

Madalyn Letellier

From: Abby Hare <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, May 22, 2025 12:01 PM
To: Public Comments; All City Council
Subject: Chapter 329

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear Council Members,

I am following up on the issue you received nearly 300 emails about this week - Chapter 329 of the Acts of 1987.

I respectfully urge the City Council to vote to accept the authority granted to you under that Act. This change in the school budget procedure would benefit our system long term by strengthening the ability of our whole city government to support schools. Other Massachusetts towns that have Chapter 329 on the books include Cambridge, Waltham, Framingham, Salem, Greenfield, Amesbury, Easthampton, and Pittsfield.

I know the mayor has expressed her concerns about this but please remember - this would only give the City Council the option to accept an alternative budget. If all relevant parties - SPS, the School Committee, and the City Council- were to agree proposed funding was not sufficient, you are going to want to be able to fix that.

In her memo on Tuesday, the mayor emphasized that the schools are one of many departments in our city and do not deserve special treatment. That is false. The education of our children **must be** our city's top priority. That is why the Massachusetts legislature passed the Act almost 40 years ago- schools are unique and deserve extra consideration. It is imperative that the Council take this opportunity to make the school budget process more democratic. Our city has shown courage and conviction in standing up to President Trump's threats to our democratic values. That's why it's particularly troubling to see a reluctance to heed the collective voice of constituents and their elected representatives when it comes to sharing control of the school budget.

This year, a clear gap emerged between what our educators—those who work most closely with our students—identified as necessary (a 10% increase in funding), and what the mayor originally proposed (a 5% increase). The budget set forth by the School Committee last night is better than that, but still falls short of what our trusted professionals say they need.

Empower SPS in future years to design a budget that reflects the true needs of our students and educators. Let us see what is possible when our schools are given the opportunity to lead—and commit to directing any available discretionary free cash toward supporting their vision.

I urge you to move forward with adopting Chapter 329 so that our schools budget is not dictated by one person.

-Abby Hare



Madalyn Letellier

From: Alexandra Thorn [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, June 3, 2025 11:46 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Comments - June 3 Committee on Finance hearing

To the members of the Somerville City Council:

My name is Alexandra Thorn, and I am a Ward 5 constituent. I live at [REDACTED].

I'm writing to express my grave concern about the proposed 2026 budget, and especially about the large increase in funding for the police department. If anything, we should reduce the police budget, and instead invest in teachers' salaries and other social programs.

We are living in a time when federal social programs are being stripped away, in favor of increased funding for federal policing and military contractors. This is a time for state and municipal governments to step up and expand civilian funding. I'm deeply disturbed that our mayor has instead shifted our budget in the other direction.

This is particularly frustrating when the mayor is also fighting against the reasonable requests by our teachers' union to receive a living wage that would allow school teachers to live in our community.

The mayor's proposed budget is 5.56% higher than last year's budget, but the Public Safety budget is expanded by a shocking 11%. The only other department with an increase of more than 5.56% is the tiny department of Culture and Recreation. Given the mayor's 2023 report^[1], which concluded that there are opportunities to reduce police staffing, the large expansion of the police budget makes no sense.

Low-hanging fruit for reducing spending on policing is to hire civilians for traffic detail, instead of hiring police. Compensation for police traffic flaggers is much higher than for their ordinary duties, as well as being far in excess of compensation for most other public servants, so hiring unarmed civilians would mobilize substantial funds to allocate toward education and other programs.

Please work toward a budget that shifts priorities to where they are needed, and avoid increasing the police department's share of the overall budget.

Thank you,

Alexandra Thorn
[REDACTED]
Somerville MA 02144

Footnote:

[1]
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/SPD-Staffing-and-Operations-Analysis-Final-Report-2023.pdf>

Madalyn Letellier

From: Steve Huff [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, June 3, 2025 6:40 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Public comment for 2025-06-03 FY26 Municipal Budget meeting

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Steve Huff, he/him, Ward 5.

At this point I cannot remember for how many years I have been hearing that the most significant oversight function that the City Council possesses comes into play during the annual budget cycle. On the other hand, I was also watching the May 5 meeting when the Council obediently lined up to approve the "charter reform" home rule petition that the Mayor wanted, so I don't know what reason I have to think that this Council has any appetite for exercising any sort of oversight function whatsoever.

Nevertheless, here goes: I implore the Council to reject any budget that comes from the Mayor's office that includes any increase in funding for Somerville PD. I have no sympathy for the argument that the additional funding is necessary in order to meet contract requirements; to my mind, the simplest path to accommodate a more demanding police contract is to eliminate excess positions in Somerville PD.

