

**Testimony to the Philadelphia City Council on Increasing Millage Rate**  
**Presented by Inella Ray, Director of Parent Advocacy and Engagement, Children First**  
**April 30, 2025**

Good morning, City Council President Johnson and members of City Council,

My name is Inella Ray. I live in the 3rd Councilmanic District, I'm the Director of Parent Advocacy and Engagement at Children First, a founding board member and current Co-Chair of Lift Every Voice Philly, and a proud graduate of Philadelphia public schools.

I'm here today to urge you to direct an additional \$25 million to our students by increasing the millage reimbursement that goes to schools. This isn't just about numbers — this is about our values. It's about making sure our schools are places where young people can experience joy, where their potential is nurtured, and where they have what they need to grow and thrive.

Yesterday, during the School District's budget hearing, the topic of swimming came up. And like many of you shared, I believe learning to swim is important — but it's also a powerful metaphor for what's happening to too many of our kids right now.

Our children are drowning — not in water, but in schools that don't have enough staff, enough resources, or enough support to hold them. They're doing their best to stay afloat in systems that were not built to keep them safe or help them succeed.

I know this because I was once a student drowning. At my magnet high school, we didn't have a full-time nurse or librarian. Music and art only appeared when the budget allowed. We had to share sports teams with nearby schools because we didn't have our own. And we only went on one school trip — one we had to fundraise for ourselves. That was nearly 15 years ago. And yet, the families I speak with every day are still navigating the same conditions — and I'd argue, for many of them, things are even more egregious now.

So, I want to ask you all directly: if you had the power to keep a child from drowning, would you?

Because that's the situation we're in. Not just with one child — but with 198,000. And right now, you have the power to help keep them afloat. You can throw them a lifeline while we wait for the larger support, we need from Harrisburg.

The conditions in our schools are urgent. Our kids are not failing — they are being failed. And just like with swimming, we cannot keep telling them to try harder if we're not willing to provide the tools, instruction, and care they need.

This \$25 million investment is one way you can act now. To hold our kids up. To help them breathe. To show them — and all of us — that this city is willing to fight for them.

Thank you!