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February 21, 2008

Honorable Anna C. Verna
President of City Council
Room 405 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107-3290

Re: City Council Budget Procedures

Dear Council President Verna,

One Philadelphia seeks to assure that the City budget is one that promotes human rights for all Philadelphia. But for all Philadelphians to be heard in the debate over the budget, we urge that Council adjust the usual budget process. We're writing to suggest two changes that we believe are important.

First, we ask that the public be allowed to testify on Department budget requests immediately after the heads of those Departments. In the past, public testimony has been restricted to single dates on each of the operating, capital and school district budgets. Historically, these dates have often been far removed from the dates on which relevant department heads testified. The result has been that residents have often given their input without first being present to hear what department heads have said, and without hearing the questions that Council members have posed to them. Thus, due to no fault of their own, witnesses have had a hard time being responsive to specific issues of concern to Council members. Furthermore, witness testimony has often been given so late in the process that it is too late to ask Department heads to return for the purpose of responding to issues that those witnesses raise.

This year's budget schedule reflects the same weaknesses as have historically been present.

Secondly, we ask that Council bring the budget hearings to the neighborhoods on a series of Saturday afternoons and/or weekday evenings. Many ordinary residents simply cannot come to Council hearings that take place during the day, or even at night, in Council's center city location. These neighborhood residents are often most impacted by Council's decisions on service Department budgets. Their voices should be heard.

Agreeing to these suggestions would undoubtedly extend the budget season. But, under the Charter, Council need not pass budget bills until the end of May. Currently Council's schedule calls for its hearings on the City budget to end on April 16. Clearly, there is room for extended hearings without jeopardizing any deadlines.

We appreciate your attention to this matter, and would be happy to meet with you if you would find it helpful.

Sincerely,

One Philadelphia
By: Stanley Shapiro
Coordinator

Endorsing organizations: ACT-UP, AFSCME District Council 47, Aids Policy Project, Asian Americans United, Coalition of Trade Union Women (CLUW), Jewish Labor Committee, Liberty City LGBT Democratic Club, Neighborhood Interfaith Movement, Neighborhood Networks, Parents United for Public Education (PUPE), Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations, Philly for Change, Prevention Point, Proyecto Sol, SEIU District 1199P, Tenant Union Representative Network (TURN)

cc: All Council members