



**Testimony Presented to the Philadelphia City Council
Fiscal Year 2025 Tax Bills**

**By Symbol Lai, Philadelphia Mobilization and Policy Director, Children First PA
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Good afternoon. My name is Symbol Lai. I'm here representing Children First. I live in West Oak Lane.

Councilmembers Thomas, Ahmad, Young - thank you for raising questions about school funding today.

I'm here to testify on bill 240180, the ordinance to increase the share of property taxes going to the School District of Philadelphia from 55% to 56%.

While I applaud Mayor Parker's initiative to increase city investment in our schools, I want to encourage members of council to be more aggressive.

We need to increase the share of property taxes going to schools from 55% to 58%.

Last week Children First was at City Hall meeting with members of council to share statistics about how kids across Philadelphia were doing. I want to share some of them now.

Across the city

- 34% of students are passing the English Language Arts PSSA.
- 19% of students are passing the Math PSSA.
- 36% of students have stellar school attendance of over 95%
- Meanwhile, there are 291 teacher and support staff vacancies in the school district.

This is what happens after years of underfunding. This is the hole that we have to dig ourselves out of.

This is why we cannot have an investment in the school district that brings about the status quo.

We need a budget that brings in recurring revenue - every year - so that our school district can actually grow.

That means new revenue to hire new teachers. Hire social workers. Hire librarians. Have libraries period.

I know everyone here is invested in the economic development. How are we going to grow Philadelphia so that we're no longer the poorest big city in America? How are we going to stem population loss that affects our tax base?

We get people to stay when we have good schools - when families see that their kids will have a good education no matter where they live. Every election, we re-learn this with polls that education continues to be a top issue for voters across the city.

Councilmembers, I'm here to say that now is the time to turn a new leaf and say that we're not satisfied with status quo schools. We are committed to levels of recurring local funding that bring about excellent schools.

Please, increase the share of property taxes going to the School District of Philadelphia from 55 to 58%.

Thank you for your time.