



COMMUNITY BOARD ELEVEN

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Nilsa Orama
Chair

Angel D. Mescaín
District Manager

May 21, 2020

Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City Hall
New York, New York 10019

Re: Community Board 11 Statement on the Fiscal Year 2021 Executive Budget

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, our economy has been put on hold in an effort to “flatten the curve;” non-essential businesses have been closed since mid-March and New Yorkers have been told to stay at home. The shutdown, albeit an appropriate and necessary response to this crisis, has resulted in mass layoffs for over 900,000 New Yorkers and a projected loss of \$7.4 billion in tax revenue for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021. The Independent Budget Office (IBO) projects a more significant drop in tax revenue at \$9.7 billion.

Community Board 11 had the opportunity to comment on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2021 in February 2020. Due to the dramatic drop in tax revenue, the proposed Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2021 is about \$6 billion less than the preliminary budget and includes an estimated \$2.66 billion in savings and cuts to offset losses. While the cuts in the Executive Budget will be felt across all city agencies, it is clear that some agencies will be impacted significantly more than others. Namely, savings generated from cuts to the Department of Education’s budget amount to 27 times that of the Police Department.

Understanding the urgent need to identify savings and efficiencies to reach a balanced budget, CB11 urges you to reconsider the distribution of budget cuts across city agencies. Data released by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene shows that East Harlem and other low-income communities of color are the most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with the highest rates of hospitalizations and deaths across the city. Cuts to education services, youth programming, and public assistance will disproportionately impact the very same communities most affected by this crisis and that were most vulnerable before it began. Now is not the time to decrease services heavily utilized by these communities. Rather, the City should prioritize allocating its resources as effectively as possible to address the needs of communities like ours that need them most.

Below you will find CB11’s responses to the Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2021 categorized by city agency.

Department of Education

Programs and services should not be cut due to remote learning. Now more than ever, our students need increased support in navigating the challenges associated with at-home learning. Existing resources should be funneled into ensuring that the needs of our most vulnerable students are met. Funding must be kept in place to ensure that students and educators are provided the necessary resources to ensure they have a successful academic year. The budget must not be balanced at the expense of our children's education.

Department of Youth & Community Development

The cancellation of the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) this year not only results in a loss of income for 75,000 youths and their families, it also deprives these youth from gaining on-the-job experience and professional development, key drivers of early career success. The experience that participants glean from this program prepares them to enter college or other trades while providing them with reliable and steady income. The cancellation of SYEP would be highly destabilizing for our youths' career development.

Moreover, the decision to suspend the Summer Youth Employment Program is devastating to the same communities hit hardest by COVID-19. Youth workers employed by SYEP are disproportionately low income youth and youth of color; 81% of SYEP participants in 2019 were Black, Hispanic, or Asian. We urge you to reinstate funding to the Summer Youth Employment Program in the Adopted Budget.

Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to protect and expand the City's social safety net, and yet the Executive Budget does not reflect additional resources needed to maintain core services essential to New Yorkers or appropriately address COVID-19 related spending. Currently, no new funding or baseline changes were made to the city's social safety net programs despite a demonstrated increased need for these services.

With hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers experiencing loss of income, HRA programs -- including cash assistance, rental assistance, emergency food assistance, programs for undocumented immigrants, and anti-eviction programs and legal services -- are especially vital. Emergency food assistance applications have tripled and cash assistance applications have doubled. While the statewide eviction moratorium protects tenants from eviction through June 20, 2020, and certain tenants through August 20, 2020, there is potential for an influx of nonpayment and holdover cases filed by landlords in housing court as early as late June once the moratorium lifts. Savings generated through underspending caused by COVID-19 should be used to bolster the social safety net and protect our most vulnerable residents from eviction.

