

Stegman, Matthew

From: Elam Klein <elamklein@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 26, 2021 10:07 AM
To: Testimony
Subject: City Budget FY22-Public Comment for Taxpayers Night

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of Baltimore City IT Network Systems.

Reminder: DO NOT click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know that the content is safe. Report any suspicious activities using the Report Phishing Email Button, or by emailing to Phishing@baltimorecity.gov

Dear City Council Members,

My name is Elam Boockvar-Klein, and I'm a resident of the Old Goucher Neighborhood in Council District 12. I am testifying in support of reducing Police Department funding by at least 25% of its current budget, and reinvesting those funds in community-based solutions that are proven to boost the health of residents across our neighborhoods.

This is urgent; I know from what I've observed first-hand. I work with middle-schoolers at a non-profit organization in Southwest Baltimore. We provide a safe, healthy environment for our students to learn, play, and build relationships with one another. **They thrive in that setting, many becoming visibly more comfortable in a matter of days.** Students share insights on homework, help with math problems, and play kickball in the field across the street.

But sometimes, a patrol car sits in the parking lot next to that field. It is striking to see how the students' dispositions change when the police surveil next to their play and learning-space. They become more tense and distant, with one student even remarking to me: "I don't want the police here", and then running back inside. Their fear - undoubtedly due to run-ins they've observed between officers and parents, relatives, siblings, friends- impedes their ability to comfortably learn and play. Their ability to be kids. **Because suddenly they are in survival mode, the color of their skin making them a potential target.**

Their fear is justified; this reality is not. It is unconscionable that we spend \$840 on police per capita, more than any other big city in the country, which is more than double what we spend on schools, and triple what we spend on housing & community development. We know what needs to be done to create opportunity in our communities: invest in schools, mental health services, workforce development programs, and youth services, to name a few. In this political moment of heightened awareness of racial injustice, we have a unique opportunity to do just that. We must invest in our youth, and not the institution that instills fear in their play-spaces. For this reason, I urge you to increase funding by 25% in community-based services and programs, using funds currently earmarked for the police department.

Additionally, I ask that you fund the following programs:

1. A \$30 million investment into a community wellness trust fund to be governed through a participatory budgeting process.
2. A \$70 million additional investment to support quality, affordable housing, high-quality public education, universal healthcare, jobs, a universal basic income, and community programs.
3. Removal of police entirely from responses to mental health distress, substance use, sex work, homelessness, and other quality of life issues. Baltimore must create an alternative to 911 that does not dispatch police but connects people in crisis with the mental health, housing, treatment, and harm reduction resources they need to live with dignity.
4. \$2.5 million to fund counsel for renters facing eviction.

5. \$2.5 million to fund the new Fair Elections program.

As a moral document, it is imperative that our budget reflects the needs of our communities, and these important amendments would get us there. Thank you for your consideration of this perspective.

Sincerely,

Elam Boockvar-Klein
elamklein@gmail.com