



PCCY Testimony before City Council on the City Budget May 4, 2010

Good Afternoon. I am Shelly Yanoff from Public Citizens for Children and Youth. For many years, I have come before this body and spoken about the things that kids and families needed to help make Philadelphia the place that it should be. I am glad to say that many times you have heard us. Council heard us ten years ago when we said that the cross the bar drink tax would not destroy local pubs or bars but would bring in needed funding for the schools. You heard us in subsequent years when we urged that the city support efforts to end lead poisoning- a permanent injurer of too many of our children, you have heard us when we spoke of the importance of staffed and open health centers to this community, you heard us when we said that neighborhoods would not be safe unless we invested in them- in lighting their streets, in supporting their art, in their recreation centers and in their libraries. So we thank you for this support – for hearing us. But every year, as inflation grows while these programs and services are not cut in major ways, they are at best left stagnant – limping along when they need to be doing much more- and at worse they have endured continuous small cuts . Communities as well as individuals have been harmed by hundreds of small cuts. And today we are threatened with much, much, more – we must close the budget gap or face drastic changes with impact on many of us- who need city services.

Lately, too many in the nation – state and city have only heard the “down with government noise”. Unfortunately, the media plays to this sound. Last week in Springfield Illinois thousands of people went

to the state capital and said “don’t cut our schools –don’t cut services. Show some guts and raise the monies to save our future”. “*Show some guts*” – they said. But we didn’t hear or read much about it. Too often it wasn’t reported- few heard the majority feeling expressed that people expect and want government to provide needed services – that it costs us too much not to – that kids with nothing to do get in trouble, that waiting list for needed services are very expensive, that finding centers closed or kids untreated are costly in both physical, emotional and fiscal terms.

Too often the question or challenge is expressed without thinking of the consequences or other choices. If we ask others or ourselves whether we support more taxes the answer is generally going to be “No”.

If we ask however “Would you rather have libraries, recreation centers, health centers stripped of more resources – would you rather the number of children with lead exposure grow or fewer afterschool programs, longer waiting lists at health centers or fewer swimming pools open- or would you be willing to support a fair tax”? – the answer changes. Most citizens of the city have shown over and over again that they want good services and they want to feel they are being treated fairly.

If you ask whether the citizenry of this city believes that the housing abatement program should continue-the one that allows multimillion dollar homebuyers to not pay any taxes – zero- the answer would be “NO”! If you ask us whether the med /ed industries and universities should start contributing something since they don’t pay property taxes – the answer would be YES – resoundingly. Large non-profits in other cities support the government in which they are sited- why not here? What happened to PILOTS and SILOTS? If Boston’s non-profits can contribute millions to their city why are we not asking publicly that Penn and Temple and Drexel etc do as well?

If obesity is a problem and it is – and the tax on sugar-sweetened beverages would both bring in funds and help the fight against obesity- which it will – and the majority of citizens support it- and the recent

poll says that's true- in spite of the lobbyists to the contrary- Why are you not supporting it? Surely if it will help the poorest kids become healthier that should be considered a good.

We understand that these are hard times in both the city and the state - and there are not easy choices- but the consequences for our choices need to be closely examined.

How much will it cost us not to support health centers, prevention programs, libraries, and afterschool and community programs, lead prevention work?

How much will it cost us in crime, in loss of business, in loss of lives?

We are in the worst economic time in many many decades - that is when we need more services – not fewer. The alternatives to not increasing some broad general tax are few and most not fair.

Can we not agree in this time to suspend the perks for the richest among us – suspend for a while the abatements- seriously approach the universities for funding- enact a property tax for two years while the assessment process becomes fairer and help our kids become healthier.

It is never easy for a politician to raise taxes but if you do it fairly then it's right.

There are 23,000 babies born in Philadelphia each year. We ask you to invest in their, their families' and their communities' future.

Thank you