5 today, it's important for our
6 babies to know how to fish. We
7 want to protect legacies. I know
8 the facilities issue is in the
9 room. We want to protect.

10 I'm from Germantown, my
11 high school closed. What I'm most
12 appreciative of is the education
13 that I had that allowed me to be at
14 work today as an attorney and come
15 here because I have the ability to
16 do so to come and testify before
17 you. That's what we're trying to
18 protect here. We're trying to
19 balance all the interest, but at
20 some point, we are -- we are at our
21 knees, and we have to do something
22 about it, because if we don't do
23 it, somebody is going to do it to
24 us.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Member Chairman -- I would like a
3 point of information, Mr. Thomas.

4 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

5 Again -- I'm just confused again,
6 and I just need clarity. So I'm
7 listening to Councilmember Young's
8 questions. I listen to the
9 Chairman's and the Superintendent's
10 answer. Earlier today, Mr. Dubow
11 told us that the reason that we
12 didn't -- we seen that big jump
13 from 20 cents to a dollar was
14 because they didn't know how bad
15 the deficit was. That's what we
16 were told earlier today.

17 And now the board
18 President just told us for the past
19 five years he has been making noise
20 about this issue. The board
21 President just said he knew this
22 day would come. I'm confused; I
23 need clarity. How is it that they
24 knew this day would come, and

1 they've been asking for this and
2 screaming about this for five
3 years, but we were just told
4 earlier today that the other side
5 said they didn't know how bad the
6 deficit is?

7 So listening to the
8 response to questions earlier
9 compared to the response to
10 Councilmember Young's questions
11 there, I'm just confused and I'm
12 asking for clarity. Did we know
13 this five years ago, or did we just
14 find out?

15 MR. STREATER: Council
16 President, may I respond?

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 Uh-huh.

19 MR. STREATER: Knowing
20 that there's a deficit isn't the
21 same as knowing exactly what the
22 board and the district is prepared
23 to do in order to cover the
24 deficit.

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1 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Oh
2 no, I'm talking about the --

3 MR. STREATER: That's what
4 I'm --

5 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I'm
6 talking about Mr. Dubow.

7 MR. STREATER: So that's
8 what I was talking about. So --

9 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: No,
10 I understand what you're saying.
11 You saying you knew.

12 MR. STREATER: No, no.
13 What I'm saying is I knew that we
14 were going to have a deficit.

15 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
16 Correct.

17 MR. STREATER: But I
18 didn't know that Dr. Watlington was
19 going to be in the kitchen cooking
20 it in a way to try to figure out a
21 way to cover the deficit in the way
22 that he did.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
24 I commend him for that.

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1 MR. STREATER: So that's
2 different. What I'm saying --

3 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: But
4 that doesn't answer my -- that that
5 doesn't give me my clarity. We
6 were told earlier today that they
7 just found out about this problem,
8 which is why it went from 20 cents
9 to a dollar. That was the response
10 to a question earlier today.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 So we're going to ask for a
13 response from Mr. Dubow.

14 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
15 Yeah.

16 MR. DUBOW: What I said
17 was, we knew that they had a big
18 deficit. What we didn't know is
19 how they were going to address it.
20 And when we found out how they were
21 going to address it, that's when we
22 shifted our proposal.

23 DR. WATLINGTON: And may I
24 just add, Mr. President,

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1 Mr. Chairman, that -- I'll say two
2 things. It's no secret that the
3 school district of Philadelphia, I
4 think everybody in this room knows
5 there's been issues with deficits
6 and structural deficits going back
7 to the days of Dr. Arlene Ackerman
8 and Paul Vallas when he was the
9 CEO, I think we all know that.

10 What Mr. Dubow was saying,
11 I can absolutely support and tell
12 you is true. As we've looked at
13 this deficit, we decided, I
14 decided; the team, that we have two
15 recommendations to make to
16 President Streater.

17 Number one, continue to
18 kick the dead can down the road and
19 leave a deficit for the next
20 superintendent and the next
21 superintendent and the next Board
22 of Education and the next Board of
23 Education. Or separate and apart
24 from the Facilities Plan, that's a

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1 separate issue, deal with our
2 structural deficit and develop a
3 plan to pay it down and to once and
4 for all eliminate it by fiscal year
5 29 30.

6 Mr. Dubow did not know
7 that we would go that aggressive in
8 terms of our thinking and how we
9 would -- as we worked on the
10 budget, to eventually bring to
11 President Streater and his board
12 members a plan to eliminate our
13 structural deficit by '29-'30.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Point of information from Member
16 Jones.

17 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:
18 Thank you, Mr. President. And a
19 point of information is statements,
20 not questions.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Yes.

23 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: I
24 shall have statements and not

1 questions. Statement; you got to
2 read the room. When you walked --
3 when this day started, you had nine
4 votes for Uber Tax. I -- the way
5 my Council math works, you might be
6 at six, maybe. All right?

7 And it's heavily weighted
8 on statements like; this is our
9 last and final offer. We're
10 closing these schools. And the
11 math is not mathing that when you
12 say you're closing the school, what
13 is the savings that will get you
14 closer to the \$300,000. And we
15 asked that question, and it was not
16 answered. All right?

17 And if that savings is not
18 really savings but designed so that
19 you have better professional
20 development locations, I think 404
21 North Broad is pretty high. It's
22 not bad. There are others that are
23 there that we could kind of squeeze
24 staff into. I just don't see why

1 we are fixing things that aren't
2 broke.

3 The -- you got performing
4 schools, they're under-enrolled
5 because we put in a system that
6 keeps students out of seats. You
7 got neighborhood schools where the
8 climate is so good. And you know,
9 I tell -- and I'm going to end on
10 this. I know what schools are hot
11 and which ones are not based on the
12 number of parents that want to get
13 into a school.

14 And then the number of
15 parents, Please, Councilman, get
16 me out -- my kid out of here. And
17 these schools I never get a problem
18 from. And so that's a statement,
19 it's not a question. But read the
20 room. And that's not just here,
21 that's at the state level. I can
22 assure you that's at the state
23 level as well. Thank you,
24 Mr. President.

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1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Thank you very much. Member
3 Harrity, point of information and
4 then we relinquish the time back to
5 Member Young to wrap up.

6 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

7 Mine is a point of inquiry. So
8 because -- well, we --

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

10 Speak into the microphone too,
11 please.

12 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: We
13 were told earlier that -- well, we
14 know COVID money was for onetime
15 capital expenses, but we were told
16 earlier the doctor said that they
17 used the COVID money for the
18 teachers, and that's why we're
19 going to be 340 short. Why would
20 we use one-time dollars in order to
21 pay for something that we knew
22 wasn't going to be recurring? I
23 know you just said the
24 administration you thought was

1 going to be the same, but that's
2 like - that's a 50/50 gamble there,
3 right?

4 MR. STREATER: If I could
5 respond briefly. COVID was one of
6 the most devastating times in our
7 history of our country as it
8 relates to our children and public
9 education. We decided that it was
10 important not to be derelict in our
11 duty, to ensure that our children
12 would not have the losses that
13 other cities have lost.

14 And we've got notoriety
15 nationwide to ensure that they can
16 still rewrite, do math, and be
17 protected in serviced in the way
18 that they could. That is what --
19 that is -- that is why we did it
20 that way. So imagine if we only
21 spent money on builders. And I
22 think that's the problem with this
23 whole conversation. We're focusing
24 so much on the facilities; we

1 focused on people.

2 And when you focus on
3 people -- and that's what this
4 Facilities Plan are really trying
5 to do, when you focus on people and
6 allocating them in the way that
7 services the mission, why you
8 exist, amazing things happen to our
9 children.

10 Again, I went to
11 Germantown High School, it is
12 closed. Closed. But the one thing
13 that I could take with me, I can't
14 take that building with me, but I
15 could take the fact that I have the
16 ability to be an attorney, to be an
17 amazing bartender that I was able
18 to be before I became an attorney.
19 To protect and provide for my four
20 babies at home. That's what we're
21 trying to do here. So it was a
22 strategy and it actually worked.

23 And elections have
24 consequences, and we know that.

1 But we were on the track to -- for
2 the first time ever, potentially
3 have reoccurring funds from our
4 federal government to move up our
5 half percent. What we were get --
6 what we get from the federal
7 government up to us to 5 percent.
8 That is a game changer.

9 So that's why we did it.
10 We want to invest in our babies and
11 our children. For too long in this
12 city, we've invested in things that
13 don't service our mission. We just
14 have. And this Board of Education
15 through goals and guardrails is
16 seeking to do that. And the
17 Facilities Plan is connected to
18 that, connected to the strategic
19 plan that seeks to do what we are
20 designed to do; educate the babies
21 so they can fish for themselves so
22 they don't grow up and say, I like
23 that school there, but I can't get
24 out the neighborhood or do anything

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1 because I don't have the skills to
2 do it.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 Member Young, wrap us up with this
5 final question. I have to call on
6 the next person, sir.

7 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:
8 Thank you. I'm just want to also
9 want to get a little bit more
10 clarity on the school-based
11 positions that are proposed to be
12 cut if this \$50 million isn't
13 received by the district. So we've
14 heard testimony to say that, well,
15 no, there will be no jobs lost, but
16 those school-based professionals
17 will have to be transferred
18 elsewhere. And so if that's the
19 case, if they -- why do they have
20 to be transferred elsewhere if, you
21 know, they're still going to be
22 employees of the district?

23 DR. WATLINGTON: Here --
24 thank you, Councilmember Young.

1 Here's the answer. In a large city
2 like Philadelphia where you have
3 200,000 public school children in
4 the district-operated and the
5 charter public schools, and you
6 have really small schools and you
7 have really large schools and you
8 have super under-enrolled schools
9 and super over-enrolled schools,
10 you got to balance how you use
11 those limited resources and
12 positions.

13 So if I'm in a school
14 where I've got a very, very low
15 population of students, but I'm
16 funded at a level of positions
17 that's higher than we can afford to
18 do, at some point you've got to
19 right size, and it's not personal
20 at all. So --

21 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: So
22 we got to do that regardless then.
23 It doesn't matter if you get the
24 money or not; you'll have to right

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1 size at -- regardless.

2 DR. WATLINGTON: And so
3 our plan to try to keep as many
4 people in the house who's in the
5 house, because we don't want lots
6 of layoffs, we devise what I think
7 is a really strategic plan to
8 project all the vacancies out. And
9 if we can't afford to continue to
10 fund some schools at a certain
11 level because the pot is only this
12 big, we're cutting -- we cut the
13 positions; it makes sense to cut.

14 And we're transferring
15 them to where we know we will have
16 vacancies next school year. It's
17 just simple math. It's not
18 personal. And we broke down how
19 these positions break out by the 10
20 council districts, so Council can
21 be aware. A historically
22 underfunded school district where
23 we have a structural deficit that's
24 not caused by the Board of

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1 Education or the administration.

2 It's caused by three
3 things. Number one, this is a
4 historically underfunded school
5 district, and you've had structural
6 deficits for decades, and we're
7 going to eliminate it. Number two,
8 it's driven by; we no longer have
9 COVID money. Number three, it's
10 driven by increases and personnel
11 costs in terms of raises. Four,
12 it's driven by charter school
13 payment increases. And number
14 five, it's also driven by, finally,
15 the increases in healthcare costs.
16 This is not a mismanagement issue,
17 it is just -- it's just economics.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

19 Excuse me.

20 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:

21 Thank you. And I --

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Excuse me one second.

24 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: And

1 I just want to say that you have
2 the -- out of -- you have a top 20
3 municipal budget in the country,
4 right? When you take into cities,
5 districts, you have a top 20
6 municipal budget. And so I just
7 ask that we think a little bit
8 differently when it comes to how we
9 allocate \$5 billion worth of
10 resources when you have a
11 population of 200,000 to serve.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 Point of information from Member
14 Dr. Nina Ahmad.

15 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD:
16 Thank you, Council President. I
17 have a point of clarification I
18 need from all of you here in terms
19 of how much thought went into
20 putting this closure plan together,
21 which is part of your -- the entire
22 plan. So -- and I'll -- you know,
23 I'm a scientist. I like to
24 disaggregate my data and talk about

1 specifics.

2 Talking about Lankenau;
3 February 20 -- January 22, Lankenau
4 was going to be merged with
5 Roxborough. And then February 26th
6 it was going to go to Saul. So you
7 had how much time to come up with
8 this plan that you had done that
9 option. And then quickly within a
10 month you switch to another option;
11 point number one.

12 Point No. 2, as my
13 colleague Jim Harrity pointed out,
14 Saul focuses on production
15 agriculture, including
16 horticulture, animal management,
17 and agricultural mechanics.
18 Lankenau does not. And the way
19 Saul is set up, the land is set up,
20 does not allow to do what Lankenau
21 does. You cannot take it and put
22 it in there. So this is not a
23 sound educational planning.
24 Merging Lankenau into Saul would

1 not preserve Lankenau; it would
2 erase what makes Lankenau distinct.

3 And for us -- for you not
4 to point that out, that you are
5 willing to erase Lankenau, you can
6 say that it's not important. We're
7 going to erase their curriculum.
8 We don't need the only
9 environmental school in the
10 district. Say that then. But do
11 not say that you're going to be
12 able to preserve this when you had
13 given one month thought of moving
14 from one school to another.

15 I want to understand what
16 is your thought pattern; how did
17 you get to this, and what is the
18 data that supports you saying that,
19 oh, Lankenau will be fine in the
20 Saul space because we have land
21 that is bisected by Henry Avenue
22 and we have all -- built
23 environment on both sides. And
24 you're telling me we're going to be

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1 replicating what 17 acres does with
2 400 acres surrounding it in this
3 new space. Please give me that
4 information.

5 DR. WATLINGTON: I --
6 thank you, Councilmember Ahmad. I
7 would answer that by saying three
8 things. One, as we said before,
9 the reason why we're doing some
10 school mergers at the high school
11 level is that we can no longer
12 continue to afford some of the
13 measures that Paul Vallas put in
14 place years ago with the smaller
15 high school model. We just can't
16 staff it and drive improved
17 performance. We can't afford to do
18 it.

19 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: I
20 need to just interject here. Which
21 means you're saying you're not
22 going to keep the Lankenau
23 Environmental Science curriculum
24 because you cannot do it. That's

1 all.

2 DR. WATLINGTON: And the
3 second thing I'll say, we are
4 absolutely committed to supporting
5 Lankenau and its students on the
6 Saul campus by doing the following.
7 A; the district will retain
8 ownership. I've recommended to
9 President Streater and his board
10 that the district maintain
11 ownership of the Lankenau property
12 for use both by Lankenau as well as
13 other students across the district.
14 As a science center inside of the
15 school district.

16 You would say, well, why
17 don't you just leave Lankenau there
18 if you're going to keep the
19 property? It's again, we can drive
20 faster and better resources into
21 our high schools if we address
22 small schools. I've discontinued
23 from our vocabulary the term small
24 boutique high schools, because I

1 understand that's offensive to
2 some.

3 But I do stand by; we can
4 no longer afford to operate the
5 small high schools and to -- and to
6 continue to drive the kind of
7 improvements that we're beginning
8 to see in academics.

9 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: So
10 just another point of information.
11 Right next to Lankenau, which they
12 use is the Schuylkill Science
13 Center, the Environmental Science
14 Center. There is no need for a new
15 environmental center because we
16 already have one. So why would you
17 use your precious resources to
18 build a new center when we already
19 have ability to use that, No. 1.

20 Number two, you have not
21 allowed Lankenau to actually fix
22 the problem so that they will not
23 be a drain on your resources. So
24 that if you were to increase the

1 enrollment, that would obviate the
2 problem you're mentioning.

3 So if we can fill that gap
4 and you've given them five years to
5 do that, to prove that they're able
6 to get that, get the enrollment up.
7 If you have three classes of 35 --
8 33 each in each of these divisions,
9 if you allowed different levels of
10 specification for the schools, we
11 would be able to turn that around.

12 But you -- at no point has
13 there been an actual -- this is
14 before you came; I made this point
15 already. At no point has there
16 been a clear thought-out plan that
17 didn't pivot in one month to tell
18 these schools that are under the
19 gun that you have X amount of time
20 to do X amount of things, and this
21 is how we're going to do it, or
22 else we are going to have to move
23 on.

24 And there's nothing wrong

1 with small boutique schools, by the
2 way. They actually are s safer,
3 they teach the children better, so
4 I don't know where this thought has
5 come that we have to all merge into
6 these massive schools. Who asked
7 for that? Did you -- do you think
8 there's actual relevance for that
9 in our -- Philadelphia? So I'm
10 just telling you what you've done
11 makes no sense.

12 When you look at it from a
13 data perspective. In one month,
14 you shifted everything, from
15 Roxborough to Saul. How much
16 thought went to that? How did you
17 account for all of these things
18 that Lankenau does in one month in
19 Saul? And you're going to put
20 aside land? You're going to
21 recreate what they do? Because the
22 amount -- the Schuylkill that runs
23 through that is a polluted
24 Schuylkill.

1 Whereas the Schuylkill
2 that runs through Lankenau allows
3 you to do water preservation and
4 all kinds of activities that they
5 do that you will not be able to do
6 in Saul. So I am -- either you're
7 saying there's no environmental
8 school or you're saying, you know,
9 it doesn't really matter because
10 we're just going to subsume this
11 into an agricultural-based school
12 and that you should just be honest
13 about it.

14 DR. WATLINGTON:
15 Councilmember Ahmad in that spirit
16 of transparency, I do want to say
17 that data does not show that just
18 because kids are in smaller
19 schools, they perform better. I
20 can -- and I won't embarrass any
21 school in public. But I can tell
22 you some of the small schools that
23 we're referencing are -- I don't
24 think any of us -- I certainly am

1 not pleased with some of the
2 performance levels.

3 But to your point about
4 the Schuylkill Center and the
5 Lankenau property, not only would
6 Saul students -- I mean, excuse me
7 Lankenau students have access to
8 use it, although they would not be
9 located on that campus. So with
10 other students across the city.
11 Relative to small school
12 phenomenon, it's no different than
13 a university.

14 If you're at some small
15 universities and you've got lots of
16 resources, it's one thing. If
17 you're at a small university that
18 can barely afford to keep the doors
19 open, I'm not sure that's where I
20 want my child to be.

21 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: So
22 I'll just wrap it up by saying,
23 show your work. You didn't show
24 your work for that. What you did

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1 --

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Member Ahmad --

4 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: --

5 in that one month to switch.

6 That's all I'm asking. Show your
7 work and tell us the truth. Thank
8 you. Thank you for your
9 indulgence.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 You're still in the queue, so
12 that's a very informative point of
13 information. Chair recognizes
14 Councilmember Jamie Gauthier, then
15 Councilmember Isaiah Thomas.