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steve huff, he/him
<http://five.sentenc.es>

Madalyn Letellier

From: Elyse Best [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, June 5, 2025 3:47 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Public Testimony from Elyse Best

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My name is Elyse Best, and I am a resident of Ward 4 on [REDACTED]. I spoke at the budget hearing meeting, but I have more to say.

I speak as an individual—someone who happens to serve on the Human Rights Commission—and as someone deeply alarmed by the proposed 17% cut to the Racial and Social Justice (RSJ) Department.

These cuts don't just affect RSJ. They reverberate across every commission, every service, every public servant, and every effort tied to equity, inclusion, and the protection of basic human rights in our city. They affect our entire community: those who live here, work here, pass through here, have experiences here, and visit here.

I'm struggling to understand how anyone can justify cutting the budget of a department whose mission is to protect the dignity, safety, and well-being of our most vulnerable neighbors. How can we say we support diversity, equity, and inclusion while slowly clawing back the funds that are meant to uphold those values? Our budget should be increased, given the rise in hate crimes and other suffering.

Other volunteers and I don't get paid to do this—we commit our time – more than our time -- to uphold anti-discrimination measures, so community members feel heard and safe. Meanwhile, those of us doing this work—and I will stress, unpaid—are trying to hold things together on the shoestring budget we work with on the Human Rights Commission. We're fighting for rights that many still don't have fully recognized, let alone protected. These are not abstract ideals. The work costs money to create projects, build awareness, provide support, and connect with our community.

Let me be clear: I lose sleep over what's happening here. People are unhoused, unsheltered, suffering from addiction and mental health crises, with very little to no support. I can't name a drop-in center that provides ongoing support. Unsheltered people go without transportation to appointments or new apartments when they finally manage to get one. They are left in the damned cold and rain until a community worker happens to pitch up to assist. These should be part of the continuity of care in these transitions. Some are underfed, underserved, and exposed to violence and the elements—exposed in ways that put them at risk of being disregarded, mislabeled, or criminalized.

People have rights. ALL people. People who live here, who move away, who pass through, who visit, who set up shops, who come to this country and this city for a better life.

A city that erodes resident-led commissions designed to address racism, accessibility, hate speech, discrimination, and violence is on a dangerous path. I am afraid of this for Somerville, our community. This wholeheartedly extends to the city staff who spend countless hours keeping us together.

I do this work because I care deeply about this community, not for pay, not for recognition. I want to live in a city where everyone is heard, valued, and safe—and where people have what they need to thrive.

It is unacceptable to strip funding from services that support our most vulnerable residents while presenting ourselves as a thriving, inclusive community. That message does not match reality. And we know we are better than this.

Children in this community are denied the resources they need to grow into healthy, capable adults with an inclusive and solid education. This is a violation. Hunger is rising. Inequity is rising. Whose interests are we serving?

I, myself, am facing cuts to my healthcare that threaten my sustainability and life, and I am at risk of losing housing stability down the line with the much larger Federal cuts. So are so many of our vulnerable community members.

This isn't just frustrating—it's heartbreaking. You can't run a city department charged with protecting people against discrimination with a skeleton crew and expect it to thrive, not when so many are vulnerable. You can't cut the vital resources needed to serve this community. I love Somerville – but I want better for it.

We need to reimagine what public investment looks like—centered on access, equity, and care—so everyone, especially the underserved, has a real chance to flourish.

I was especially moved by **Counselor Sait's experience**, which she shared in a recent City Council meeting—her perspective as a former teacher fighting to support students who faced immense challenges inside and outside the classroom. Her words were a sobering reminder that this budget is not theoretical—it shapes the daily lives of children, families, educators, and entire communities—and their voices are left unheard by the very people making the decisions about who gets the money to thrive. This is disgusting and unacceptable.

When we fail to invest in our youth, our schools, and our most marginalized, we fail as a city. We are squandering the potential of future doctors, tradespeople, educators, and leaders. **THIS BUDGET HAS BETRAYED THEM!**

And when our children are betrayed—when they are denied the resources to have not just a good education, but the best, most creative, most inclusive education possible—we are reinforcing the school-to-prison pipeline. That pipeline is real. It is built on disinvestment in youth, especially youth of color, disabled youth, immigrant youth, and low-income youth. When schools are neglected, children suffer—and some are swept into systems of punishment instead of support. Teachers, parents, caregivers, and advocates have repeatedly voiced concerns over school funding.

The same goes for people with disabilities. Accessibility is not a luxury—it is a right. We deserve a world designed with us in mind, where we can participate as equals, horizontally. We shouldn't have to imagine a more accessible world—we should be actively building it, together.

We need the tools and the budget to make this city a better one!

Elyse Best

Angry Resident

Ward 4