



# chairman's update

the NEWSLETTER of  
DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson

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## BUDGET BLUES

Throughout April the Council's committees are holding hearings on the Mayor's proposed budget for the next fiscal year (which begins this October 1st).

The resources available to the Mayor for her FY 2020 proposal are considerable. Local fund revenues have surpassed \$8 billion due - in part - to over \$100 million in tax increases.

I cannot help but be critical of this proposed FY 2020 budget.

While many people are celebrating the dramatically increased investment in affordable housing – a 30% increase to the Housing Production Trust Fund alone – there is very little, too little, scraps, relatively speaking, added for public education. And yet public education, more than anything else, is the true pathway to the middle class.

And the proposed budget boosts housing subsidies by raising taxes. Raising taxes in an environment where our revenues are growing by hundreds of millions of dollars annually anyway. When Mayor Bowser came to office in Fiscal Year 2015, our total general operating funds were budgeted at \$7.69 billion.

The total general operating fund budget for FY 2020 is \$9.87 billion. This is a \$2.2 billion-dollar *increase*. In four years. So, we are raising taxes?

Meanwhile virtually none of the Council's legislation that became law – and therefore government policy – under the Mayor's watch is funded in this budget. Like Language Access, Wage Theft, School Discipline, or Birth-to-Three.

And then there are smaller matters. Like the Office of Unified Communications, which handles emergency 911 calls, that is crying for better technology. Actually, the technology fund was raided last year and converted to operating, so there is no longer a dedicated source to maintain state-of-the-art technology for our emergency response system.

But the most important oversight is education. Yes, I am disappointed with this budget.

And while some advocates celebrate a \$100 million increase in business taxes to support affordable housing and homeless services, the victory is hollow. The increases are funded for only one year and then the tax increases go somewhere else.

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## Constituent Services Corner

Each March our office hosts a series of "Tax Town Halls" around the city to talk about real property taxes and how to appeal your assessment.

Chairman Mendelson also takes the opportunity to explain tax relief opportunities. Every homeowner should be receiving the Homestead Deduction, which reduces their real property tax by \$636.

And, after the first year, homeowners further benefit from a 10% cap on tax increases. You'll see this on your assessment notice: a "taxable assessment" that's equal to or less than your full assessment.

A resident from Ward 8 came to a recent tax town hall and learned he was not receiving the Homestead Deduction. He swears he filled out the form when he bought two years ago, but the tax records don't show it.

Our office immediately put him in touch with a supervisory assessor, and this homeowner is on his way to saving at least \$636 this year (maybe more with the 10% cap).

When you feel overtaxed by government and don't know where to go, call on our office. We're here to help!

**Contact our Constituent  
Services Team at  
(202) 724-8032**

# chairman's update

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Mayor Bowser has said repeatedly, “As we continue through budget season, we must resist the temptation to write checks now that we cannot cash in recessionary times.” However, this budget proposal gave in to that temptation.

Inflation was just 2.13% in 2017 and 2.44% in 2018. Meanwhile, District spending growth has averaged 6% in the last three years.

As D.C. Auditor Kathy Patterson said, “The budget before you represents an 8.2 percent 1-year increase in overall spending and that’s not sustainable.”

The Council’s hearing schedule is available on the Council’s website. On April 26<sup>th</sup>, we will hold the final hearing on the Mayor’s proposed budget.

## Budget Problem #1: Schools

Public education is arguably the most important service our government can provide. It certainly is the pathway out of poverty. Or is supposed to be. But not with this budget. Two examples:

Flora Hendley is an elementary school in Ward 8 with the highest percentage of “at-risk” students of any school in DCPS. Its actual enrollment this year exceeded the budget projection (366 vs. 349), and yet next year’s enrollment projection was lowered (347).

This is a school that needs more, not less, resources. But Hendley will lose almost \$800,000 in funding and five positions. Five positions may mean five classes. Or it may mean fewer staff to help with social-emotional issues – exactly what Hendley may need more of. For years it has been policy that no school should lose more than 5% in funding from one year to the next; Hendley is budgeted to lose 14% – with stable enrollment.

Turner Elementary had the second worst attendance problem of any elementary school last year (56.8% truant). Truancy often correlates with poverty, and 88% of Turner students are considered “at-risk.” This is another school that needs more, not less resources. In addition, Turner is projected to increase enrollment by 9%. Yet Turner is budgeted to lose about \$59,000.

Overall, K-12 education is seeing a small increase in funding. Obviously, little if any of the \$56.3 million is being directed to classrooms.

I don’t see how cutting schools helps our kids. Yet about half of the DCPS schools are seeing cuts. Two-thirds of those schools are in Wards 7 and 8. If a budget is a moral statement reflecting our values, the proposed budget fails our kids. We need a Marshall Plan, not funding cuts.

Upcoming Hearings  
of the  
Committee of the Whole

**Regular Committee of  
the Whole**

April 23, 2019  
10 a.m. Room 500

**Public Hearing –  
Department of  
Consumer & Regulatory  
Affairs Ernest Chrappah  
Confirmation Resolution  
of 2019 (PR 23-129)**

April 23, 2019  
1 p.m. Room 120

**Joint Budget Oversight  
Deputy Mayor for  
Education**

April 25, 2019  
10 a.m. Room 412

**Fiscal Year 2020 Local  
Budget Act of 2019,  
Fiscal Year 2020 Federal  
Portion Budget Request  
Act of 2019, Fiscal Year  
2020 Budget Support  
Act of 2019**

April 26, 2019  
10 a.m. Room 500

To Testify Contact the  
Committee at  
202.724.8196 or email  
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