16 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

17 Thank you, Council President. Good
18 afternoon, Dr. Watlington and Board
19 President Streater. I appreciate
20 you all coming into this hearing.
21 I appreciate the Majority Leader
22 for making this happen.

23 At different points you
24 all have expressed, Dr. Watlington,

1 board President Streater, Chief
2 Education Officer Carrera, that you
3 believe that these are two
4 different conversations. That we
5 are having a conversation about the
6 Uber tax and that the Facilities
7 Plan is somewhere over here.

8 And I think the tenor of
9 this room has been what it's been
10 all morning, because neither
11 Council nor our communities view it
12 that way. You are asking us to do
13 something that is difficult. You
14 are asking us to do something that
15 at this moment feels very
16 unpopular. And that's fine. We
17 are legislators. We are expected
18 to do hard things and to engage in
19 hard conversations.

20 The problem is that you're
21 asking us to engage in this
22 difficult conversation and decision
23 with you while simultaneously
24 telling us that you are not going

1 to listen to us or our communities.
2 That is the problem with this
3 entire conversation, because that's
4 not what partnership is. That's
5 not what partnership looks like.

6 I appreciate some of the
7 changes that you revealed yesterday
8 in your amendments to the
9 Facilities Plan. I appreciate that
10 you are recommending a hundred plus
11 million dollars for the 3rd
12 District over what was there
13 before, and that you are scrapping
14 the recommendation to give our
15 facilities over to developers,
16 including the Robeson property. I
17 appreciate those changes, but if
18 we're being honest, those were
19 massive deficiencies with the
20 original version of your plan.

21 And so, though I
22 appreciate those changes, for me,
23 the changes don't go far enough. I
24 have talked to you for months,

1 Dr. Watlington. I have talked to
2 you for months about pulling
3 Robeson off the closure list.

4 After months of advocacy,
5 you looked me in my face on more
6 than one occasion, and you said,
7 not only to me, but to other
8 elected officials that represent
9 that area, that you think we can
10 revise that recommendation. And
11 you knew full well that what we
12 were asking for in a revision was
13 to not look up at your slide
14 presentation to the press yesterday
15 and see close Robeson still on
16 that sheet. None of us were asking
17 for that. Our community was not
18 asking for that, and you knew it.
19 That's not partnership.

20 And so for me, this is
21 about so many things that are
22 disappointing and traumatic to our
23 community. One, Robeson as a
24 school has made enormous leaps and

1 bounds since the last time that
2 they were put on the closure list
3 because these processes tend to
4 traumatize the same black and brown
5 communities over and over again.

6 But they pulled themselves
7 up and they worked really hard to
8 become a better school academically
9 as was noted by yourself, by the
10 governor, and by many others. The
11 other thing that's traumatic about
12 this is you all saying that we're
13 going to reserve the land for
14 school district use. We're maybe
15 going to build a STEM-focused
16 school there, but we can't go that
17 extra step of saying that that new
18 school will be Robeson High. We
19 can't go that extra step of pulling
20 Robeson off the closure list.

21 That kind of attitude is
22 carrying out the same legacy of
23 erasing black people in University
24 City that has happened in my

1 district for decades and it's not
2 fair. Especially since you cannot
3 tell me why you did not -- I talked
4 to you all yesterday evening about
5 this. You could not identify a
6 concrete reason why we couldn't
7 keep Robeson open, especially if we
8 were keeping the land for school
9 facility purposes.

10 So to us, it feels like
11 you're not listening. But at the
12 same time, you're not listening,
13 you're coming in here and asking us
14 to do something hard for you. How
15 dare you do that. How dare you.
16 How dare you rush this plan to a
17 Thursday vote when you haven't even
18 taken the time to fully engage our
19 communities but then come in here
20 and ask us to do something hard for
21 you.

22 That is why the tenor of
23 this conversation in the room today
24 is what it is, because partnership

1 doesn't look like that. And so my
2 questions are, why can you not
3 remove Robeson from the closure
4 list? Why can you not do a
5 co-location that is temporary while
6 we build a new facility as opposed
7 to a merger that would completely
8 wipe out the legacy of that school?
9 That's my first question. And I
10 want to know -- I don't -- I'm not
11 looking for -- I'm looking for
12 actual cost since the cost seems to
13 be an issue to you.

14 Secondly, I also put
15 forward other alternative
16 recommendations that would keep
17 Blankenburg the last public high
18 school in Mill Creek without an
19 admissions criteria in the
20 district. I recommended that it be
21 co-located with Parkway West.

22 Why would you rush a plan
23 to the school board on Thursday
24 without even giving full

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1 consideration to that idea, without
2 even coming out to West Philly to
3 really talk to our communities
4 about that idea? Please speak to
5 those two questions because to me,
6 having that conversation while
7 you're asking us to do something
8 hard is what partnership looks
9 like.

10 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank
11 you, Member -- Councilmember
12 Gauthier. In terms of the notion
13 about it being a rushed plan, I
14 would just remind the Council that
15 I came aboard just over four years
16 ago, getting ready to start year
17 five.

18 Shortly into my tenure, I
19 was questioned in front of this
20 Council with board President
21 Streater about when can we expect a
22 Facilities Plan on our desks? I
23 think the district was admonished
24 for not moving fast enough.

1 Over the past four years
2 -- I can send to Mr. President to
3 the Council, a list of all the
4 engagement sessions with members of
5 council, with communities with the
6 district learning networks, et
7 cetera. And I think it would show
8 robust engagement; best in class
9 engagement for a district this
10 size.

11 Number two, the immediate
12 problem we're experiencing at
13 Robeson is that the building has a
14 poor business building score. I
15 cannot, in a good fiduciary sense,
16 recommend to go in and renovate
17 that building. It's not good
18 business sense. It's not good use
19 of the public tax dollar. Some
20 buildings it's not a good use to go
21 in and renovate and upgrade.
22 They're better off being replaced.
23 Number three --

24 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: I

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1 don't think that the community has
2 definitively objected to that. We
3 want to build a new facility. I'm
4 not sure what's prohibitive about
5 what you just said.

6 DR. WATLINGTON: Sure.

7 And because we originally
8 recommended to move the students at
9 Robeson to William Sayre as a way
10 to increase the sizes of the high
11 school so we can push more
12 resources in so that they can have
13 advanced placement courses, have
14 the resources for band and
15 orchestra, and maybe even some
16 athletics equipment and things that
17 kids in the suburbs get that our
18 kids quite frankly don't have in
19 these schools. I want to be really
20 clear about that.

21 No matter how good we say
22 these schools are, I'm telling you
23 they're missing a lot of stuff, in
24 addition to having a poor building

1 score. We modified that
2 recommendation to -- because there
3 was such strong opposition, and we
4 thought, hey, Motivation is another
5 opportunity. There's no pride in
6 authorship. We don't have a
7 problem making adjustments as the
8 community and our elected officials
9 inform us. So Motivation --

10 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
11 Was it -- let just pause you for a
12 second. Was it your understanding
13 that my community was asking for
14 Robeson to be disappeared into
15 Motivation as opposed to Sayre? Is
16 it really your understanding that
17 the community was asking for the
18 school -- was just choosing between
19 the schools that Robeson should
20 disappear into? Or was it your
21 understanding that the community
22 wants Robeson to still be in our
23 community?

24 DR. WATLINGTON: It was my

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1 understanding and continues to be
2 my understanding that Councilmember
3 Jamie Gauthier and her -- and her
4 constituents prefer that there be
5 no changes and that the Paul
6 Robeson High School not be merged
7 anywhere at this time.

8 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
9 Correct. Thank you. So please
10 speak to the rest of my questions.
11 You stated yesterday evening that
12 we cannot -- we must do a merger
13 for Robeson. We cannot do a
14 temporary co-location that would
15 keep the school alive while
16 building a new facility and then
17 bringing them back. Why can we
18 not? What are the real numbers and
19 the real barriers associated with
20 that?

21 DR. WATLINGTON: One of
22 the challenges we're experiencing
23 in the school district, and quite
24 frankly in the city, is that this

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1 whole -- the real root problem here
2 is district-wide, the school
3 district of Philadelphia has a 65
4 percent building occupancy or
5 utilization rate. 35 percent of
6 our footprint is sitting empty.
7 It's not a good financial
8 management or an investment.

9 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

10 My question is --

11 DR. WATLINGTON: And --

12 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

13 -- why does a merger as opposed to
14 a co-location in the -- in the same
15 building solve that problem? So
16 how does it solve that problem?

17 DR. WATLINGTON: So to
18 your point, Councilmember Gauthier,
19 we could have two choices for a
20 school. We could take two high
21 schools and merge them together and
22 have one school; one principal, one
23 set of faculty. Or we could have
24 two separate schools in the same

Committee of the Whole

1 building. New York --

2 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

3 Which already exists --

4 DR. WATLINGTON: New York
5 City has a lot of that. Other
6 cities do it. And we could have
7 one principal, one set of faculty
8 for school A, one principal, one
9 set of faculty for school B. The
10 reason I'm not recommending to
11 President Streater and his board to
12 do that for Robeson is because the
13 size of Robeson and the size of
14 Motivation High School are small;
15 number one. Neither school is
16 growing in enrollment, and neither
17 school has a high wait list.

18 If we're going to make
19 this school district solvent, we've
20 got to provide choice where there's
21 high demand. And it's my job to
22 recommend those really hard
23 decisions that I don't really want
24 to do. But if we have a larger

1 school merged together, I can push
2 more resources in to include
3 teachers, to include advanced
4 placement courses, elective
5 courses, career technical
6 education. And we just can't do it
7 when we have so many small, small
8 schools.

9 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

10 We are dealing with monumental
11 decisions that will impact
12 communities and people for a long
13 time. And so before you say that
14 you are going to wipe out a school
15 that the community has begged you
16 to keep around, I think you need to
17 come to the table with real cost,
18 with real barriers to why we can't
19 do a co-location as opposed to a
20 merger.

21 You all are asking us to
22 consider a tax that, you know,
23 granted would generate \$48 million,
24 but would be passed on to

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1 consumers. And we should consider
2 that. But I don't think it's fair
3 for you to want us to dialogue with
4 you in good faith about what you
5 need from a financial perspective
6 when you won't dialogue with us in
7 good faith. That's not okay. It's
8 not okay for you to rush this plan
9 to a vote on Thursday when you
10 didn't even come out and really
11 talk to our communities about the
12 recommendations on the table. It's
13 not okay. It's not partnership.
14 And that's why the conversation has
15 gone the way it has today. Thank
16 you.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 Chair recognizes Councilmember
19 Isaiah Thomas.

20 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I
21 want to say thank you to our
22 Majority Leader for bringing the
23 district here today, but I'm going
24 to save my questions for the

1 district for tomorrow. But I do
2 think that the district put some
3 important facts on the plate that
4 we need to consider.

5 I want to go back to our
6 conversation about taxes. I
7 personally last year asked for the
8 Mayor, the admin, to increase the
9 percentage of the mileage tax last
10 year because I knew that the
11 funding issue was a problem. I
12 have receipts. I don't got time,
13 so I'm not giving up all my
14 receipts. I'm a 100 percent sure
15 that I knew this problem existed
16 last year. I'm a 100 percent sure
17 that the Council President staff,
18 along with other members of the
19 City Council, knew this problem
20 existed last year.

21 So I have a simple
22 question, and I'm asking that you
23 tell me if it's A or B. Somebody
24 dropped the ball. Did the school

1 district not tell the admin that
2 this fiscal problem existed last
3 year? Or did the school district
4 tell the admin, and the admin
5 decide not to address it? Which
6 one happened last year?

7 DR. WATLINGTON: From the
8 school district side --

9 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I'm
10 sorry, I want to speak to the admin
11 side. Because you testified that
12 you guys didn't know about this
13 deficit. And I'm a 100 percent
14 sure I sat in this very same seat
15 last year and talked about this
16 deficit.

17 And I even remember
18 sitting in that seat going back and
19 forth with my colleague, Rue
20 Landau, around H.O.M.E because I
21 said, we shouldn't do H.O.M.E
22 because we needed the money for
23 schools. So if I knew the problem
24 existed last year, how are you-all

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1 going to sit here and tell us
2 you-all didn't know the problem
3 existed last year.

4 MR. DUBOW: So we never
5 said the problem didn't exist.
6 What I testified this morning was
7 --

8 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
9 if you knew the problem exists, why
10 you weren't putting money in last
11 year?

12 MR. DUBOW: Can I -- can I
13 answer the question?

14 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: No.
15 If you knew the problem existed,
16 why you weren't putting money in
17 last year?

18 MR. DUBOW: So what we
19 talked about last year, we did talk
20 about this very problem last year.
21 We did not say at any point last
22 year there wasn't a projected
23 deficit because there was.

24 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So

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1 why didn't you put the money up
2 last year?

3 MR. DUBOW: What I said
4 last year was that we need the
5 state to step up. This isn't
6 something we can do by ourselves.

7 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: We
8 knew the state wasn't going to step
9 up. I knew the state wasn't going
10 to step up. I haven't been here
11 that long. You-all have been here
12 longer than me. If I knew the
13 state wasn't going to step up, and
14 I said we need to put the money in
15 last year, why didn't we put the
16 money in last year?

17 MR. DUBOW: So the state
18 has a constitutional obligation to
19 step up --

20 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
21 they haven't been doing it --

22 MR. DUBOW: And we don't
23 --

24 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: --

1 and we had to sue them. Let me
2 move on to my questions because you
3 playing with me and I'm not in the
4 mood to be played with. Extended
5 Day; why would we -- if I own a
6 house and I can't keep my basic
7 house repaired, why would I add a
8 porch to a house that I can't keep
9 repaired?

10 If we knew we didn't have
11 the funding to make sure that
12 schools were funded the way that
13 they needed to be, why would we add
14 Extended Day? Why would we make
15 school all year round if we can't
16 pay for school from eight to three?

17 DR. WATLINGTON: Extended
18 Day is a --

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I'm
20 talking to them. I'm sorry,
21 Dr. Watlington.

22 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I'm
24 asking money questions. I'll --

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1 don't talk to the school district
2 tomorrow.

3 DR. CARRERA: Thank you,
4 Councilman Thomas. Extended
5 Day/Extended Year is part of the
6 Accelerate Philly plan. And it is
7 in written --

8 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I'm
9 very -- I'm very familiar what plan
10 is a part of. I'm asking a very
11 specific question; if we knew we
12 didn't have the money to keep the
13 lights on, why we spending money on
14 vacation?

15 DR. CARRERA: Extended
16 day/Extended year is not vacation
17 --

18 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
19 What is it?

20 DR. CARRERA: Extended
21 Day/Extended Year is supporting the
22 school district of Philadelphia by
23 providing opportunities for
24 students to get academic and

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1 enrichment opportunities to support
2 Accelerate Philly plans.

3 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
4 why would we add -- why would we
5 add these things that happen after
6 three o'clock if we can't pay for
7 everything up until three o'clock?
8 Next question --

9 MS CARRERA: We would --
10 we would add these things because
11 we know that out of school time
12 helps decrease --

13 COUNCILMEMBER: But you
14 can't pay for in-school time.

15 DR. CARRERA: It decreases
16 --

17 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: You
18 want to pay for out of school time,
19 you can't pay for in-school time.
20 Next question, Mr. Dubow, if we
21 didn't do H.O.M.E last year, will
22 we be have -- will we have enough
23 money right now for schools? Yes
24 or no? Matter of fact, let me

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1 change that question. If we did
2 H.O.M.E at 400 million last year,
3 instead of 800 million, will we
4 have money for schools; yes or no?

5 MR. DUBOW: We would not.
6 We wouldn't have enough money for
7 schools.

8 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
9 That's not true. Next question --

10 MR. DUBOW: It is true.

11 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: If
12 -- next question, the fund balance
13 right now is set, according to your
14 words, to be at 400 million at the
15 end of the five-year plan. Why
16 would we ask for -- why would we
17 ask -- oh, go ahead. I'm sorry.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 Member Thomas, point of information
20 from Member Catherine Gilmore-
21 Richardson.

22 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
23 RICHARDSON: I have a -- I have a
24 point of inquiry, Council

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1 President, to drill down on
2 Councilmember Thomas's question for
3 Mr. Dubow. If you could notate for
4 the record, how much would have
5 been saved if H.O.M.E was at 400
6 million versus 800 million? What
7 is the quantifiable amount relative
8 to the debt service?

9 MR. DUBOW: About \$30
10 million a year.

11 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
12 RICHARDSON: 30 -- the debt service
13 difference from the 800 million
14 borrowing to the 400 million would
15 have been how much per year?

16 MR. DUBOW: About \$30
17 million difference in what we would
18 show in the budget, yes.

19 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
20 RICHARDSON: 150 million over the
21 five-year plan, right?

22 MR. DUBOW: No. Because
23 the second bond issue comes later.
24 So it would be less over the five-

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1 year plan.

2 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

3 RICHARDSON: I'm just trying to get
4 a number based on his question.

5 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. So I
6 think the second didn't start till
7 28. So it would be about 90
8 million more over the plan.

9 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

10 RICHARDSON: 90 million. Thank you
11 very much, Council President.

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
13 like I said, it wasn't true -- oh,
14 go ahead. I'm sorry.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
16 Chair recognizes Dr. Anthony
17 Phillips.

18 MR. DUBOW: Well, no, 90
19 million more would not give us
20 enough to fund the school district.

21 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
22 Neither will your tax. Neither
23 will your tax.

24 MR. DUBOW: The tax is

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1 enough to save 340 position --

2 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I'm
3 sorry, go ahead.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Let's do this. Time out. Chair
6 recognizes Councilmember
7 Dr. Anthony Phillips.

8 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
9 Council President, thank you. I --
10 this is -- Mr. Dubow, this is why I
11 think it's important that once an
12 idea is shared, that you all would
13 like to see that it immediately,
14 whether or not you wanted to get
15 out to public or not, there should
16 be conversations with the
17 stakeholders that you want to see,
18 you know, support it.

19 And with all of the data,
20 all of the ideas that you all have
21 come up with in the plan, that way
22 we can provide a level of
23 deliberation. So the question is
24 that I have -- because I say this

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1 because even with my own team, I
2 have an idea, right?

3 Emmanuel, some other folks
4 are like -- other stakeholders I
5 work with. They're like, that's a
6 good idea, but you should talk to
7 this person. And we end up
8 changing our idea and it becomes
9 better as a result. You know, I
10 don't just jump out.

11 I'm talking to you,
12 Mr. Dubow, because you're the
13 mayor's, like, chief advisor when
14 it comes to finances. And so my
15 question is, did -- at one point,
16 did we ever say, let's talk to
17 Council, then also let's talk to
18 the rideshare services. And maybe
19 we came up with -- said maybe the
20 rideshare services could have said,
21 you know what, if you do this tax,
22 this is what we're going to do.

