

**Testimony from Kathy Fisher**  
**Family Economic Security Director for Public Citizens for Children and Youth**  
**Philadelphia City Council hearing**  
**June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

Good afternoon, my name is Kathy Fisher. I am the Family Economic Security Director at Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY). And, more importantly for my testimony today, I am a parent of two school-age children.

Like hundreds of thousands of parents in every neighborhood of the city, I've agonized over what is best for them. As my daughter approached kindergarten, I considered neighborhood schools, submitted multiple charter school applications, and even briefly entertained the idea of private school before concluding I can't afford them. Ends up, we were incredibly lucky to receive a coveted lottery slot to a strong charter school. Friends and family living elsewhere in the country could not believe that this is the process here.

I am grateful that my kids are at a good school, but it pains me that not all children in the city are able to attend high quality schools. I want ALL children to have art and music, science and computer labs. I want them to have a school nurse and counselors, and all the resources needed for a healthy school environment. I want them to have well-trained and supported teachers who can help prepare them for the future.

While I worry about how my children's school will manage next year with a shrinking budget, I worry more that the lack of city – and state – investment in public education is limiting opportunity for the district's 120,000+ low-income students. They are the primary casualties of too little funding. Far too many families who want the best for their children remain trapped by their elected officials' lack of political will.

It appears House and Senate Leaders in Harrisburg do not have an appetite for revising the sales tax legislation. Both as a parent, and on behalf of PCCY, I am extremely pleased and want to thank the Council President for making the wise decision to revise his bill to make it possible for the school district to receive the full \$120 million from extending the 1% increase in the sales tax.

But Council's work is not done.

I know Harrisburg must come through with more money for our schools. I have asked, and will continue to ask, our state elected officials to do so. And you can trust PCCY is doing so as well. But today, I am here to ask you to do more to ensure stability for Philadelphia public schools – for Philadelphia students.

You must find local options for the balance of the \$195 million the District needs. You need to be creative and fair, which is why PCCY will support any of the following to fund the schools:

- a millage shift
- an increase in the Use and Occupancy tax

- a tax on sweetened beverages
- a revision of the tax abatement program

While every tax increase has winner and losers, the entire city will lose if our school district has to weather further layoffs and if it can't immediately start repairing the damage inadequate funding has already caused.

And a secondary repercussion of the school funding crisis is that families who are fortunate enough to have options will leave for better schools. This will further shrink the city's middle class and impact the city's fiscal future. This means Council will continually struggle with too little revenue, not only for schools and pensions, but for all of its many competing priorities.

I wholeheartedly believe that investments in education will reap dividends over time. If you:

Fund the schools, you'll fix the pensions.

Fund the schools, you'll fix the crime.

Fund the schools, you'll start to stabilize struggling neighborhoods and even begin to reduce poverty.

You have the power to dramatically improve the future of this city by investing in education. More importantly you have the power to improve the future of hundreds of thousands of children in this city who deserve much better than what they experienced this year.

Thank you.