

Letter From 27 City Councilmembers Calling On Speaker Gifford Miller To Raise Taxes To Pay For Children

by Gotham Gazette Staff
Monday, March 25, 2002 12:00 AM -

Dear Speaker Miller,

As the Council prepares its response to the Mayor's preliminary budget, we urge you to continue to emphasize the impact of the proposed cuts on children and families, especially reduced support to our public schools, to child care programs and to summer youth, senior, and library programs. We believe that we must consider every option to protect our children and families, and we commend your insistence that everything -- including revenue programs -- be considered as the Council seeks solutions to the budget crisis.

The Mayor's preliminary budget -- and the recent announcement of an additional \$500 million in possible reduced spending -- simply cuts too deep. New York City's kids must come first. School governance issues aside, classes are too big, the city's teachers remain underpaid, buildings are overcrowded, and supplies are inadequate, outdated, or unavailable. Under the Mayor's preliminary budget, thousands of children will lose access to day-care slots and after-school programs. In a time of crisis, we cannot stop investing in our children's future to cover holes in the budget.

Of course, no one wants to raise taxes, and we support a thorough analysis at all agencies to eliminate waste and identify savings. At the same time, a "Children's First" budget would acknowledge that in tough fiscal times, we should all be prepared to make hard choices. We urge you to incorporate the three proposals below into the Council's response to the Mayor's preliminary budget to protect New York from an even greater deterioration in essential services. These proposals have been chosen because of their fairness, their economic impact, and their capacity to raise money to protect vital services:

Reinstating the commuter tax, a .45% tax on the income earned in New York City by non-residents. According to the Mayor's estimates, the repeal of this nominal tax will cost New York City \$410 million this upcoming fiscal year.

Increasing the rates of the City's personal income tax by 1% on income over \$200,000 and 2% on income over \$250,000. This is a fair, effective way to raise over a billion dollars.

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Reinstating 10% of the stock transfer tax. By placing a tax of up to a half-penny on stock transfers and by capping the tax at \$35 for any transaction, the City could raise \$800 million for its schools and other services.

We further suggest that the Council consider the possibility of implementing these tax increases for a limited period of time.

Taken together, these three modest tax increases would generate over \$2 billion in new revenue to protect our children and our other city priorities. Investors, commuters, and wealthy New Yorkers have prospered in the past few years -- thanks to both the economic boom of the late 1990s and the extraordinary Bush tax cuts enacted last year. We believe, in these extraordinary times for New York, that they will support a "Children's First" agenda. If the Mayor believes that these New Yorkers are unwilling to help their city after last year's devastation, he has underestimated their patriotism and civic-mindedness. Far more destructive to our City will be devastating cuts to our schools, our child care programs, and our mental health and youth services.

We believe the three proposals outlined above represent the only fair alternative to the Mayor's preliminary budget, an alternative that will protect our children and free up scarce funds for other important city services. We strongly urge you to ensure their inclusion in the Council's response to the Mayor's preliminary budget.

Margarita Lopez (Dist 2), Christine Quinn (Dist 3), Eva Moskowitz (Dist 4), Gale A. Brewer (Dist 6), Robert Jackson (Dist 7), Phil Reed (Dist 8), Bill Perkins (Dist 9), Miguel Martinez (Dist 10), Larry Seabrook (Dist 12), Maria Baez (Dist 14), Joel Rivera (Dist 15), Helen Foster (Dist 16), Jose Serrano (Dist 17), John Liu (Dist 20), Hiram Monserrate (Dist 21), Eric Gioia (Dist 26), Leroy Comrie (Dist 27), James Sanders Jr. (Dist 31), Diana Reyna (Dist 34), James Davis (Dist 35), Albert Vann (Dist 36), Bill de Blasio (Dist 39), Yvette Clarke (Dist 40), Tracy Boland (Dist 41), Charles Barron (Dist 42), Kendall Stewart (Dist 45), Michael Nelson (Dist 48).

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