23 We're not going to --
24 we're going to give over to the

1 residents, but maybe what we can
2 offer is a certain amount of money
3 back to the city of Philadelphia,
4 if you all work with us. That --
5 did that option ever come up as an
6 idea to kind of work with the
7 corporations to get to give the
8 money to us as opposed to the tax?

9 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. So
10 we've met with them and we have
11 said to them, if there are other
12 ideas, we're happy to hear them.
13 But those ideas have to have
14 recurring predictable revenue.

15 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
16 Right. And that -- do you know
17 that just -- the city of
18 Philadelphia receives money,
19 revenue, from the sports teams
20 recurring. So that agreement could
21 have been made. I just -- I just
22 wanted to ask, like, did you offer
23 that as an idea, like, recurring
24 revenue that they could just donate

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1 so we can support our schools as
2 opposed to doing it through
3 district tax?

4 MR. DUBOW: We did have
5 that -- we've had that conversation
6 with them, yes.

7 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
8 And then nothing came from that?

9 MR. DUBOW: We're still
10 talk -- we still have -- we have
11 ongoing conversations.

12 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
13 Okay.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Chair recognizes Councilmember
16 Isaiah Thomas.

17 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
18 Closing out real quick. We -- if
19 the -- with the school's deficit
20 the way it is, why will -- and I
21 looked into this issue a couple
22 years ago before we came into 2026,
23 because we knew a lot of people
24 were coming. So I examined the

1 hotel tax. I worked with folks
2 that did a study, and it was
3 presented to us that it wasn't
4 worth it.

5 If the school's deficit is
6 the way it is, why would we -- if
7 we're going to ask Harrisburg for
8 anything, why would we not ask them
9 to increase the cigarette tax where
10 the revenue goes directly to the
11 schools instead of increasing the
12 hotel tax, which could hurt
13 hospitality and have a big -- and
14 could have a negative impact on our
15 entire industry? Why would we go
16 -- why would we not ask them for
17 that?

18 MR. DUBOW: Because the
19 hotel tax generates more revenue
20 than the cigarette tax. So a
21 smaller increase in that tax --

22 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: But
23 the industry says that you-all are
24 not correct. The industry says

1 that your estimates are too high,
2 and the industry feels like an
3 increase in the hotel tax, not only
4 is the a hundred plus million at
5 your asset for over five years, not
6 realistic. The industry says it
7 could kill tourism. That's what
8 the industry says, not me.

9 MR. DUBOW: Yeah. I know
10 it's a -- I understand what you're
11 saying. It's a -- for a \$200 room,
12 it's a \$4 increase per night.

13 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
14 Okay. So I guess the industry is
15 lying too. Everybody is lying,
16 right? And I don't -- I don't
17 know, everybody there is telling
18 the truth, everybody else is lying.
19 I just want to close out with this,
20 Council President, because I heard
21 the bell. I've been on my best
22 behavior all budget. I've been on
23 my best behavior all budget. And
24 I'm here today and I'm upset.

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1 And it's not personal, but
2 I -- myself, Councilmember
3 Gauthier, Councilmember Ahmad,
4 Councilmember O'Rourke,
5 Councilmember Jones, and I'm sure
6 other council members experienced
7 this too. We started off our day
8 with special needs kids. I had to
9 stand next to a young lady who is
10 blind. She's blind. She goes to a
11 school where she's very comfortable
12 and everything works for her. And
13 you telling me about 340 staff,
14 what about the deaf children at
15 Lankenau? What about the blind
16 children at Lankenau?

17 So my energy isn't
18 personal to you-all. It's not
19 personal, but come on, you-all,
20 like, this isn't right. You-all
21 asking us to do some of the most
22 ridiculous stuff I've ever heard
23 anybody ask me to do and then go in
24 front of black kids and tell them

1 kids, you can't go to this school
2 no more. That hurt. That's tears.

3 So I get it. Yeah, you
4 going to be mad, oh, Isaiah did
5 this. Isaiah did that. I don't
6 care. Them kids is going to be
7 adults pretty soon. And I could
8 tell you that man -- that young man
9 looked me in the face. He said
10 he's going to run for office. He's
11 the one who is going to decide on
12 my pension.

13 Like, I -- you-all not
14 taking this serious enough. And
15 that's why -- that's what my
16 colleagues is saying that's why
17 we're so upset. It isn't about
18 you-all. It isn't even about the
19 teachers; I love the teachers, I
20 really do.

21 But come on you-all come
22 to Lankenau with me, look at them
23 deaf kids and them blind kids tell
24 their parents to their face, you

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1 got to go to Saul. I get it. And
2 I said this at the press
3 conference, maybe you could take
4 the environment on the outside and
5 put it Saul, but you can't do that
6 with the environment on the inside.
7 And if you've been there, you would
8 know that. That's it. I'm done
9 for the day.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Thank you, Member Thomas.
12 Councilmember Rue Landau. And we
13 have a hard stop at 1:00.

14 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:
15 Okay. Thank you. Thanks for being
16 here. I think I want to start by
17 just taking a minute of reading the
18 room trying to understand a little
19 bit more school district of where
20 you guys are coming from. I will
21 be honest how I feel, how you come
22 from -- come to this space.

23 You seem annoyed with us.
24 You seemed like we are just, kind

1 of, pestering and that this is --
2 that -- this is not the
3 conversation you want to have or
4 the place to be. But I want to say
5 that -- I'm going to go back to my
6 first comment, which was that all
7 of the work that could have
8 happened before now, those are the
9 courageous conversations that need
10 to happen. Getting in front of the
11 community, working with the council
12 people.

13 When I hear that you've
14 come up with a solution for certain
15 parts of the 3rd District, this all
16 could have been front-ended. So
17 you're hearing clearly that we're
18 upset, and we see that you've come
19 to this space to be frustrated.
20 But there is -- there's a lot of
21 work that could have happened up
22 until now.

23 I believe that
24 Superintendent Watlington, when you

1 had a one-on-one conversation with
2 each one of us, I recall you saying
3 that you have -- that you all made
4 the choice to eliminate the deficit
5 this year because you keep going
6 out to Harrisburg, and in
7 Harrisburg, they don't look kindly
8 to the city of Philadelphia saying,
9 we don't want to give you more
10 money because you keep holding this
11 deficit.

12 And that's your reason for
13 getting out -- rid of the deficit
14 all at once in this one year, is
15 because you believe that Harrisburg
16 will give us more money. What
17 evidence do you have that
18 Harrisburg will give us more money
19 if we eliminate the deficit in one
20 year? Rip the band aid off.

21 MR. STREATER: Before the
22 Superintendent speaks, I want to
23 address the energy in the room
24 piece. Please don't take my energy

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1 as being disrespectful to this
2 space. I welcome you to board
3 meetings often, and we have
4 conversations there.

5 My energy is at the fact
6 that we have to have this
7 conversation in the first place all
8 of us. I think we have been put
9 into a cauldron as a city fighting
10 over scarce resources, and we're
11 all fighting for the babies. And I
12 think we all agree on the what and
13 the why. We are disagreeing on the
14 how.

15 So please, if anybody felt
16 that my demeanor, not wearing a
17 suit today, I would have worn a
18 suit. I was prepared to speak
19 tomorrow, but I wanted to address
20 that Councilmember Landau, that
21 this is really important work. And
22 I think the energy that we're
23 bringing is that we're also trying
24 to be zealous advocates for our

1 babies. But Dr. Watlington, please
2 add. Your time.

3 DR. WATLINGTON: I want to
4 say three things. You know, I'm
5 trying to be very succinct. You
6 know, Council President likes to
7 get to the point. To show you how
8 bad historic underfunding has been
9 in the school district of
10 Philadelphia, I want the Council to
11 think about this. Congress
12 appropriated the COVID money for
13 two reasons.

14 Going back to
15 Councilmember Harrity's comment or
16 question, Congress said, we're
17 going to get this money out to the
18 50 states and 15,000 public school
19 districts. Number one, to mitigate
20 the impact of COVID-19 learning
21 loss. That was number one.
22 Congress said, number two; school
23 districts may also use these
24 dollars to address air quality

1 issues to mitigate future airborne
2 illness, COVID-19, and future
3 pandemics. So that's why some
4 districts were able to build
5 schools and do some other things.
6 It was around air quality. In my
7 last district, we actually provided
8 retention bonuses to teachers.

9 Here in Philadelphia,
10 because the district is so
11 underfunded, this district, even
12 though people think the budget is
13 so big, had to not only try to deal
14 with learning loss. Dr. Bill Hite
15 had to take as much of that COVID
16 money and fill the holes that
17 funding is just not providing.
18 Here is the best example.

19 While most districts would
20 not spend COVID money on positions,
21 this school district hired 127
22 assistant principals with COVID-19
23 money. You let me recommend to
24 President Streeter to cut 127

1 assistant principals and every
2 member of this council would be not
3 happy. That just shows that here
4 the money had to go to plug a lot
5 of holes. The reason why I think
6 we can get more money is not
7 because I'm pollyannish or somehow
8 naive. In 2023, the Commonwealth
9 Court ruled that the way we fund
10 schools is unconstitutional in this
11 Commonwealth.

12 The General Assembly has
13 started on a path as well as the
14 city to get more revenue. It's
15 just going to take time to get to
16 adequate funding. Our best
17 estimate right now is that it'll
18 take a decade at the price -- at
19 the rate we're going. Our kids
20 can't wait a decade. So I would
21 say that first.

22 Second, I don't disagree
23 that we can do some -- take some
24 measures here in Philadelphia to

1 help ourselves and then go to
2 Harrisburg, the appropriate elected
3 officials and others and make the
4 case that we're doing our part; you
5 do your part. I don't have any
6 magic wand or a crystal ball, but I
7 do think it puts the city in a
8 stronger footing when we say we
9 don't have 35 percent of our school
10 buildings sitting empty and asking
11 for more money.

12 MR. STREATER: And if I
13 could be brief. I think one of the
14 elephants in the room that the
15 board is constantly worried about
16 and guarding against, there's a
17 statute that is still viable in
18 this -- in our -- in our state,
19 where we can lose local control
20 again if we're seen as being
21 financially in trouble.

22 So the Board of Education
23 understands we will -- we will
24 guard -- we will guard that to our

1 -- to our graves because we
2 understand the impact that about 20
3 years had on our city of
4 Philadelphia. And we're starting
5 to put things back that were taken
6 away and rebuilding public
7 education.

8 So I think there -- that's
9 one of the elephants in the room
10 we're not talking about. It's not
11 just about getting more resources,
12 it's not getting things taken away
13 and done to us. Again, that's part
14 of the analysis too.

15 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:
16 Appreciate that. I don't think
17 that was a little bit of a direct
18 answer to my question that you said
19 --

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Member Landau, I'm going to wrap it
22 up so.

23 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:
24 Yeah. I would like --

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 You have to be brief and you're
3 going to have them all day
4 tomorrow. We all will have them
5 all day tomorrow.

6 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

7 This is -- okay.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

9 So I'm just being frank; they
10 stopped what they were doing to
11 come temporarily, but we will have
12 them all day tomorrow as well. So
13 can you be brief and wrap it up and
14 then Majority Leader.

15 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: The
16 question was why do we have to
17 eliminate the full deficit this
18 year? I understand how we got
19 there --

20 DR. WATLINGTON: Oh, I'm
21 sorry.

22 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: And
23 I understand how this mark would
24 look bad for potentially losing

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1 local control. I'm asking that
2 specific question.

3 DR. WATLINGTON: We are
4 not proposing to President Streater
5 and his board -- I want to say this
6 on the record. We are not
7 proposing to pay down and eliminate
8 this deficit in one year. This is
9 a four-year plan. We will -- we
10 are recommending that President
11 Streater and his board take these
12 austerity measures to the tune of
13 \$225 million in fiscal year 26-27.
14 And that we continue to trim our
15 budget over the next four years
16 such that by fiscal year 30, we
17 will once and for all eliminate the
18 structural deficit in the school
19 district of Philadelphia.

20 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: So
21 the significant amount this year,
22 the largest amount this year --

23 DR. WATLINGTON: The
24 longer you kick the can down the

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1 road, the more interest, the more
2 you pay.

3 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

4 I'll end with this. I've been a
5 lawyer for a long time. When a
6 judge orders that someone has to be
7 evicted, they have to leave their
8 home. When a judge orders that
9 someone committed a crime, they go
10 to jail. When a judge orders they
11 have to pay someone a certain
12 amount of money, you have to pay
13 that amount of money. We got to
14 figure out a way to get this money
15 from the state. The judge ordered
16 it in 2023. We must be adequately
17 funded. They owe us money. Let's
18 go get it. End of discussion.
19 Thank you.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

21 I wish it was that simple though.
22 Being frank, and I come from that
23 body. You have a strongly
24 controlled Republican senate and

1 that no matter how much my good
2 friend and appropriation chairman,
3 Jordan Harris does, or my little
4 sister the speaker Joanna McClinton
5 do, at the end of the day, unless
6 we take control of that Senate,
7 right? I mean, it's good to say
8 it, but I come from that body. But
9 we will fight and we will advocate
10 for that additional funding because
11 it is our constitutional
12 responsibility -- their
13 constitutional responsibility.

14 But I'm also approaching
15 this pragmatically, I understand
16 the reality of what that
17 environment is. We are on the
18 front line in the city of
19 Philadelphia fighting for these
20 babies. Because most of them up
21 there can care less, to be quite
22 frank with you, unless you're from
23 City of Philadelphia and the
24 surrounding area. And some folks

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1 may be in the counties, to be quite
2 frank with you.

3 But I'm going to turn it
4 over to Majority Leader Gilmore-
5 Richardson to wrap us up. We're
6 going to have a brief -- we are not
7 going to do an hour-long lunch
8 today because the public is here.
9 And I expect all this energy that's
10 here will also be here to listen to
11 what these public individuals who
12 took their time out of their
13 schedule to come down here to say.
14 Majority Leader, take us home.

15 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
16 RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you
17 very much, Council President. And
18 first a thank you to Rob Dubow and
19 to Dr. Deb Carrera and the
20 additional representatives from the
21 administration. As well as our
22 school board Chair Reginald
23 Streater and Dr. Watlington and
24 your team at the school district.

1 I requested your presence
2 here today at this hearing to
3 respond to a financial question
4 that was posed by Councilmember
5 Curtis Jones relative to the school
6 district budget that the
7 administration was unable to
8 respond to. And I felt that it was
9 unfair for us to have this debate
10 in the public forum without having
11 that information as requested.

12 And so I requested you all
13 to be here. I appreciate you
14 coming. I understand that you're
15 going to be with us tomorrow, but I
16 wanted to ensure we could have a
17 full conversation today since we
18 were unable to get the financial
19 question answered from the
20 administration.

21 And I did mention the CFO,
22 so I didn't say anybody specific.
23 I just want to be clear that I
24 didn't ask for anyone specific

1 outside of the CFO who could answer
2 the financial question. I wanted
3 to put that on the record. I also
4 wanted to state for the record, and
5 this data comes from the district
6 quarterly school manager report,
7 that from fiscal year 21 to fiscal
8 year 26, City Council has increased
9 our contribution to the School
10 District of Philadelphia by
11 \$513,602,000 since -- over FY 21 to
12 FY 26. I wanted to put that on the
13 record because that is an important
14 figure to state for the auspices of
15 this conversation.

16 I'll end with this
17 question because of the timeframe
18 we have this week. We are meeting
19 with you all tomorrow. I
20 understand that you all are
21 scheduled to vote on the Facilities
22 Plan at the Thursday meeting. I am
23 formally and officially requesting
24 of you board Chair Streater and

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1 also Dr. Watlington in the presence
2 of the officials from the
3 administration that you commit to
4 us on record to move the facilities
5 vote to either the 4/23, April
6 23rd, action meeting or the May
7 28th action meeting of the school
8 board and the school District of
9 Philadelphia.

10 Are we able to receive
11 that commitment as we continue to
12 deliberate the facts and the
13 figures of this plan, as well as
14 the other information that has been
15 presented that we have been unable
16 to give full and complete answers
17 to?

18 MR. STREATER: May I have
19 the dates again, please?

20 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -
21 RICHARDSON: Yes. The dates are --
22 you have an upcoming action meeting
23 on April 23rd as well as May 28th.

24 MR. STREATER: And what

1 was the request?

2 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

3 RICHARDSON: And the request is
4 that you not vote on the Facilities
5 Plan this Thursday but commit to
6 moving that vote to either the 4/23
7 action meeting or the 5/28 action
8 meeting to allow City Council the
9 opportunity to deliberate on all of
10 the information that has been
11 presented, as well as continue to
12 get the answers to the questions
13 that we have that were presented
14 today around the tax bills. And
15 that would be Bill 260202, 260203,
16 260204, 260205, 260206, 260208, and
17 260209.

18 MR. STREATER: Today I'm
19 not prepared or even empowered to
20 even answer that question. We are
21 a board as well, so I'll have --
22 obviously I noticed questions you
23 want to come up tomorrow and I'll
24 be ready to respond tomorrow.

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1 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

2 RICHARDSON: Thank you very much.

3 Thank you, Council President.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

5 So for the record, tomorrow you'll

6 report back as is the two dates

7 requested will be either approved

8 or not approved based upon your

9 discussion with your board members,

10 correct?

11 MR. STREATER: As the
12 board president of the Philadelphia
13 Board of Education, I will testify
14 tomorrow and respond and answer
15 that question.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
17 Okay. All right. Thank you very
18 much. We will have a -- we will be
19 back at 1:35 from a brief break.

20 (Lunch recess.)

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Good afternoon, everyone. Good
23 afternoon, everyone.

24 AUDIENCE: Good afternoon.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 We are now doing public testimony.
3 We are here today to hear from you
4 about the city's proposed revenue
5 measures to ensure that there's an
6 opportunity for all of you to be
7 heard. Certain ground rules have
8 been established as follows.

9 Your testimony should be
10 about the city's proposed revenue
11 adjustments. Once your name is
12 called, you'll have the opportunity
13 to speak. In order to be fair to
14 all those wishing to speak, we want
15 to make sure that you stay within
16 your time limit. Your limit will
17 be a minute, right?

18 We have a very, very
19 extremely long public comment for
20 this afternoon. We have a hard
21 stop at 4:00, and if you need to
22 come back tomorrow, if your name
23 isn't called, because we have a
24 second session for public comment,

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1 that will actually happen. So I'm
2 going to make sure we stick to the
3 one-minute limit. And please be
4 mindful and respect the bell
5 because we want as many people as
6 possible to have their public
7 comment for the record today.