Department of Housing Preservation and Development

New York City's shortage of affordable housing had reached a crisis point years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic not only exacerbates an existing affordable housing crisis, but also re-emphasizes the need for safe and affordable housing as New Yorkers are instructed to shelter in place in

order to protect themselves and others. Cuts to the capital budget for the Department of Housing Preservation and Development will stagnate the development of new affordable units at a time of increased need for these units. Additionally, with East Harlem's median income (\$37,470) well below the city's Average Median Income (\$62,040) and the increased rate of unemployment citywide, the need for deeper levels of affordability in new development is paramount. Now is not the time to scale back on the production of affordable housing.

Department of Small Business Services

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on small businesses in East Harlem and across the city; non-essential businesses are closed to customers and revenue has significantly dropped. Many small businesses will be unable to reopen their doors, and those who are able to reopen will need a lot of financial assistance. Assistance from the federal government excludes undocumented New Yorkers, mixed-status families, and cash economy workers, and therefore falls short of meeting our city's actual need.

The Executive Budget does not sufficiently meet the demands and needs of small businesses that have been terribly impacted by the pandemic. The agency's \$49 million loan and grant program for small businesses impacted by pandemic, while greatly appreciated, has been depleted, and has not been extended into the next fiscal year and beyond. The Executive Budget does not include additional funding for workforce development training, Workforce One stop centers, or equal opportunity compliance. Funding to neighborhood development and economic development corporations have been cut.

The Department of Small Business Services should reinstate funding to workforce training and development, as well as job preservation and creation. Additionally, the agency should advocate for and work to help implement commercial rent regulation and property tax relief for small businesses and landlords.

Department of Parks and Recreation

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, our parks and open spaces remain critical infrastructure and essential to New York City residents, and should be treated as such in the Adopted Budget. A continually diminishing budget, especially in regards to East Harlem's grossly inadequate and inequitable access to green space, will continue to have a negative impact on the quality of life and health outcomes of our residents. The safety and general usability of the water's edge in our neighborhood is critical with the need for safe outdoor space during the warmer months and this ongoing crisis. CB11 emphasizes the immediate need to fund and reconstruct the portions of the East River Esplanade not currently slated for construction, including the enhancements at the Harlem Greenway Link promised through the approved rezoning of East Harlem which includes a park and pathway to be named for the late esteemed East Harlem community activist Richard Toussaint.

New York Public Library

The COVID-19 Pandemic demonstrates the importance of our New York Public Libraries in bridging the digital divide. Funding for our libraries must remain sufficient for our remaining branch to provide full service hours, full trained staff and updated facilities. We will continue to request all elected officials to continue finding sufficient funds to ensure these essential institutions remain relevant and effective.

Conclusion

The City's budget is more than simply a document of estimated revenue and projected expenses; rather, it's a vital policy statement that expresses our priorities as a city and a commitment to serve its people. Our neighborhood has historically been disproportionately negatively impacted by the City's policies and budget decisions. As it stands, the Executive Budget prioritizes policing over our youth and our social safety net, and, like COVID-19, will inordinately harm the most vulnerable in our city. CB11 maintains the position that the City should revisit the priorities detailed in the Executive Budget and produce a more equitable budget -- one that yields savings evenly across city agencies and that prioritizes addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. We look forward to seeing the Adopted Budget and to continuing to partner with this administration to ensure that our requests will be incorporated.

Sincerely,



Nilsa Orama
Chair
Community Board 11

cc: Hon. Diana Ayala, New York City Council
Hon. Bill Perkins, New York City Council
Hon. Ben Kallos, New York City Council
Hon. Keith Powers, New York City Council
Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Jay L. Gottlieb, New York City Office of Management & Budget
Anthony Notaro, Jr, Chair, Community Board 1
Carter Booth, Chair, Community Board 2
Alysha Lewis-Coleman, Chair, Community Board 3
Lowell D. Kern, Chair, Community Board 4
Vikki Barbero, Chair, Community Board 5
Molly Hollister, Chair, Community Board 6
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