8 Ms. Loughead, please call
9 the first person for public
10 comment, please.

11 THE CLERK: Julio
12 Rodriguez, Garrett Johnson, Barbara
13 Shelly and Latasha Wells can also
14 make their way to the podium.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
16 And we are going to do this also to
17 make sure we continue to keep this
18 process going. If a person's name
19 is called and they are not here,
20 we're going to go on to the next
21 individual to keep the flow.

22 Please state your name for
23 the record, and please begin.

24 Yes, ma'am. How you

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1 doing?

2 MS. SHELLY: Yes. Hello.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 Like that button, too. Pretty
5 sharp. Please state your name for
6 the record and begin.

7 MS. SHELLY: Okay. Hello.
8 My name is Barb Shelly. I live in
9 the 5th Council District, and I am
10 a member of Arch Street United
11 Methodist Church in the 1st
12 District. I'm here with POWER
13 Interfaith.

14 I just want to speak on
15 behalf of some of the younger
16 adults that have made a home at our
17 church. They are young adults with
18 a passion for service and social
19 justice. They are nurses,
20 teachers, artists, the future of
21 our city, and yet, almost to a one,
22 they question whether they have a
23 future in this city because of the
24 affordability issue.

1 I do understand there's
2 many pieces to the affordability
3 puzzle, but you are the ones who
4 get to decide who benefits from the
5 city's tax policies and who gets
6 hurt.

7 Long term, if taxes are
8 the best, you can do this year to
9 preserve essential jobs in the
10 schools, then so be it. But taxes
11 on Uber and Lyft rides and retail
12 deliveries seem like a desperate,
13 inadequate patch on a tear that
14 will continue to widen without a
15 bigger fix.

16 So I joined with POWER
17 Interfaith in calling for a tax
18 structure that makes lives better
19 for ordinary people and doesn't
20 impose additional burdens on them.
21 Thank you.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
23 Well, thank you, ma'am. Go ahead,
24 sir. Just state your name for the

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1 record and please begin.

2 MR. JOHNSON: Good
3 afternoon. My name is Jerrett
4 Johnson. I am a lead transit
5 organizer for fiscal advocacy and
6 member of Transit Forward
7 Philadelphia. On behalf of Transit
8 Forward Philadelphia, we want to
9 see you support the transportation
10 -- the package delivery tax.

11 This is important to me
12 because it'll allocate funds for
13 public transportation without
14 impacting schools. It'll invest
15 the freedom and mobility, looking
16 out for other students -- and the
17 city should invest in mobility and
18 transit -- making transit more
19 affordable.

20 And as a matter of fact,
21 we have members that -- for Transit
22 Forward Philadelphia that use
23 public transportation. And I know
24 someone who has teenager in high

1 school, and she can't use her
2 student pass beyond 8:00 p.m. or on
3 the weekends. And it's also hard
4 for her because she has to shell
5 out money just so that she can get
6 a ride. Doing this will make it
7 easier for that woman and her
8 child.

9 And like I said, it's also
10 looking out for your friends,
11 neighbors, and coworkers who use
12 public transportation that are on
13 low income and who work for the
14 city. Thank you.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
16 Thank you very much, sir. State
17 your name for the record and please
18 begin.

19 MR. WELLS: Good
20 afternoon, members of Council. My
21 name is Latasha Wells, and I'm here
22 today deeply concerned -- as a
23 deeply concerned community member
24 and professional who witnessed the

1 daily challenges of our unhoused
2 population right here in
3 Philadelphia. I'm standing before
4 you to express my full and
5 unwavering support for Mayor's
6 Parker's proposal on hotel tax.

7 This isn't just about a
8 policy or a percentage; it's about
9 a necessary investment in dignity
10 and safety of our neighbors.

11 In my line of work, I see
12 that human face homelessness every
13 day. We aren't just talking about
14 statistics; we're just talk -- we
15 are talking about families,
16 veterans, and individuals who are
17 often one crisis away from losing
18 everything.

19 Currently, our shelters
20 are stretched thin, and our
21 resources for transition services
22 are at a breaking point. When we
23 fail to provide adequate support,
24 the cost is felt by everyone in our

1 public spaces, in our healthcare
2 systems, and mostly important, in
3 our lives of -- in the lives of
4 those left in the cold.

5 The beauty of this
6 specific tax is sustainably by
7 leveraging the tourism in a -- in a
8 hospitality sector, we can generate
9 an -- we can generate a dedicated,
10 consistent stream of revenue that
11 goes directly toward expanding home
12 shelter capacity, ensuring no one
13 has to be turned away on a freezing
14 night. Wraparound services,
15 providing the mental health and
16 addiction resources that are vital
17 for long-term stability. Rapid
18 rehousing, helping people move from
19 a cot of -- a cot to a front door
20 of their own.

21 If this bill -- if this
22 passes into a bill, the benefit
23 will be visible. We will see
24 cleaner, safer streets, but more

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1 importantly, we will see a
2 Philadelphia that takes care of its
3 own. It sends a message that we
4 welcome visitors to our hotels. We
5 use their growth to enter. I'm
6 sorry. Okay. Well, thank you.

7 THE CLERK: Next, we have
8 RK Williams, Peter Han, Mimi
9 Lijima, David Tatgenhorst.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Thank you, Ms. Wells.

12 THE CLERK: Deborah Kler
13 and Brianna January.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Good afternoon.

16 MR. WILLIAMS: Good
17 afternoon.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 Good afternoon.

20 MR. WILLIAMS: My name is
21 Christopher, RK Williams.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
23 Christopher, could you pull the
24 microphone up a little closer to

Committee of the Whole

1 you, sir?

2 MR. WILLIAMS: Is this
3 fine?

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Yes, sir.

6 MR. WILLIAMS: Okay. My
7 name is Christopher RK Williams.
8 I'm one of the Philadelphia
9 residents from the North
10 Philadelphia district for District
11 5. I've lived there all my life,
12 and a business owner. I come
13 before this government today to see
14 -- excuse me, one second. I know I
15 got a minute.

16 These taxes that you're
17 putting on, these tax cuts you all
18 are taking off, in my neighborhood,
19 the neighborhood I grew up in,
20 North Philly; I'm watching schools
21 close down. Everything you-all
22 doing is going to the people who
23 are hurt here.

24 Now, I'm a business owner

1 at the same time, even though I had
2 to deal with homelessness,
3 whatever, and even though I had to
4 overturn a case, the guys that I
5 employ they are transients, they
6 can't even open -- they can't even
7 fund a room, and you-all going to
8 make more taxes where they can't --
9 they can't -- like, it's 7.25 an
10 hour.

11 And what I'm saying is the
12 fact that if you all going to do
13 this and you all going to have all
14 these taxes, make it affordable for
15 the people who has -- who are
16 working. You-all making these big
17 corporations get over on it. No,
18 stop that. If they're going to tax
19 them, tax them to help us. Taxes
20 them to help little people.

21 Every day I walk around
22 here in my own city, the one that
23 we all say you-all love, and I'm
24 one of you-all business -- I'm a

1 small business owner, and I can't
2 afford most of the stuff I can
3 because you-all taxes is too high
4 and I can't even keep the people
5 employed that are trying to do for
6 self. And, like, what you-all
7 doing? That's my question. What
8 are you-all doing? And I'm just
9 part of the community. Thank you
10 for your services.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 Thank you, sir.

13 MR. HAN: Good afternoon,
14 Council members. My name is Peter
15 Han. I live in Germantown, Council
16 District No. 8. I speak as a part
17 of POWER Interfaith, but also, I've
18 been working closely with API PA.

19 In the first year -- in
20 the past year, I've had many, many
21 firsts. I received a phone call
22 from an unhoused and undocumented
23 friend, a mother with a U.S. born
24 daughter, from a homeless shelter.

1 They didn't know where to go, what
2 to do, because they were getting
3 threats that they were going to
4 call ICE on them.

5 My friends and I also
6 housed unhoused friends, rotating
7 house by house weekly. And I know
8 your job is not easy, and I wish I
9 had more time to tell you other
10 things. I know that in the federal
11 budget, we've seen the largest
12 transfer of wealth from the bottom
13 to the top, increasing 42 percent
14 of budget in military. We always
15 seem to have enough money to borrow
16 to kill people, but not enough to
17 feed people or house people.

18 I think there's some
19 choice happening here, especially
20 when we cut taxes from wages, big
21 businesses, more taxes for Uber,
22 which is for everyday
23 Philadelphians.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Thank you, sir.

2 MR. TATGENHORST: Good
3 afternoon. My name's David
4 Tatgenhorst. I'm a pastor,
5 retired. I live in Jamie
6 Gauthier's district proudly, and
7 see her running a lot. She's good.
8 And we're glad the city's
9 considering new taxes. We're just
10 worried, as in POWER, that they
11 fall so much on poor and working
12 people, and we have to figure out
13 alternatives.

14 A public bank would be a
15 really good alternative. It's a
16 real possibility that we keep our
17 money -- that -- in ways that we
18 can use it for ourselves rather
19 than have it go to big banks
20 outside of Philadelphia.

21 We think that instead of
22 -- I mean, we're cutting down BIRT.
23 There are ways that we can be
24 continuing to tax a corporate class

1 and have money coming more from
2 wealthy people and less from poor
3 and working people. Thank you.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Well, thank you, sir. Go ahead,
6 ma'am.

7 MS. LIJIMA: Hi. My name
8 is Mimi Lijima, and I live in West
9 Philly, Council District 3. I am
10 with POWER Interfaith and here to
11 talk about taxes. Most West Philly
12 houses are big Victorians, too big
13 for our small family.

14 So when we bought into
15 Penn Alexander Catchment, we got a
16 multi-family. We kept the first
17 floor as a rental, and we live in a
18 separate apartment on the upper
19 floors. Our house was the ugliest
20 house on the block. It needed tons
21 of work. Our rental helped with
22 renovation costs and helped us
23 afford a good school in a pricey
24 area.

1 Our neighborhood's
2 popularity, however, resulted in
3 our property tax more than doubling
4 in 2025; it shot up 114 percent.
5 Our house was lumped together with
6 surrounding rental properties. We
7 were grouped with investors who
8 care most about making money, and
9 they chop up their buildings into
10 many units to generate as much
11 revenue as possible.

12 But the city didn't care
13 that our rental income is much
14 smaller, and the city didn't care
15 that our property is our family
16 home. We've -- we keep the rent
17 below market rate so that our
18 tenants can save for a house -- the
19 house of their own. It's really
20 hard to save. We raise the rent
21 only after they leave. And in our
22 22 years as homeowners and
23 landlords, we've never raised the
24 rent on a tenant.

1 However, the bigger
2 property taxes may change things.
3 Right now, I am worried about the
4 couple who have been living with us
5 for the last four years. Last
6 year, the wife lost her job and has
7 serious health issues. I want to
8 look out for my tenants, but the
9 city is making it hard. Thank you.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Thank you, ma'am.

12 MS. JANUARY: Good
13 afternoon, Mr. President, esteemed
14 Council. Brianna January with
15 DoorDash in respectful opposition
16 to the proposed retail delivery
17 tax. DoorDash is proud of our work
18 and impact in Philadelphia, but
19 we're concerned that the proposed
20 delivery tax will hurt all aspects
21 of the DoorDash community in the
22 city; consumers, small businesses,
23 and our drivers.

24 In 2024, we worked with

1 thousands of local merchants, 85
2 percent of whom were small
3 businesses, delivering thousands of
4 everyday essentials to Philly
5 households, about 70 percent of
6 which went directly to residents in
7 low-income neighborhoods.

8 Additionally, we partner
9 with several local city nonprofits
10 to reduce food waste and help feed
11 the city's most vulnerable
12 residents. Council, the proposed
13 delivery tax hurts all of this.
14 Increased prices will make everyday
15 essentials less affordable for the
16 city's most vulnerable residents.
17 And thousands of small businesses
18 on our platform will also suffer
19 with fewer and smaller orders and,
20 ultimately, less business.

21 Lastly, fewer and smaller
22 deliveries mean decreased earning
23 potential for drivers, and consumer
24 behavior shows that tips are the

1 first to be cut.

2 I'll leave you with this.

3 Just last week, a poll was released
4 on this very proposal.

5 The findings were telling:
6 85 percent of Philly voters say a
7 delivery tax will harm their
8 communities. Sixty-seven percent
9 oppose the delivery tax. And
10 three-fifths said that they would
11 not support policymakers that
12 approve of a delivery tax.

13 Council, these are your
14 voters, your friends, your
15 neighbors. They know that this is
16 not right for Philly. DoorDash
17 stands ready to work with the
18 Council for other proposals, and we
19 look forward to our continued
20 collaboration. Thank you.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Thank you. Ms. Loughhead, please
23 call --

24 THE CLERK: Next, we have

1 Mai Miksic, Hope Ledford, Dan
2 Urevick-Ackelsberg, Rosa Parks-
3 Green, Angeline Jefferson, and Ed
4 Grose.

5 MS. MIKSIC: Good
6 afternoon. My name is Mai Miksic.
7 I'm the Deputy Director of Policy
8 for Children First. I'm here to
9 read the testimony of Dr. James
10 Parrott. He is an economist who
11 focuses on the rideshare industry.
12 He wanted to be here today, but
13 could not, so I'm reading his
14 testimony.

15 For the past eight years,
16 I have worked with several state
17 and local governments across the
18 country, analyzing rideshare and
19 gig economy services. Based on my
20 analysis, the rideshare industry,
21 and my understanding of the
22 economics of the industry and the
23 performance of its leading
24 companies, I think there is merit

1 in the mayor's proposed \$1
2 rideshare tax.

3 The pure economics do not
4 suggest an adverse effect on
5 passengers. Over 50 jurisdictions
6 across the country impose a sales
7 tax on rideshare services. In
8 Washington, D.C., it is a 7.25
9 percent rate, and in New York City,
10 it is an 8.875 percent rate. The
11 significant market power wielded by
12 the two major rideshare companies
13 in Philadelphia means that they
14 determine what they charge
15 passengers.

16 In recent years,
17 algorithmic pricing, also called
18 upfront pricing models, determine
19 what they charge passengers and
20 matches them with the lowest-paid
21 drivers in their area. That means
22 it has nothing to do with time or
23 distance. Upfront pricing was
24 introduced in 2022, and since then,

1 passenger fares have continued to
2 rise. Driver pay has continued to
3 fall, and Uber and Lyft profits
4 have soared. For 2025, Uber's
5 revenues increased by 18 percent,
6 with net profits rising 32 percent.

7 All right. He would be
8 happy to meet with every single one
9 of the Council members to answer
10 your technical questions about how
11 Uber and Lyft opaque pricing
12 actually harms every rider in this
13 city.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Thank you very much.

16 MS. LEDFORD: Good
17 afternoon. My name is Hope
18 Ledford, director of Civic
19 Innovation Policy at Chamber
20 Progress. I'm here in respectful
21 opposition to the rideshare and
22 delivery taxes. Both would impose
23 regressive new costs on
24 Philadelphians who already have the

1 least affordable options.

2 First, the rideshare tax
3 hit short, necessary trips the
4 hardest, like rides to work, to
5 school, or to a medical
6 appointment. For seniors, people
7 with disabilities, and working
8 families, rideshare is often not a
9 luxury; it is how they get to where
10 they need to go. The delivery tax
11 would also impose a new per-order
12 delivery tax on another service
13 that families rely on every day.
14 Its exemptions are much narrower
15 than they appear. A single
16 non-exempt item, like dish soap or
17 paper towels, can trigger the tax
18 for your entire order.

19 Forty-four percent of
20 voters have personally relied on
21 delivery because of a disability,
22 injury, sickness, or mobility
23 issue, and 50 percent know someone
24 who regularly does. Philadelphia

1 can and should focus on funding
2 schools and infrastructure, but not
3 by taxing access, mobility, and
4 hurting affordability. I
5 respectfully urge you to oppose
6 both taxes.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 Thank you. Thank you very much.
9 Go ahead, sir.

10 MR. ACKELSBERG: Thank
11 you, Council members, for having
12 me. My name is Dan Urevick-
13 Ackelsberg. I'm an attorney at the
14 Public Interest Law Center and
15 litigated the school funding case
16 that everyone talks so much about.
17 I'm here in support of Bills 260208
18 and 260205, which provide, as you
19 know, an estimated \$50 million in
20 recurring revenue for the district,
21 which it needs because we are
22 facing an imminent crisis.

23 The district -- we didn't
24 win that case because the district

1 is spending too much. We won
2 because they're spending too
3 little. Many members of this body
4 fought for years to ensure that
5 when the district did have
6 resources to invest, it
7 concentrated them in the
8 communities that have suffered the
9 most from systemic disinvestment.
10 And that investment over the years
11 is what is now at risk.

12 The schools that are going
13 to be hardest hit by these cuts are
14 places like McDaniel, Rhodes,
15 Munoz-Marin, Elkin. They're going
16 to lose reading specialists in the
17 middle of a citywide literacy
18 crisis. They're going to lose
19 counselors and climate staff in the
20 long tail of a -- the gun violence
21 crisis of a century. I know that
22 you all face tough decisions.

23 The children of this city,
24 however, don't have a giant

1 monopolistic corporation's ability
2 to flood this building with
3 lobbyists or to blanket our phones
4 with attack ads. But what the
5 children of this city do have is
6 all of you, who can be counted on
7 to stand up for their dignity,
8 their future, and their potential.
9 Thank you very much.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 You didn't hear Isaiah Thomas
12 earlier speaking on behalf of the
13 kids of Lankenau?

14 MR. ACKELSBERG: I -- oh,
15 no. I -- absolutely. Absolutely.
16 But --

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 I hear you, sir.

19 MR. ACKELSBERG: Yeah,
20 yeah.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 We Good. Mr. Grose, state your
23 name for the record, Ed, and please
24 begin. Good to see you, sir.

1 MR. ROSE: Good to see you
2 too. Ed Grose, last name spelled
3 G-R-O-S-E. I'm with the Greater
4 Philadelphia Hotel Association.
5 Good afternoon, Council President
6 Johnson, Majority Leader Gilmore-
7 Richardson, and all members of the
8 City -- of City Council. My name
9 is Ed Grose. I'm the President and
10 CEO of the Greater Philadelphia
11 Hotel Association.

12 The Greater Philadelphia
13 Hotel Association, alongside the
14 Pennsylvania Convention Center,
15 Visit Philadelphia, the
16 Pennsylvania Restaurant and Lodging
17 Association, and the PHLCVB, stands
18 in full support of Mayor Parker's
19 goal to end street homelessness in
20 Philadelphia. While the objective
21 of adding 1,000 beds with
22 wraparound services is vital,
23 funding the city initiative through
24 a targeted tax on the hospitality

1 sector alone jeopardizes our city's
2 economic competitiveness and puts
3 thousands of local jobs and
4 existing tax revenues at risk.

5 The hospitality and
6 tourism industry is a primary
7 economic engine for Philadelphia,
8 generating \$13.4 billion in
9 economic impact. Hotels are
10 already one of the city's most
11 heavily taxed industries. Beyond
12 standard property, wage, net
13 profits, and business income and
14 receipts taxes, we are responsible
15 for use and occupancy tax, net
16 profit, sugar-sweetened beverage,
17 and liquor-by-the-drink taxes.
18 This is in addition to an array of
19 specific municipal fees, ranging
20 from commercial trash and valet
21 parking permits to specialized fire
22 damper inspections.

23 If this proposed tax
24 increase is enacted, Philadelphia's

1 total hotel tax will rise from
2 16.25 percent to 18.25 percent.
3 This would make Philadelphia the
4 most expensive major city for
5 travelers on the East Coast,
6 surpassing Baltimore at 17.39,
7 Boston at 16.85, Washington, D.C.
8 at 15.9 percent, and New York City
9 at 14.76 percent.

10 Philadelphia is currently
11 in high -- in a high-stakes
12 environment for attracting national
13 and international events and
14 conventions. This tax would -- I
15 got cut off just when I was getting
16 started.

17 Okay. This tax would make
18 Philadelphia less competitive in
19 relation to other peer cities and
20 could trigger cancellation causes
21 in existing convention agreements
22 that are tied to changes in
23 financial terms. Hospitality
24 supports more than 76,000 local

1 jobs, accounting for 10 percent of
2 all employment by city residents.
3 I would also like to point out that
4 80 percent of our team members are
5 Philadelphia residents. A targeted
6 tax increase on the hospitality
7 industry places thousands of
8 workers across every zip code in
9 Philadelphia at risk.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Please summarize, Mr. Grose. Just
12 summarize the ending. You are past
13 your time.

14 MR. GROSE: Okay. I'll
15 summarize the ending. To
16 summarize, we support the mayor
17 fully in her efforts, and we --
18 matter of fact, we applaud her for
19 tackling such a difficult problem
20 when it would be easier just to
21 ignore it. We're on her side on
22 this one, with the exception of how
23 to pay for it because we feel other
24 industries and other entities

1 benefit from the very problem that
2 we have in the hospitality
3 industry.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Thank you very much, sir.

6 MS. PARK-GREEN: Thank
7 you. Good afternoon, City Council.
8 My name is Rosa Parks-Green, and
9 I'm here with Children First as a
10 proud board member and advocate for
11 children. I'm testifying in
12 support of the mayor's proposal to
13 raise \$50.4 million.

14 Today, the district faces
15 a \$300 million structural deficit
16 following the end of federal
17 pandemic relief funds. This
18 shortfall has serious consequences.
19 The district is forced to cut 340
20 school-based positions, leave
21 central office roles unfilled, and
22 reduce critical contracts. It is
23 projected that schools across this
24 district could lose up to 149

1 teachers, 120 climate staff, and
2 potentially 23 counselors. These
3 students cannot afford to do more
4 with less. These roles are
5 essential to student success.

6 The Mayor's proposal will
7 bring \$50.4 million in reoccurring
8 funding to schools and preserve the
9 340 positions that would otherwise
10 be cut. This investment directly
11 benefits students and families in
12 every single district. I urge you
13 to support new revenue solutions,
14 including the rideshare bill, and
15 oppose any reductions to school
16 funding. All students deserve
17 safe, supportive, and well-
18 resourced learning environments.
19 Please act now.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Thank you very much. Please state
22 your name and begin.

23 MS. JEFFERSON: Yes.
24 Angeline Jefferson, President

1 Johnson, and esteemed members of
2 the City Council. I am testifying
3 on behalf of Lyft in opposition to
4 the proposed rideshare tax
5 ordinance. We recognize the
6 seriousness of the school
7 district's funding deficit, and we
8 share this Council's commitment to
9 Philadelphia students.

10 But this ordinance, a \$1
11 per ride tax on all trips
12 originating in Philadelphia, on top
13 of the existing 1.4 percent excise
14 fee riders already pay is not the
15 right solution. It will impose
16 real hardship on Philadelphians,
17 riders, drivers, and the broader
18 local community without resolving
19 the deficit claims to address.

20 This measure has been
21 characterized as a progressive tax,
22 suggesting the wealthy will bear
23 most of the burden. We strongly
24 disagree. This tax falls hardest

1 on those who can least afford it.

2 An estimated 61 percent of
3 rideshare rides in Philadelphia
4 begin or end in low-income areas.
5 Ninety-four percent of Lyft drivers
6 hold other jobs or are enrolled as
7 students. These riders and drivers
8 depend on every dollar of earnings
9 and depend on consistent ride
10 volume to earn. When a tax-driven
11 fare causes riders to reduce their
12 trips, drivers absorb those losses
13 directly. This ordinance would
14 reduce earning opportunities for
15 the very constituents this Council
16 aims to support, and it will not
17 solve the underlying problem.

18 The revenue that this tax
19 would generate falls far short of
20 what is needed to make a meaningful
21 dent in the school district's
22 budget gap. Relying on one
23 industry with a per-ride tax is not
24 a sustainable or equitable funding

1 strategy. It shifts the burden
2 onto everyday rider, while the
3 underlying fiscal challenge remains
4 unsolved, we respectfully but
5 strongly urge Council to vote no on
6 this ordinance.

7 Thank you for the
8 opportunity to share our
9 perspective and contribute to this
10 important discussion.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 Thank you for your testimony.
13 Ms. Loughhead, please call the next
14 panel.

15 THE CLERK: Frangi Pozo.
16 Donna Cooper, Priyanka Reyes Kaura,
17 Matt Collier, Barbara Shelly and
18 Heidi Ramirez.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 How are you doing, Donna? Always
21 good to see you. Just state your
22 name for the record, and go ahead
23 and please begin, or whoever wants
24 to begin. Please state their name

1 for the record and please begin.

2 MS. POZO: Hi. My name is
3 Frangi. I'm a resident of the 8th
4 District, future parent, community
5 member, and Lyft/Uber rider. I'm
6 in support of the rideshare and
7 sale tower taxes, as they are both
8 an investment in the 1000 -- 98000
9 Philly school students across the
10 district. The reality is federal
11 funds are no longer available, yet
12 kids still need their counselors,
13 their teachers, and their climate
14 staff.

15 I'm hearing from parents
16 across the district already being
17 given the news of the teachers that
18 are going to be cut, the climate
19 staff as well as their counselors,
20 and how their kids are worried
21 about what does that mean for their
22 favorite teacher. Some kids show
23 up, and they go to their teachers
24 from past grades because they're so

1 excited of the support they offered
2 them, and they want support for
3 their future peers as well. So I'm
4 in favor of this bill because this
5 is currently our only option that
6 I'm seeing.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 Thank you.

9 MS. COOPER: Hi. My name
10 is Donna Cooper. I'm a resident in
11 Councilman Young's district.
12 Rideshare companies are projected
13 to make a billion dollar in
14 rideshare trips in Philadelphia
15 alone this year. In fact, it may
16 be over that. Last year, they
17 ended with \$898 million in revenue
18 from rides that originated in
19 Philly. I support both of the
20 taxes because they tax billion-
21 dollar corporations.

22 And let me say that again;
23 they tax corporations that are
24 currently valued at 140 billion for

1 Uber and 5 billion for Lyft. The
2 CEOs and the owners of these rides
3 share companies are among the
4 wealthiest 0.01 percent of all
5 Americans. They can afford to pay
6 for the future of our children.

7 This council has been a
8 champion for kids and low-income
9 families, and it's why I hold this
10 council in great respect. Uber and
11 Lyft are implementing a six figure,
12 twisted PR campaign, trying to
13 argue this is a regressive tax.
14 The real regressive policy is
15 cutting school counselors from
16 low-income schools to spare
17 billion-dollar corporations from
18 paying taxes. Change the
19 narrative, support this tax, and
20 demand that Uber and Lyft stop
21 bilking Philadelphians by agreeing
22 to pay a -- the dollar per ride on
23 the billion they make off of
24 Philadelphians. Thank you.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Thank you very much.

3 MS. KAURA: Hi. I'm

4 Priyanka Reyes Kaura with Children

5 First and a proud resident of

6 District 2. I'm here today to urge

7 City Council to pass the mayor's

8 proposed rideshare tax as the bare

9 minimum new revenue that our public

10 schools need this year.

11 Philadelphia students have already

12 endured enough disruption. They've

13 lived recently through a global

14 pandemic that upended their

15 learning and their well-being.

16 With the help of federal

17 relief funding, they're finally

18 beginning to recover. Attendance

19 in our district is improving,

20 academic progress is rising, and

21 schools are regaining stability.

22 But that progress is now at risk.

23 Our students are on the brink of

24 another wave of disruption, with

1 school closures, relocations, and
2 uncertainty. And at the moment
3 when they need consistency the
4 most, we are preparing to take it
5 away.

6 City Council, you have the
7 power and the responsibility to
8 prevent that. For decades, the
9 School District of Philadelphia has
10 been chronically underfunded. As
11 the education policy director at
12 Children First, I spend a lot of
13 time in Harrisburg advocating for
14 the state to pay their fair share.
15 And we've secured millions in the
16 last two years for the schools.
17 But the state is not the only
18 entity responsible for funding our
19 schools. The City Council, you
20 must also help the city do its
21 part.

22 Three hundred forty
23 school-based staff positions are at
24 risk of being cut. And these are

1 not abstract numbers. These are
2 the teachers, counselors, and
3 climate staff who our kids see
4 every day. They build
5 relationships with our kids. These
6 are the people who ensure that
7 mental health -- mental well-being,
8 and stable learning can occur.
9 Thank you.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Thank you.

12 MR. COLLIER: Hi. My name
13 is Matt Collier. I am a
14 professional macro-economist, and
15 I'm here to voice support for the
16 ride hailing tax in Mayor Parker's
17 budget proposal. So as mentioned
18 before, a lot of cities across the
19 country, globally really, but
20 across the country, most
21 relevantly, have proposed or have
22 adopted similar versions of a
23 policy like this.

24 So there's enough economic

1 literature out there to study the
2 effects -- the effects that matter
3 most to Philadelphia. And I read
4 that, so you don't have to, and the
5 results, or the questions that be
6 most pertinent, are, how much does
7 ride volume actually reduce when
8 any kind of per ride, small per
9 ride tax, like a dollar, is
10 implemented in the city?

11 And the results there are,
12 there is some variation in
13 coefficients across each study, but
14 generally what we're looking at is
15 a minor reduction in some small,
16 short trips, discretionary trips,
17 off peak hours; there is some
18 reduction there, but, in general,
19 that is something we consider
20 pretty inelastic because what
21 happens is comparatively --

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
23 Taking me back to econ class, bro.

24 MR. COLLIER: I'm usually

1 allergic to jargon, but there's no
2 way around in elasticity here.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 Go ahead.

5 MR. COLLIER: So what
6 we're talking about is not
7 proportional reduction in demand
8 for a price increase. There's not
9 a million ways, or an infinite
10 number of ways, that a city can
11 generate revenue in that kind of
12 fashion. And this is a policy that
13 can, it has been tested throughout
14 the country. And that's why I'm
15 here to voice my support.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
17 Thank you very much. State your
18 name for the record and please
19 begin.

20 MS. REYES: Good
21 afternoon. My name is Bianca
22 Reyes, and I am the proud principal
23 of Julia de Burgos Elementary
24 School in North Philadelphia in the

Committee of the Whole

1 7th Council District.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 We'll see you tonight. We'll be at
4 -- there 5:00 at budget town hall.

5 MS. REYES: I'm here today
6 not only for my own school
7 community, but in solidarity with
8 my principal colleagues, other
9 school leaders, teachers, and all
10 School District of Philadelphia
11 personnel because we are all facing
12 the same challenges, and we are all
13 part of the village that is
14 supposed to care for and protect
15 our children.

16 At Julia de Burgos, we
17 believe that a child's ZIP code
18 should never determine their
19 destiny. We serve a student body
20 that is 85 percent Latino, with
21 36.6 percent of our students
22 receiving special education
23 services and 35 percent receiving
24 English language support.

1 Our students need
2 resources, opportunity, and caring
3 adults around them. Instead, next
4 year, we're losing an ESL teacher,
5 three general ED teachers, and two
6 climate staff members. These are
7 not extras; these are essentials.
8 One cut means 66 sixth-grade
9 students split into two classrooms,
10 33 children in each room. How can
11 students get the attention they
12 deserve? How can teachers prepare
13 them for high school and to imagine
14 any future that they deserve?

15 We are also losing climate
16 staff, the people who help keep
17 children safe, build relationships,
18 and de-escalate conflict daily. In
19 a community impacted by poverty,
20 trauma, and the opioid crisis, we
21 need more support, not less. This
22 is why I support Mayor Cherelle
23 Parker's proposed \$1 rideshare tax
24 to restore positions and create

Committee of the Whole

1 lasting revenue for public
2 education. Do not ask our children
3 to dream big while funding them
4 small. Thank you.

5 THE CLERK: Next, we have
6 Arthur Steinberg, Elena Lin, Sarah
7 Bradley, Shirlee Howe, Jonathan
8 Hoffmeier, and Margaret Durkin.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
10 Hello, Mr. Steinberg. Just say
11 your name for the record and please
12 begin.

13 MR. STEINBERG: High tech
14 stuff is difficult for me. You
15 know that.

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

18 MR. STEINBERG: Good
19 afternoon, Council President
20 Johnson and members of the
21 Committee of the Whole. My name is
22 Arthur Steinberg. I'm the
23 President of the Philadelphia
24 Federation of Teachers. I'm here

1 today to testify in support of Bill
2 No. 260208, with amendments in Bill
3 No. 26025.

4 PFT does represent more
5 than 14,000 educators who work in
6 the School District of
7 Philadelphia. I'm going to try and
8 keep to the minutes, so I'm going
9 to skip through parts of it. Mayor
10 Parker's proposed \$1 rideshare tax
11 and adjusted U&O tax on telecom
12 corporations are fair, reasonable,
13 and necessary to raise \$50.4
14 million towards addressing the
15 School District's \$300 million
16 structural deficit and saving 340
17 school-based positions, which will
18 be cut if these tax bills aren't
19 passed.

20 I admit, I am amazed to be
21 testifying before you on these
22 bills today. It's incredible that
23 amid a severe educator staff
24 shortage in the School District,

1 we're talking today about cutting
2 positions, not adding positions.
3 Our schools have been seriously
4 short staffed for years, and yet we
5 are here today begging to save the
6 jobs of -- jobs of 340 teachers,
7 counselors, climate staff, and
8 more.

9 Before I go on, I would be
10 remiss if I did not thank Council
11 for their fierce advocacy for
12 education over the years, including
13 the advocacy for stopping the
14 school closures right now.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
16 Thank you.

17 MR. STEINBERG: We thank
18 you and appreciate that. It is
19 imperative the Council act
20 immediately to pass these bills,
21 save 340 school-based positions,
22 and keep district educators assured
23 that their positions and school
24 locations will be intact next year.

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1 I'm afraid, if we do not, we'll
2 exacerbate the teacher shortage and
3 incentivize educators to leave the
4 system and kids, which will then,
5 of course, affect the funding we
6 receive. Our kids are more than
7 worth this. Thank you.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Thank you, sir. Please begin. Say
10 your name, and please begin.

11 MS. LIN: Hello. My name
12 is Elena Lin. I am a constituent
13 of Councilperson Cindy Bass in the
14 8th District. I am also a proud
15 parent at Lingelbach, which is a
16 K-8 school in Germantown. I have a
17 3rd grader and a rising
18 kindergartner who will join next
19 fall. I'm also an educator who was
20 inspired by my own dedicated
21 public-school teachers. I was
22 raised by a low-income single mom
23 in unstable housing, and my life
24 was saved by public schools and

1 other public services.

2 I am here to support the
3 rideshare and cell phone tower tax.
4 I recognize the burden that these
5 taxes could put on the lives of
6 Philly residents who need to
7 supplement our inadequate public
8 transit system. But removing
9 caring adults from schools burdens
10 the very same people. I feel
11 strongly that Philly must invest in
12 our young people by providing
13 stable schools. We heard from a
14 representative from Lyft today who
15 expressed concern about the
16 low-income residents in
17 Philadelphia. So I would welcome
18 and encourage them to absorb the
19 tax, as they can afford to do.

20 We, in District 8, stand
21 to lose a number of teachers and
22 support staff, and Lingelbach could
23 be considered lucky to only face
24 one teacher being moved. But the

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1 story of this one teacher shows how
2 important every single caring adult
3 is. He is our beloved first grade
4 teacher, the only black male
5 teacher in the entire school of a
6 majority black school. His own
7 children attend our school, and as
8 one parent said, this is her only
9 --

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 But that's a shame in itself, just
12 to highlight like that for the
13 record.

14 MS. LIN: Yes. It's her
15 son's only chance to be taught by a
16 black male teacher. So I just want
17 to say we should not see these
18 taxes as costs. Investing in our
19 schools and providing students with
20 stable schools, caring adults who
21 are there year after year, that is
22 how young people learn, and we know
23 this.

24 Also, this sends the

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1 message to our kids that we care
2 about them. When they attend
3 schools where they lose their
4 teachers and their buildings are
5 inadequate, they receive the
6 message that their community does
7 not care for them. So, please, I
8 urge Council to show our young
9 people that we do care by passing
10 this tax and searching for more
11 funding. Their future is our
12 future. Thank you.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
14 Thank you.

15 MR. HOFFMEIER: Good
16 afternoon. My name is Jonathan
17 Hoffmeier. I'm here to speak to
18 support Bill 260208 and identify
19 investments directly to what's
20 happening in our schools. The
21 proposed rideshare tax is a smart
22 local solution that asks those who
23 benefit from our city's
24 infrastructure to help invest in

1 the future of our students. This
2 is not just about closing a budget
3 gap; it's about protecting
4 opportunities, programs, and
5 communities.

6 But funding alone is not
7 enough if we turn around and
8 approve a facilities plan that
9 repurposes the very schools that
10 we're trying to support. When we
11 approve to fund schools, we should
12 not be closing successful schools
13 and supportive programs that work.
14 So the question becomes, why invest
15 in education with one hand and
16 dismantle with the other?

17 If we pass this tax, we
18 must also commit to keeping schools
19 like Lankenau on Robeson open
20 because real investment means
21 stability, it means consistency, it
22 means believing that our students
23 deserve both resources and a place
24 to learn, grow, and lead. We

1 should be aligning policy with
2 purpose. Fund our schools and
3 protect our schools. Thank you.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Thank you.

6 MS. BRADLEY: Hello. My
7 name is Sarah Bradley. I'm a
8 student at CCP, a mother, and a
9 full-time worker. I'm here to
10 speak on the taxes. I believe that
11 we pay enough, but if we're going
12 to push package delivery and other
13 taxes, we need to make sure the
14 money goes back to the city, to our
15 students, to a tuition drop, Zero
16 Fare program. I'm tired of us
17 paying taxes, and it never going
18 back to the people who need it
19 most. The city -- the city needs
20 help funding our schools,
21 transportation, and safety.

22 I plead with you today, if
23 you're truly going to tax, to be
24 bringing it back to the community.

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1 I'm all with it. But please listen
2 to what we are saying and what we
3 are asking for with these taxes so
4 that we can keep pushing for a city
5 and a better future. Thank you.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
7 Thank you.

8 MS. HOWE: Hi. I'm
9 Shirlee Howe. I work at Children
10 First, and I also live at 309 Bryn
11 Mawr Ave, Bala Cynwyd, three blocks
12 from the City Avenue corridor. I'm
13 here today in support of the
14 rideshare fee, Bill No. 260208. I
15 represent a community inextricably
16 linked to the success of the city
17 of Philadelphia, where rideshare
18 services are widely used. Let us
19 do our share to support the
20 Philadelphia Public Schools, where
21 our friends and neighbors send
22 their children. They deserve the
23 very best, and it's our obligation
24 to help deliver it. Thank you.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Thank you.

3 MS. DURKIN: Good

4 afternoon. My name is Margaret

5 Durkin. I'm the Mid-Atlantic

6 Executive Director for TechNet, a

7 Tech Trade Association. Thank you

8 for allowing me the opportunity

9 today to share our concerns on the

10 dollar rideshare tax and the \$0.25

11 delivery fee. I submitted written

12 remarks for the records, and

13 similar to prior speakers, we are

14 concerned both about the rideshare

15 tax as well as the delivery fee.

16 Due to its unintended

17 consequences of driving up prices

18 for consumers, we believe that the

19 rideshare tax will prevent people

20 from using rideshares to get to

21 work, the doctor, or other places,

22 usually inaccessible without a TNC.

23 On delivery, we are concerned about

24 mixed baskets, specifically if an

1 exempt item is mixed with a
2 non-exempt item and how that tax
3 will work. Our neighbors in states
4 such as Maryland, New York State,
5 and New York City, as well as
6 Virginia, have rejected similar
7 delivery proposals. Happy to take
8 any questions, and thank you.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

10 Thank you.

11 THE CLERK: Next, we have
12 Miles Owen, Jigar Mehta, Rachel
13 Garnic, Steven Broski, Alexander
14 Malone and Eden McDougall.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
16 State your name for the record, and
17 please begin.

18 MR. OWEN: Good afternoon.
19 My name is Miles Owen. I'm a
20 resident of Brewerytown and
21 District 5, a regular user of our
22 roads and transit systems, and I
23 work as a city and infrastructure
24 planner. I'm here today on behalf

1 of Transit Forward Philadelphia to
2 speak in support of the package
3 delivery fee for two reasons.

4 First, speaking to my
5 background as a city planner.
6 Since 2019, the numbers of packages
7 delivered throughout the United
8 States has increased from 15.6 to
9 24.6 billion. Assuming the size of
10 this increase of nearly 10 billion
11 packages throughout the US is the
12 same in Philadelphia, that means
13 the number of package deliveries in
14 Philly has increased by over 60
15 percent in just a few years.

16 This means thousands more
17 heavy trucks on our roads every
18 day, which destroy pavement and
19 cause congestion when double parked
20 in our neighborhoods. Requiring
21 these companies to pay just a
22 little more for the damage they
23 cause makes sense to me.

24 And secondly, speaking

1 less about the direct impacts on
2 our road's infrastructure and more
3 as somebody who loves shopping at
4 local Philadelphia businesses, each
5 package delivered was not purchased
6 in person at a small business here
7 in Philly. This fee won't reverse
8 the massive increase in e-commerce,
9 but it will create a small
10 incentive to support our local
11 businesses over billionaires and
12 massive multinational corporations.
13 Thank you.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Thank you very much.

16 MR. MEHTA: Thank you,
17 Council President Johnson and City
18 Council. My name is Jigar Mehta.
19 I'm talking on behalf of the
20 rideshare tax. My biggest concern
21 about the rideshare tax, I think it
22 should go up to a thousand per
23 delivery if it's a robot. That is
24 what I'm worried about. That is

1 what I lose sleep over because this
2 is the direction it's going.

3 We're going to -- we are
4 already seeing it. We're already
5 seeing, in our city, they're
6 testing in our city. There's going
7 to be robots that are going to be
8 driving people around. We don't
9 have to worry about Uber taxes
10 anymore. No one is going to have a
11 job. So I would strongly encourage
12 that there's an amendment to say,
13 like, whatever the tax needs to be
14 for the current situation, but
15 let's make sure we add a robot tax
16 for a thousand dollars per
17 delivery, whatever it needs to be.

18 And another thing, I do
19 want to thank City Council because
20 on March 25th, the Law Department
21 thanked all of you for eliminating
22 the BIRT exemption. That BIRT
23 exemption raised taxes on
24 Philadelphians across the board;

1 individuals and sole proprietors.
2 What they didn't say is that,
3 before you made that decision, in
4 good faith, City Council was
5 working with lawyers, the two top
6 lawyers in our city at Stradley
7 Ronon and Ballard Spahr, to find a
8 solution.

9 And by November 20th, we
10 found a solution to exempt
11 individuals and sole proprietors,
12 thank you, Councilman Driscoll, for
13 introducing that bill. Also, I
14 want to make sure we thank the city
15 council members, City Councilmember
16 Squilla, City Councilmember Brooks
17 for their policy expertise. I want
18 to thank City Council Members --
19 apologies, Harrity, Lozada,
20 O'Neill, O'Rourke, Phillips, Young,
21 for sponsoring the bill. We have
22 nine votes.

23 Also want to thank
24 Councilmember Gilmore-Richardson.

1 She may not know it, it's because
2 of her connections. A lot of the
3 people that are engaged in this
4 entire process is because of her
5 connections.

6 I want to thank Councilman
7 -- Member Gauthier, and especially
8 Councilmember Thomas, who at the
9 point when no one else was raising
10 the alarms, he was. So overall in
11 good faith, I want to say everybody
12 in city council worked to find a
13 solution before they voted to
14 eliminate the exemption. And it's
15 important to make that fact.

16 And on the same day that
17 you were thanked by the Law
18 Department for getting rid of the
19 exemption for the 100,000 BIRT
20 exemption, they also said this law
21 was constitutional publicly.
22 Publicly they stated it was
23 constitutional. So thank you City
24 Council. What we're asking now is

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1 in good faith the work was done and
2 now in faith we -- we're asking for
3 action to bring a vote. Thank you,
4 sir.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
6 Thank you very much.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: State
8 your name for the record, ma'am.

9 MS. GARNICK: Good
10 afternoon. My name is Rachel
11 Garnick. I'm here representing
12 Teach Plus Pennsylvania in support
13 of the bills. I'm also a proud
14 resident of District 1. I am a
15 former 1st Grade teacher, so I'm
16 here today to testify from that
17 perspective. I have sat on the
18 floor with 1st Graders learning to
19 read. I watched the moment happen
20 when things clicked for them. And
21 I see what happens when a child
22 doesn't get there in time.
23 Research tells us that a child who
24 can't read proficiently by 3rd

1 Grade is four times more likely to
2 drop out of school.

3 And right now 83 percent
4 of Philadelphia 4th Graders are not
5 reading proficiently. That is a
6 crisis of literacy and their
7 teachers are the single most
8 powerful factor in changing that.
9 And Philadelphia is about to lay
10 off 340 of those teachers.

11 A \$1 rideshare fee and a
12 cell phone tower fee would generate
13 \$48 million annually, go directly
14 to Philly Public Schools and save
15 those 340 positions. Uber and Lyft
16 can afford it. Philly asks less
17 than New York. We're asking less
18 than Chicago, we're asking less
19 than DC. So please vote yes on
20 both bills, ideally before May and
21 before budgets are finalized and
22 pink slips go out. Our students
23 cannot wait and our teachers
24 deserve protection. Thank you.

1 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank
2 you. Next.

3 MS. MACDOUGALL: My name
4 is Eden -- I'm sorry.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Mic is
6 on.

7 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
8 RICHARDSON: Okay. My name's Eden
9 MacDougall. I'm a District 2
10 resident, and I teach in District
11 8. I ride SEPTA every day and I
12 also cycle frequently. I support
13 increasing funding for SEPTA in
14 general and also specific
15 initiatives like Zero Fare.

16 I have a friend in
17 Baltimore who struggles
18 financially, and on top of having
19 to pay rent and bills, they also
20 have to pay for the bus to get to
21 work and it makes it really hard
22 for them because there's no reduced
23 fare or zero fare for low income
24 people in Baltimore.

1 So we're really lucky to
2 have this program in Philadelphia.
3 We should preserve it and make it
4 permanent, which can be done with
5 funds from the package delivery
6 tax. We should also keep funding
7 Vision Zero. I don't want to get
8 hit biking home because someone
9 just really, really, really needed
10 to park in the bike lane. Thank
11 you.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 Thank you. Next.

14 MR. MALONE: Good
15 afternoon, Chair and members of
16 City Council. My name is Alex
17 Malone. I live in the 2nd
18 district. I'm here on behalf of
19 Fiscal Advocacy as the transit
20 committee co-chair. We at Fiscal
21 Advocacy urge you to fully fund and
22 expand the Zero Fare transit
23 program, which benefits
24 Philadelphians living below the

1 poverty line.

2 For residents with the
3 least financial stability, even the
4 cost of a daily fair can be a
5 barrier to basic mobility that many
6 take for granted. Zero Fare
7 removes that barrier. It allows
8 people to get to work, attend to
9 medical appointments, access
10 groceries, and stay connected to
11 their communities without having to
12 choose between transit costs and
13 other basic needs.

14 Investing in Zero Fare is
15 an investment in low income
16 Philadelphians. It puts money back
17 into the pockets of residents who
18 are struggling the most, reducing
19 financial pressure and expanding
20 access to economic opportunity
21 while simultaneously supporting
22 SEPTA.

23 We also recognize that
24 funding this program requires

1 dedicated revenue. To accomplish
2 this, Fiscal Square supports the
3 mayor's proposed funding plan,
4 including measures such as a
5 package delivery tax, as a
6 practical way to sustainably fund
7 this program going forward.
8 However, we do oppose the use of
9 those funds for the paying of
10 parking tickets, which would be a
11 gross misallocation of very limited
12 funds.

13 City Council has the
14 opportunity here and now to
15 sustainably support a program that
16 is already working to support both
17 our people and our transit system
18 simultaneously. We at Fiscal
19 Advocacy urge you to make Zero Fare
20 permanently funded program and to
21 expand it to serve every eligible
22 Philadelphian living below the
23 poverty line. Thank you.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

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1 Thank you. Next.

2 MR. BRONSKILL: Good
3 afternoon. My name is Stephen
4 Bronskill. I'm the coalition
5 manager for Transit Forward Philly.
6 Thank you, Council President,
7 Council, all the incredible
8 advocates, and community leaders
9 speaking up for their communities
10 and schools today. I want to talk
11 about the incredible opportunity we
12 have through the package delivery
13 tax and the funds for
14 transportation projects here in
15 Philadelphia.

16 As some of my colleagues
17 have shared, we have a remarkable
18 opportunity through the Mayor's
19 proposed budget to fund Zero Fare
20 this year and into the future.
21 This is a moment -- we talk with a
22 lot of transit riders at SEPTA
23 platforms. We are a very big
24 diverse community. We may not all

1 look the same or travel the same,
2 but we all have somewhere to go.
3 If you make minimum wage here in
4 Philly, in Pennsylvania, you make
5 7.25 an hour.

6 If you're tapping SEPTA
7 both ways, that's 5.80. It's 48
8 minutes on the job. If you are a
9 transit rider who has a physical
10 disability, use the wheelchair, an
11 access ride, it can cost almost \$12
12 round trip to the grocery store or
13 to the doctor. If you're a
14 student, and thank you
15 Councilmember Landau for speaking
16 up on this, if you're trying to get
17 to an afterschool activity, a
18 summer program or work on the
19 weekends, your student fare card
20 doesn't go far enough.

21 We believe that we have an
22 incredible opportunity to invest in
23 these programs, programs that even
24 Dallas has. We can't let Dallas

1 beat us at anything. Philly
2 deserves great schools, it deserves
3 great transit. We can fund those
4 through this budget. Thank you for
5 your time.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
7 Thank you.

8 THE CLERK: Next we have
9 Allegra Dingle, Janice Tosto, Kevin
10 Burgess, Zaina Cahill, Vidula
11 Joshi, and Larry Bombback.

12 MS. DINGLE: Okay. Hi, my
13 name is Allegra Dingle, and I'm a
14 transit advocate here on behalf of
15 Transit Forward Philadelphia. I
16 recognize the majority of the
17 discussion today has been related
18 to the rideshare tax, but I would
19 like to share my thoughts on the
20 package delivery tax funding,
21 public transportation.

22 I am personally so
23 privileged to be surrounded by
24 transit by way of the trolley, the

1 MFL, and the bus. But there are so
2 many residents in southwest
3 Philadelphia who I represent that
4 still must rely on cars because
5 transit is either inaccessible,
6 unreliable, or too expensive for
7 them.

8 A fully funded transit
9 system would make mass transit a
10 more attractive option for
11 Philadelphians and funding raised
12 with a package delivery tax should
13 expand transit access equity. The
14 package delivery tax would truly
15 benefit seniors and low income
16 riders. The recipients of programs
17 like Zero Fare at the Transit
18 Access Fund, Student Fare, and
19 other transit equity initiatives.
20 Equity starts with getting where
21 you need to go. Thank you.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Thank you.

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: State

1 your name for the record.

2 MS. JOSHI: My -- good
3 afternoon. My name is Vadula
4 Joshi, and I'm a resident of
5 Council District 3. I'm also a
6 former corporate employee of Lyft,
7 a company that is lobbying against
8 the new rideshare tax proposals
9 that have the potential to be
10 hugely beneficial for
11 Philadelphians. I support the
12 rideshare and retail tax proposals.

13 Philly desperately needs
14 improvements to local
15 infrastructure, public services,
16 and quality of life to get it to a
17 minimal level of respectability.
18 It's frankly embarrassing that in
19 the richest country in the world,
20 in one of the biggest cities in the
21 country, we have to close public
22 schools due to lack of funding.

23 Our streets are crumbling
24 and our transit is sparse. I

1 commend Mayor Parker for taking
2 action to put more money towards
3 our severely underfunded schools
4 and fix our crumbling
5 infrastructure. However, as
6 written, the tax proposals allow
7 the large tech companies to pass
8 the cost of the tax down to already
9 struggling consumers.

10 I urge you to ensure that
11 this tax is progressive, meaning
12 the mega rich corporations
13 themselves are on the hook for it.
14 As a former tech employee, I've
15 seen firsthand how rich these
16 companies who essentially operate
17 in an oligopoly truly are. The
18 fact that they fight tooth and nail
19 when asked to minimally contribute
20 to the communities that enrich them
21 is frankly embarrassing. I want to
22 live in a city that's healthy and
23 safe. I want our kids in schools
24 and our infrastructure fixed.

1 The city budget needs to
2 include deep investments in the
3 most marginalized communities in
4 Philadelphia, and we do that by
5 making sure the rich pay their fair
6 share. The tech companies need us
7 more than we need them. I urge you
8 to have the political courage to
9 act in favor of working
10 Philadelphians. Thank you.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 Thank you.

13 MR. BURGESS: Hi. My name
14 is Kevin Burgess, and I'm a
15 resident of South Philly and I'm
16 here to speak in support of the
17 rideshare fee. It's important to
18 remember why we're here.
19 Harrisburg has underfunded Philly
20 public schools for years, and while
21 there's been progress, the district
22 is still owed almost \$1 billion.

23 So now we find ourselves
24 once again in a make or break

1 moment for Philly public schools
2 and the 898,000 students they
3 serve. If the district's deficit
4 is not addressed, 340 teachers,
5 counselors, and support staff will
6 lose their jobs directly harming
7 Philly kids' education. Let us
8 also remember rideshare companies
9 earn billions each year. They can
10 afford to cover the cost of the
11 fee.

12 Furthermore, we've heard
13 from the rideshare companies about
14 how the proposed fee would
15 allegedly hurt drivers. However, I
16 think it's -- it is these very
17 companies that have actively fought
18 efforts to increase driver pay and
19 extend drivers' labor protections.

20 So their concerns now
21 can't help but ring false to my
22 ears. As the council debates this
23 policy, let's remember what this is
24 really about. Stepping up for

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1 Philly's kids that have -- that are
2 already asked to learn with --
3 learn with less than they deserve.
4 In conclusion, our kids are worth
5 it. Rideshare companies can afford
6 it. Please support this proposed
7 investment. Thank you for your
8 time.

9 MS. CAHILL: Good
10 afternoon. My name is Zaina
11 Cahill. I live in Council District
12 1, and I am a Lyft and Uber rider,
13 an education advocate and the
14 parent of a child soon to enter
15 into the school district of
16 Philadelphia.

17 I'm speaking in support of
18 the rideshare fee and cell phone
19 tower tax, and I'm here today to
20 urge City Council to support the
21 mayor's proposal to provide \$50.4
22 million for the school district of
23 Philadelphia to prevent cuts to
24 permanently assign school staff in

1 the 2026 and 2027 school year.

2 This funding would help
3 protect 340 teachers, counselors,
4 climate staff, and other school-
5 based positions that students and
6 families rely on every single day.
7 The rideshare fee is an investment
8 in Philadelphia's 198,000 public
9 school students. rideshare
10 companies have the option to absorb
11 this \$1 per ride cost rather than
12 pass this fee onto their consumers,
13 with Lyft and Uber collectively
14 valued at over \$65 billion. They
15 can afford to pay this fee and
16 contribute to the funding of
17 education for the communities that
18 they serve.

19 Philadelphia is asking
20 less than comparable major cities
21 who have already passed these fees
22 like New York, Chicago, and DC.
23 The revenue is legally designated
24 for the school district, and the

1 fund raised from the fee will go
2 directly to Philly Public Schools,
3 not the general fund, immediately
4 benefiting our city students.

5 We're counting on City
6 Council. If Council fails to pass
7 this measure, 340 school staff will
8 lose their jobs and Philly students
9 and their families will lose out on
10 critical education resources. I
11 urge you to oppose any reductions
12 to school funding and support new
13 revenue solutions, including the
14 proposed rideshare fee to ensure
15 schools have the resources they
16 need. Our students deserve safe,
17 supportive, and well-resourced
18 learning environments. Thank you.

19 MR. BOMBACK: Good
20 afternoon. Larry Bomback -- Good
21 afternoon. My name is Larry
22 Bomback. I'm a CFO, a small
23 business owner, and a parent of two
24 children in Philadelphia public

1 schools. I'm also an Uber One
2 member and I fully support the
3 proposed Uber tax because it's a
4 practical, fair way to invest in
5 our city's future. Uber is a
6 convenience, public education is a
7 necessity.

8 Families in my Northern
9 Liberty's neighborhood leave for
10 the suburbs when their kids reach
11 school age because they don't
12 believe Philadelphia prioritizes
13 basic school conditions. And when
14 they leave, we lose tax revenue and
15 local spending. Uber is a
16 convenience, public education is a
17 necessity. Uber has the scale and
18 pricing power to absorb a modest
19 local tax.

20 And if it made good on its
21 threats and chose to leave the
22 city, I'm sure another entrant
23 would step up, fill the void and
24 pay the tax because there are

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1 simply too many people in this city
2 that want to use the service.

3 Uber is a convenience,
4 public education is a necessity.
5 Thanks to Philadelphia's affordable
6 and acceptable -- and accessible
7 public transportation system, there
8 are always other options to get
9 from point A to point B. If we do
10 not vote yes on Mayor Parker's
11 proposal, we have effectively
12 chosen to continue subsidizing a
13 \$200 billion company based in San
14 Francisco over our own Philadelphia
15 kids. I urge you to support this
16 measure.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 Thank you.

19 THE CLERK: Next we have
20 Madeline Johnson, Sarin Talk,
21 Lillian Dunn, Margaret Di Santo,
22 Jean Stewart, and Stacy Holland.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 Please state your name and begin,

1 please.

2 MS. JOHNS: Madeline Johns

3 -- okay. Hello. My name is

4 Madeline Johns, and I'm here with

5 Transit Forward Philadelphia

6 advocating for a taxation -- for

7 the taxation of package delivery in

8 Philadelphia to go towards funding

9 public transportation initiatives

10 and expanding the current SEPTA

11 student program.

12 Being a university

13 student, I am -- I utilize public

14 transportation to advance myself

15 academically and professionally. I

16 travel around the city to attend

17 class field trips, lectures at

18 other universities, and for social

19 activities. I enjoy being a

20 college student in Philadelphia, a

21 city that is rich in history and

22 community opportunities for

23 students.

24 I try to spend Sundays --

1 weekend exploring new -- exploring
2 something new in the city, a new
3 neighborhood, museum or restaurant.
4 To do this and to attend my
5 internship and classes during the
6 week, I utilized SEPTA's public
7 transportation system. As a
8 university student, I have access
9 to the SEPTA UPass program, which
10 allows me to travel around the city
11 for free with up to 240 rides per
12 month.

13 School student -- school
14 students in grade 7 through 12
15 should have the same ability to
16 access opportunities in
17 Philadelphia. As an intern with
18 Transit Forward Philadelphia, I
19 have been working to research
20 connects and advocate for universal
21 student affairs to make public
22 transportation more accessible and
23 equitable for all Philadelphia
24 students.

1 The current SEPTA student
2 fare program limits students'
3 mobility and places financial
4 burdens on their families to
5 transport their children around the
6 city. Middle and high school
7 students in Philadelphia deserve
8 the freedom of mobility and access
9 to opportunities that will help
10 build their futures.

11 Unfortunately, the current
12 SEPTA student fare program does not
13 go far enough for students.
14 Students who live less than 1.5
15 miles from their school, who have
16 jobs after school, enrichment
17 activities on the weekend, or
18 programs over the summer, are
19 unable to use their SEPTA student
20 passes to reach them.

21 I am asking you to
22 consider using the taxation of
23 package delivery in Philadelphia to
24 fund public transportation and

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1 expand the student fare program in
2 Philadelphia so that students have
3 mobility to access growth and
4 community opportunities in their
5 city. Thank you for your time.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
7 Thank you.

8 MS. DI SANTO: Good
9 afternoon, City Council President
10 and members of Council. My name is
11 Margaret Di Santo. I'm a 3rd
12 District resident and a advocate
13 for children and families with
14 Children First. I also serve as a
15 committee person in the third ward
16 in 6th Division. I am the
17 education chair of the Cobbs Creek
18 Community Educational Environmental
19 Center. My children are proud
20 graduates of the Philadelphia
21 School District. I currently have
22 grandchildren in the Philadelphia
23 School District.

24 I am here today with a

1 clear ask to support at minimum the
2 mayor's proposed 50.4 million
3 investment in the school district
4 of Philadelphia to prevent harmful
5 cuts in 2026 and 2027 school year.

6 Let's be clear, we're at a
7 moment of urgency, and our response
8 must match the reality. For years,
9 our schools have been underfunded
10 and our children have suffered and
11 carried the burden of the
12 disinvestment. A court has already
13 provided information about what
14 families have long known. Our
15 schools have not been funded
16 adequately or appropriately. The
17 Commonwealth has begun to respond.
18 The city must do its part.

19 The city is the decision-
20 maker and their choices will
21 determine whether our schools
22 stabilize or continue to struggle.
23 Thank you.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Thank you.

2 MS. STEWART: Hello. I'm
3 Janine Stewart, a mental health
4 therapist in private practice here
5 in Center City. I'm so glad that
6 Mayor Parker is attempting to fund
7 the Philadelphia schools with the
8 rideshare tax. Educating our youth
9 is an ethical duty we all share as
10 adults.

11 However, a regressive tax,
12 like the \$1 rideshare tax, if it's
13 paid by the people, not the
14 companies such as Uber and Lyft or
15 the new version of the BIRT Tax
16 passed last summer is not the
17 answer. These regressive tax
18 measures are poised to cause a mass
19 exodus of single owner LLCs and
20 sole proprietors fleeing the city
21 ultimately depleting the tax base.

22 I am one of those sole
23 proprietors. Due to the removal of
24 the exemption on the first 100K on

1 the BIRT, my total tax bill was at
2 least 8K more -- \$8,0000 more than
3 anticipated this year. This is a
4 devastating blow that eats into
5 funds for rent, vacations, food,
6 leaving me vulnerable to burnout.
7 And everyone else in my field the
8 same.

9 Looking at future tax
10 bills consistently 60 percent
11 higher than they were last year, I
12 am seriously considering moving my
13 practice outside of Philly. I
14 don't know how I'll afford to stay
15 in my home. Financial pressure
16 among Philadelphians is at a fever
17 pitch.

18 The clients I see who
19 already struggle with depression,
20 anxiety, and the impacts of trauma
21 often tell me they feel
22 increasingly demoralized amid
23 rising costs. But it's more than
24 that. Clients and therapists feel

1 demoralized by the decisions of our
2 leaders, from the president to the
3 CEOs to our state and local
4 leaders, which often indicate that
5 those in power aren't willing to
6 address the crucial issue of our
7 day, the rich getting richer and
8 the poor getting poorer.

9 Many therapists I've
10 spoken to describe the BIRT tax
11 change as heartbreaking, crushing,
12 and absurd. Others aren't sure how
13 they'll stay. Under very tight
14 budgets with health insurance
15 premiums having already increased
16 and prices having risen nine
17 percent cumulatively over the past
18 three years, rent money is
19 extremely tight.

20 People must not be priced
21 out of the city they work
22 tirelessly to support, nor should
23 the food truck drivers or the Uber
24 and Lyft drivers who make everyday

1 run more smoothly. The burden of
2 funding the schools and the city's
3 infrastructure must be shouldered
4 by the corporations that make a
5 profit, not by the individuals
6 whose livelihoods will be destroyed
7 by getting gouged.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Thank you very much. Please state
10 your name, please begin.

11 MS. DUNN: I'm Lillian
12 Dunn. I'm a licensed clinical
13 social worker. I'm a therapist in
14 private practice. Like Janine, I'm
15 here to support the rideshare tax
16 if being paid by the corporations,
17 not by the riders, instead of
18 burdening working people like the
19 BIRT does after the exemption
20 elimination.

21 The removal of the BIRT
22 exemption is disproportionately
23 impacting mental health
24 practitioners in private practice.

1 About half of our field of mental
2 health practitioners in this city
3 are private practitioners making
4 under \$100,000 in sole proprietors.
5 Private practice psychotherapists
6 like me offer an essential service
7 to our city's economy.

8 We stabilize working
9 people, prevent crises from
10 worsening and keep people in their
11 jobs and in their families. And
12 today about 20 percent of adult
13 Americans suffer from some sort of
14 mental illness. Recent research
15 has shown that untreated mental
16 illness among Americans, namely
17 workers, cost the U.S. economy
18 about \$282 billion a year.

19 The BIRT tax exemption
20 removal has raised the taxes on my
21 small business by a factor of six.
22 BIRT has made me and every
23 colleague of mine in a similar
24 position I've spoken to seriously

1 consider moving our businesses out
2 of the city. And where we go, our
3 local expertise goes.

4 Our ability to see people
5 in-person where they live and work,
6 refer them to local networks for
7 the kinds of proactive care that
8 prevents mental health crises from
9 happening or worsening. Look
10 around, it's 2026, you do not want
11 to lose half of the mental health
12 field in this city due to a
13 misguided tax exemption removal.
14 Reform BIRT and keep mental health
15 workers in this city to keep
16 Philadelphia thriving. Thank you
17 very much.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 Thank you very much. Just state
20 your name for the record, Stacy.

21 MS. HOLLAND: Yes. My
22 name is Dr. Stacy Holland. Thank
23 you so much to Council President
24 and members of Council for allowing

1 me to testify today. I am the
2 executive director of Elevate 215,
3 which is dedicated to improving the
4 quality of schools throughout
5 Philadelphia.

6 But I'm here today to
7 implore you to support the
8 rideshare and cell phone tower tax,
9 which would protect 340 school-
10 based jobs, and more importantly
11 add reoccurring revenue to our SDP
12 system, which educates over 198,000
13 children. Today, Elevate has
14 invested millions in almost 31K to
15 12 schools, and we can attest that
16 the staff are the magic. They lead
17 academic progress, which is about
18 consistency. The staff provide
19 relationships. The staff are
20 trustworthy.

21 Parents, kids and each
22 other -- they depend on each other.
23 We have to make sure that that
24 staff is supported and that they

1 are protected because they are the
2 heart of our school community and
3 they are the reason why our
4 children can thrive.

5 Reoccurring revenue would
6 allow SDP to keep the necessary
7 staff and therefore provide
8 consistency. Underfunding is not
9 abstract. It means schools are
10 struggling to provide students with
11 individualized attention, mental
12 health supports and academic
13 intervention. The conversation
14 before us is the right one simply
15 because it is the truth.

16 If we want different
17 outcomes for students, we have to
18 be willing to make different
19 choices. I am here to ask you,
20 implore you to improve the
21 rideshare tax and cell phone tax
22 and continue this conversation, the
23 focus and urgency with the students
24 for the students because they

Committee of the Whole

1 deserve it. Thank you.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Thank you very much. Ms. Loughead,
4 please call the next panel.

5 THE CLERK: Next we have
6 Sue Hoffman, Kate Fox, April Brown,
7 Dr. Robin Cooper, Bianca Reyes, and
8 Dr. Toni Damon.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
10 State your name for the record and
11 please begin your testimony.

12 MS. HOFFMAN: Hello, my
13 name is Sue Hoffman. I'm a member
14 of POWER Interfaith in Congregation
15 Mishkan Shalom in Manayunk Council
16 District 4, but many of our
17 congregants live in Mount Airy in
18 Germantown and Councilmember Cindy
19 Bass's District 8.

20 I'm speaking today because
21 the budget is a moral document and
22 we at POWER are glad to see the
23 city tap new funding sources
24 because we're going to need them.

1 But we're concerned that those new
2 taxes and along with existing taxes
3 shouldn't fall primarily on
4 everyday Philadelphians, especially
5 the lowest income Philadelphians
6 who are renters.

7 There's an affordability
8 crisis in our city, which I know
9 and Katherine Gilmore-Richardson
10 knows. When I used to run the
11 Women in Nontraditional Careers
12 program at Philadelphia Works, we
13 saw that women wanted to go to
14 training, wanted to better their
15 lives and get into the building
16 trades, but they couldn't afford
17 lunch, they couldn't afford
18 transportation, they couldn't
19 afford childcare.

20 We don't want new taxes
21 that make the affordability crisis
22 worse. And POWER's affordability
23 report shows that low income
24 renters already bear the biggest

1 burden from sales tax and from
2 landlords passing through property
3 taxes.

4 I urged City Council to
5 create a long-term tax plan that
6 makes sure our city is funded but
7 in a moral and fair way. Taxes
8 shouldn't go up for Philadelphians
9 who are already struggling. Those
10 who can afford it should pay their
11 fair share. POWER Interfaith looks
12 forward to shaping that future with
13 you.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Thank you very much.

16 MS. BROWN: Good
17 afternoon. My name is April Brown.
18 I am the proud principal of
19 Finletter Elementary School,
20 located in the Olney section of
21 Philadelphia. I am here today to
22 speak not just about numbers on the
23 spreadsheet, but about the real
24 impact of the budget cuts on

1 children, families, and educators,
2 and ultimately about the district's
3 equity promise to cultivate
4 prosperity and liberation for our
5 students and staff.

6 The school district's
7 equity statement explicitly commits
8 to prioritizing historically
9 marginalized populations by
10 removing barriers and increasing
11 access. Yet the proposed budget
12 reductions for Finletter, which
13 includes losing five teachers, a
14 counselor, and two climate staff do
15 the exact opposite. These cuts
16 don't remove barriers, they build
17 them.

18 Finletter serves one of
19 the highest concentration of
20 students with complex needs in
21 Philadelphia, including 10 autistic
22 support classrooms. According to
23 the Office of Specialized Services,
24 we are legally and morally bound to

1 provide a free and appropriate
2 public education.

3 However, when we strip a
4 school of its staff, we are not
5 increasing inclusion, we are
6 isolating our most vulnerable
7 populations and our learners. We
8 are placing students and educators
9 in an impossible environment where
10 the shared culture of social
11 responsibility the district's claim
12 to value is sacrificed for a bottom
13 line. True organizational
14 accountability means that when the
15 district promises to build trusting
16 relationships, it must protect the
17 very people who form those bonds.

18 Each educator lost is a
19 broken bridge for a child who
20 relies on consistency to feel safe
21 and to learn. When we reduce staff
22 in high needs buildings, class
23 sizes swell and individualized
24 attention vanishes. We are asking

1 fewer adults to meet greater needs.
2 That is not equity and is certainly
3 not liberation. It is the
4 continued marginalization of a
5 community that has already been
6 told to do more with less for fall
7 too long.

8 Our students deserve safe,
9 supportive, and well-resourced
10 classrooms. They deserve the
11 prosperity the district has put in
12 writing. I urge city council and
13 the district leadership to continue
14 to move beyond the rhetoric of
15 equity and into the practice of it.
16 Protect the resources that our
17 students depend on. If you are
18 committed to removing barriers,
19 start by removing the threat of
20 these budget cuts. Pass the
21 rideshare tax.

22 Thank you for your time
23 and your accountability to the
24 students and families of

1 Philadelphia. Please don't just
2 publish equity statements, fund
3 them.

4 MS. DAMON: Good
5 afternoon. My name is Dr. Toni
6 Damon, and I am the principal of
7 Middle Years Alternative, also
8 known as MYA. I am here today
9 representing staff, students,
10 families, and my colleagues, many
11 of which who could not be here to
12 speak for themselves.

13 As someone born, raised,
14 and educated here in Philadelphia,
15 returning home to serve and educate
16 the next generation was an easy
17 decision. What is not easy is
18 doing this work without the funding
19 and support our school's need and
20 deserve. For many years, large
21 corporations have been allowed to
22 operate in our city while avoiding
23 their fair share of taxes.

24 Meanwhile, educators,

1 students, and families were left
2 advocating for basic resources
3 required to provide quality
4 education so that our young people
5 could one day fill these very jobs
6 these companies promise to bring.
7 Instead, we continue to see
8 repeated budget cuts. The data is
9 clear what happens when young
10 people are not adequately prepared
11 for their future.

12 Since I've joined the
13 District in 2012, we have
14 experienced cycles of closures and
15 funding reductions, and now here we
16 are again in 2026 seeing the same
17 thing. At MYA alone, we have lost
18 a special education teacher, a
19 climate manager, and two climate
20 staff members, critical positions
21 that district -- that directly
22 support safe and effective learning
23 environments.

24 We now have an opportunity

1 before us, a rideshare tax that
2 could restore essential positions,
3 not only at MYA, but across the
4 school citywide. This should be a
5 straightforward decision. Instead,
6 these companies are choosing to
7 avoid responsibility, shifting the
8 burden onto working class drivers
9 and riders while our schools fight
10 for survival.

11 I urge you not only allow
12 large corporations to dictate the
13 future of our children, do not
14 accept cuts that will have lasting
15 consequences on their lives and
16 opportunities. Please pass the
17 rideshare tax. Hold these
18 companies accountable and most
19 importantly, invest in our schools.
20 Thank you.

21 MS. COOPER: Good
22 afternoon, all. I am asking for
23 you to support Number 260208 --

24 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

Committee of the Whole

1 RICHARDSON: Please state your name
2 for the record. We know who you
3 are, but you have to state your
4 name for the record. Thank you.

5 MS. COOPER: Sorry. I am
6 Dr. Robin Cooper, President and
7 Principal Officer of Teamsters
8 Local 502 Commonwealth Association
9 of School Administrators. I am
10 asking for support for Bill No.
11 260208 for rideshare, and 260205
12 for cell phone tower tax.

13 We talk about the village
14 and I'm looking at the village
15 that's all around. A lot of folks
16 in this room have always supported
17 public education and I sincerely
18 thank you for it. I'm just urging
19 you to please support this tax
20 because our time is not done. You
21 know, we often talk about public
22 education and what we're doing, and
23 we are working as a village. We
24 are a part of that village. You

1 are a part of that village.

2 So when folks say increase
3 attendance, we did. They said
4 reduce suspensions, we did. They
5 said make the school safer, we did.
6 But we did that with money. We did
7 that with the necessary resources.
8 We did that because the city
9 stepped up. We did that because
10 the state stepped up. I have a
11 real problem with the Billionaire
12 Boys Club where they could just
13 put out a bully and threaten a
14 newspaper and say, we'll just pass
15 this tax on to the riders. So
16 that's done as a distraction.

17 I have a further problem
18 when we hide from the bullying as
19 opposed to addressing it head on.
20 This tax does not have to be given
21 to any rider anywhere, ever. So we
22 take and we talk about public
23 education, we cannot cave to the
24 Billionaires Boys Club because

1 they are saying, hey, you know,
2 we're going to just pass it.

3 I think our children are
4 important. I think that we are
5 doing the job. I think we all are
6 part of the community, the village,
7 and we know what we can do when we
8 all come together. Dr. Martin
9 Luther King said, the time is
10 always right to do what's right.
11 Supporting the rideshare tax,
12 supporting the cell tower tax is
13 the right thing to do.

14 And all we ask is, what
15 will we be remembered for when we
16 go into the history books? Will we
17 have protected our most vulnerable
18 population? And that's our
19 students. I am speaking as a
20 former public school student of
21 Philadelphia. All I know is
22 Philadelphia. If I could sit here,
23 so can someone else. Please
24 support the rideshare tax. Thank

Committee of the Whole

1 you so much for your time.

2 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

3 RICHARDSON: Next we have Tisha
4 Dunn, Christie Parfitt, Dr. Ismail
5 Alraham Lamar, Keith Arrington,
6 Brian Johnson, Michael Roth, and
7 Nichole Willoughby.

8 MS. DUNN: You want to go?

9 MS. PARFITT: No, it's all
10 you.

11 MS. DUNN: Good afternoon,
12 everyone. I am Tisha Dunn, the
13 proud principal of S. Weir Mitchell
14 School, a K to 8 school located in
15 southwest Philadelphia. Due to
16 this budget cut, we have lost seven
17 teachers. Our K to 4 grades used
18 to have two teacher -- well, they
19 currently have two teachers per
20 grade. With this budget cut next
21 year, we will have one teacher per
22 grade for K to 4, the most
23 fundamental years.

24 And that means going from

Committee of the Whole

1 an average of 14 to 15 scholars per
2 class to an average of 27. Our
3 middle school program that we work
4 so hard to develop with Ford's
5 expert teachers in Math, ELA,
6 Science and Social Studies will be
7 reduced to two teachers that will
8 be requiring one teacher to know
9 Math and Science and administer and
10 implement a curriculum for both
11 topics. We've worked so hard to
12 develop our teachers. If I had
13 mentioned my school is the home of
14 the heroes, meaning we have
15 respect, engage, and be
16 responsible, rise to the challenge
17 and own our actions.

18 With these budget cuts, we
19 are now in need of heroes. We are
20 in the midst of a crisis that's
21 starting to feel like we are
22 entering into the Marvel's end game
23 where we are fighting for our
24 future, a fight that we cannot

1 fight by ourselves. Our Mayor
2 stated that her office is working
3 to bring back jobs and
4 opportunities to this city. Our
5 scholars deserve to be competitors.
6 We deserve, in Philadelphia, to
7 raise our own children to become
8 Philadelphia's future. City
9 Council, you are the heroes that we
10 need.

11 You are our Ironman, our
12 Spider-Man, our Hulk, our Captain
13 Marvel, and we are asking you to
14 assemble. We start -- we support
15 this rideshare tax where we could
16 start \$1. We are worth \$1. This
17 rideshare tax can reshape our
18 reality of our need for better
19 school; \$1, one snap.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Thank you.

22 MS. PARFITT: Good
23 afternoon. My name is Christie
24 Parfitt. I'm the proud principal

1 of Jay Cooke Elementary School in
2 the Logan section of Philadelphia.
3 Throughout my time as the principal
4 at Cooke, I have seen the
5 dedication and hard work of the
6 staff, scholars, and community
7 members. Since the pandemic, Cooke
8 has demonstrated remarkable
9 resilience with recent data
10 highlighting a strong upward
11 trajectory in both school culture
12 and academic growth.

13 The study improvement in
14 our data is a direct result of
15 having the right tools, a reliable
16 team, and a clear plan of action.
17 The investment in resources for our
18 school has paved the way for our
19 team to effectively make an impact
20 in the school community. As the
21 26-27 school year approaches, there
22 is great concern that losing vital
23 resources will stall the progress
24 that we have worked so hard to

1 achieve.

2 As a result of the budget
3 cuts, Jay Cooke is seeing a
4 decrease in about \$1.4 million
5 alone at our school. This equates
6 to one assistant principal, five
7 teachers, one climate liaison, and
8 five student climate staff. The
9 budget cuts not only reduce our
10 staff significantly, it reduces the
11 access our scholars have and
12 deserve.

13 Across the city, there are
14 several schools grappling with
15 severe budget cuts and shortfalls
16 that have forced the elimination of
17 essential staff roles and academic
18 programs. Backing a dedicated tax
19 on rideshare services offers a
20 practical and sustainable solution
21 to provide immediate relief to
22 these struggling schools.

23 This targeted funding
24 ensures that the burden of

1 municipal deficits does not fall on
2 the shoulders of the students. It
3 allows schools to maintain
4 important resources, programming
5 and staffing levels necessary for a
6 safe, high quality learning
7 environment. Supporting such a
8 measure is a direct investment in
9 the long-term stability of the
10 community and the success of the
11 next generation.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 Thank you. Next. State your name
14 for the record, please.

15 MS. WILLOUGHBY: Good
16 afternoon, City Councilmembers. My
17 name is Nichole Willoughby, and I
18 serve as Principal and Learning
19 Network Aide at Potter-Thomas
20 School. Budget cuts aren't just
21 numbers on a spreadsheet. They're
22 the faces of the people who make
23 our school function. Potter-Thomas
24 is losing five critical positions,

1 a reading interventionist, a Math
2 interventionist.

3 They're the very people
4 who help struggling students catch
5 up to grade level. An ESOL teacher
6 leaving our English language
7 learners without the specialized
8 support that they deserve. A
9 kindergarten teacher, forcing our
10 most vulnerable learners into
11 overcrowding classrooms. A dean of
12 students who is essential for
13 maintaining positive school
14 culture. Without these roles,
15 class size increases, targeted
16 interventions disappear.

17 Our English language
18 learners lose essential language
19 support and our youngest students,
20 our most vulnerable students, our
21 kindergartners lose the strong
22 start that they deserve. The
23 rideshare tax is a necessary
24 intervention. It provides a clear,

1 sustainable path to restoring these
2 five positions and ensuring that my
3 students aren't defined by what
4 they've lost, but by what they can
5 achieve. Thank you.

6 MR. ROTH: Hi. Hi. My
7 name is Michael Roth, a proud
8 principal of Olney High School.
9 We're going to be losing 17 members
10 of our staff this year. I could
11 talk about what that's going to do
12 to our progress, but I want to tell
13 you something else instead. This
14 morning I received a call from a
15 parent. Last school year, two of
16 our Olney students were killed in
17 separate shootings.

18 This morning I received a
19 call from the mother of one of
20 those young men. She called me
21 because one of our counselors,
22 unbeknownst to me, had reached out
23 to this parent earlier this year.
24 Counselor Donahue informed the

1 parents that since their son
2 would've graduated this year, the
3 Olney High School team wanted to
4 recognize their son at our
5 graduation ceremony and present a
6 member of his family with his
7 diploma. The young man's mom
8 called just to go over some of the
9 details with me and tell me how
10 grateful she was that the school
11 thought of this honor.

12 The parent and I also
13 talked for a bit reflecting on her
14 son and talked about some of her
15 son's Olney friends. I could tell
16 that this conversation in the
17 moment to talk about her lost son
18 meant a lot. I could also hear in
19 her voice how the chance to have
20 her son recognized that the Olney
21 graduation was extremely important
22 and came as a pleasant surprise to
23 her. This invite and thoughtful
24 action was initiated by Counselor

1 Donahue.

2 Counselor Donahue is one
3 of the staff members losing her
4 position to these budget cuts,
5 along with another counselor who is
6 from the neighborhood and served
7 Olney for 10 years. We're also
8 losing an assistant principal, a
9 climate manager, and two climate
10 staff members who grew up in the
11 Olney neighborhood and want to
12 serve their community.

13 We'll be losing 11
14 teachers, eight of whom have been
15 with us all four years of the
16 turnaround. I won't say the end,
17 but please pass this rideshare tax.
18 We need the funds to keep our
19 schools moving in the right
20 direction. Thank you.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Thank you.

23 MR. JOHNSON: Good
24 afternoon. My name is Brian

1 Johnson, Principal of John Bartram
2 High School. Very thankful, Mike,
3 that I haven't had to go through
4 something like that recently. The
5 last two years, we have not lost
6 any students at our school due to
7 their staff at the school, which is
8 a huge thing as a comprehensive
9 high school in southwest
10 Philadelphia, District 2.

11 Our school serves as a
12 true anchor for our students and
13 families. We're facing a loss of
14 two teachers, one administrator,
15 and two climate staff. In
16 addition, three additional climate
17 staff. Rather than lose the
18 positions, I had to reduce their
19 hours from seven hours down to six
20 hours.

21 These are not just
22 positions. They're trusted adults
23 who know our students, support our
24 families, and help maintain a safe,

1 stable learning environment. I've
2 seen this before. As a principal
3 of Tilden Middle School, during a
4 period of significant staff
5 reductions, I watched the social
6 and emotional health of students
7 suffer as trusted adults
8 disappeared almost overnight. We
9 cannot allow that to happen again.

10 The proposed \$1 rideshare
11 tax will allow us to keep all the
12 positions, maintain full hours for
13 our staff. It will preserve the
14 relationships and consistency our
15 students rely on every single day.
16 I urge you to protect this
17 investment in our school community.
18 Our students in southwest
19 Philadelphia deserve stability,
20 support, and opportunity. Thank
21 you.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Thank you.

24 THE CLERK: And Bahir

1 Hayes. And if there's anyone else
2 here to testify whose name I have
3 not called, please come to the
4 podium now.

5 MR. HAYES: Good
6 afternoon, council members. I'm
7 Principal Hayes from Bryant
8 Elementary School. I stand before
9 you as a proud leader of Bryant, a
10 school rooted in community that has
11 carried more than a share. Bryant
12 is a place where a child was
13 abducted. A place where -- a place
14 that felt the lasting impact of
15 MOVE bombings. A place where just
16 recently a thousand man march moved
17 through the community in response
18 to violence.

19 Our students come to us
20 with some of the highest aces
21 scores and mental health needs in
22 the city. We're located in the top
23 10 litter zone surrounded by
24 environmental stressors that show

1 up in our classrooms every day.

2 And yet, despite all of
3 that, we are making progress. Not
4 by chance, but because we had the
5 resources to invest in safety and
6 support and the student success.
7 That's why I'm here today in
8 support of the Uber rideshare tax
9 because it represents sustainable
10 local investment in schools like
11 Bryant.

12 With COVID relief funding,
13 Bryant was able to exit state
14 intervention within three years,
15 the earliest possible timeline.
16 Last year, we achieved green status
17 across three years of data: ELA,
18 Math, attendance and suspensions.
19 The progress is not abstract. That
20 progress is people, it's teachers,
21 it's climate staff, it's
22 counselors, it's consistent caring
23 adults showing up every day for our
24 children.

1 And funding streams like
2 the rideshare tax ensure we can
3 sustain those people because when
4 we lose even one teacher, the
5 impact is not temporary, it's a
6 lifelong -- it's lifelong for a
7 child. And when we lose climate
8 staff, we lose the very foundation
9 that keeps our school safe, stable,
10 and supportive.

11 There's a difference
12 between rising to meet a challenge
13 and being forced to operate in a
14 constant state of secrecy --
15 scarcity. That's not strength,
16 that's burnout. And when burnout
17 sets in, it doesn't just affect
18 staff; it affects students, it
19 affects relationships. It affects
20 the very community we are trying to
21 build and protect.

22 Our students feel that,
23 our families feel that. The Uber
24 rideshare tax helps us change that

1 reality because quite frankly,
2 right now, schools are like a boat
3 taking on water.

4 These funds help us plug
5 those holes. They keep the boat
6 afloat, but it's our staff, our
7 teachers, our climate teams, and
8 our counselors who actually move
9 the boat forward. Without the
10 funding, we're just trying to stay
11 above water. With it, we can build
12 momentum. And we've already shown
13 that's possible when we were
14 already -- we were properly
15 resourced. So this is just not
16 about maintaining, it's about
17 continuing progress for Bryant, for
18 our students, and for our
19 community. Thank you.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Thank you.

22 MS. ARGRO: Good
23 afternoon, council members. My
24 name is KaTiedra Argro, and I come

1 before you today as a Philadelphia
2 taxpayer, but as a proud product of
3 the school district of Philadelphia
4 and someone who has dedicated my
5 life to it.

6 I'm a proud graduate of
7 Hartranft Elementary, and I'm the
8 proud principal and alum of the
9 Philadelphia High School for Girls,
10 where I have now -- I now have the
11 honor of leading the institution
12 where I once went.

13 For 20 years, I have
14 served in every role, whether it
15 was a middle magnet, charter
16 sector, central office,
17 comprehensive high school at Martin
18 Luther King, John Barry Elementary,
19 which is a neighborhood school.

20 And so across every single
21 one of those experiences, one truth
22 remains constant: our schools need
23 adequate funding to provide what
24 our students are entitled to, not

1 just what we can afford.

2 As a vested educator in
3 any school, in any part of the
4 city, we need your support with the
5 rideshare tax. How can we talk
6 about enrichment, innovation, and
7 opportunity when we are still
8 struggling to fund what is
9 required? For years, the narrative
10 around the school District of
11 Philadelphia has not reflected the
12 brilliance, resilience, and
13 potential of our students or our
14 staff.

15 As city leaders and
16 educators, we have worked
17 tirelessly to change the narrative
18 through intentional climate and
19 culture initiatives, through
20 relationship building, through
21 creating welcoming and affirming
22 environments for our students.

23 We are redefining what it
24 means to attend a Philadelphia

1 public school. But the very
2 positions and supports that drive
3 this transformation: counselors,
4 climate staff, are some of the ones
5 being cut. You cannot change a
6 narrative without investing in the
7 people doing the work. The
8 students of 2026, carrying more
9 than any generation before them.
10 Post pandemic learning gaps,
11 increased mental health, a demand
12 for real world skills, they need
13 more. We are asked -- we are being
14 asked to do more.

15 If we are serious about
16 closing gaps, supporting the whole
17 child, we must ensure that every
18 student has access to these
19 supports. The proposed rideshare
20 tax is not just a policy decision,
21 it is investment in our students.

22 As a high school
23 principal, we have to provide
24 electives 23.5 credits that

1 requires staff and instruction that
2 sparks these students' passion and
3 connection. These classes make
4 sure that every student wants to
5 come to school, we need for them to
6 want to come.

7 If we want to increase
8 graduation rates, decrease dropout
9 rates, then we must invest in the
10 system that make those outcomes
11 possible. Mayor Parker says, one
12 Philly a united city. Dr. Walton
13 speaks of becoming the fastest
14 growing urban school district.
15 Those visions cannot become reality
16 without meaningful investment in
17 our schools.

18 I say this with urgency
19 and with love for this city, we
20 cannot afford to fall short for our
21 students. If you want to be a part
22 of strengthening Philadelphia's
23 future, if you want to stand for
24 equity opportunity and progress,

Committee of the Whole

1 then I urge you to vote yes. Thank
2 you.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 Thank you.

5 MS. ARGRO: Thank you.

6 MS. NOVAKOVA: Thank you.
7 How do I -- how do I do this?

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Go
9 ahead. State your name for the
10 record.

11 MS. NOVAKOVA: Good
12 afternoon. Sorry. It's my first,
13 I've never done this before. Good
14 afternoon, council members. My
15 name is Galina Novakova, and I am a
16 Philadelphia resident and a
17 rideshare driver as well as a
18 rider.

19 I am here to oppose the
20 Bill 260208 with the proposed \$1
21 rideshare tax. Let me be clear.
22 Philadelphia schools deserve
23 funding. I am a parent myself.
24 I'm a single parent myself. Our

1 children deserve safe schools,
2 teachers, counselors, and
3 resources. But placing another tax
4 on rideshare trips is the wrong way
5 to do it.

6 This tax will hurt every
7 day working people first, not
8 corporations. It will hit seniors
9 going to appointments, workers
10 commuting late at night, families
11 in neighborhoods with limited
12 transit access. Teenagers that go
13 to school in the mornings because
14 it's not safe for them to ride
15 SEPTA. College students and
16 residents who rely on rideshare
17 when SEPTA is delayed, unsafe, or
18 unavailable.

19 The very same residents
20 that use these schools, their
21 children go to these schools. As a
22 driver and a rider, I can also tell
23 you that this affects us, too.
24 When ride -- when rides become more

1 expensive, customer tip less, ride
2 less, or stop using the service
3 altogether; that means fewer trips
4 and less income for drivers that
5 are already struggling with gas,
6 maintenance, insurance, and rising
7 living costs.

8 Many drivers like me are
9 already seeing fewer requests and
10 unstable earnings. We are trying
11 to survive. We should not be a
12 collateral damage in a budget
13 solution. Philadelphia already
14 taxes residents heavily. Instead
15 of taxing transportation access,
16 the city should examine waste
17 mismanagement, existing revenue
18 streams, and fair alternatives that
19 do not burden working class people.

20 Please support schools,
21 but do it without punishing working
22 class people, especially when gas,
23 food, rent, and everything else is
24 expensive. Thank you for your time

Committee of the Whole

1 and have a good day.

2 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

3 RICHARDSON:

4 Thank you. Thank you very
5 much for your testimony. Are there
6 any further witnesses here to
7 testify whose name has not been
8 called? Seeing none, the Chair now
9 recognizes Councilmember Thomas for
10 a motion that the public hearing
11 and meeting on the bills and
12 resolutions before the committee
13 today stand in recess until
14 Wednesday, April 22nd at
15 10:00 a.m., in Room 400, City Hall.

16 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

17 Thank you, Madam Chair. I move
18 that we stand in recess.

19 COUNCIL MEMBERS: Second.

20 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

21 RICHARDSON: It has been moved and
22 properly seconded that the public
23 hearing and meeting on the bills
24 and resolution before the committee

Committee of the Whole

1 today stand in recess until
2 Wednesday, April 22nd, 2026, at
3 10:00 a.m. in Room 400, City Hall.

4 All those in favor of the
5 motion will indicate by stating
6 aye.

7 COUNCILMEMBERS: Aye.

8 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
9 RICHARDSON:

10 Those opposed? The ayes
11 have it and the motion carries.

12 This committee will stand
13 in recess until Wednesday, April
14 22nd at 10:00 a.m. which -- at
15 which time we will reconvene in
16 Room 400, City Hall. Thank you.

17 (Committee of the Whole meeting concluded at 3:30 p.m.)

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Committee of the Whole

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence are contained fully and accurately in the notes taken by me of the above case, and this copy is a correct transcript of the same.

Samanda J. Rios

Samanda J. Rios

Court Reporter
Notary Public of PA & DE

(The foregoing certification of this transcript does not apply to any reproduction of the same by any means unless under the direct control and/or supervision of the certifying reporter.)

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