

Marianne Hetzer

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Good morning Mayor Euille and members of the City Council,

My name is Marianne Hetzer. I am an Alexandria City taxpayer, a proud ACPS graduate and parent, and the Acting President of the PTA Council of Alexandria. I have urged members of the ACPS community to be in contact with you during this process; I hope that they will. I watched the February 15 City Council meeting and I attended a Community Budget briefing in January, which allowed me to gain a much clearer understanding of the nuances of this budget process that is based on the Managing Results Initiative and returning to zero. I am impressed with the City Manager's resolve and ability to craft a budget that meets the restrictive target established by Council last year. And I thank you for the supportive comments made last Thursday regarding the school portion of the budget.

As I followed the ACPS portion of the budget process, it was clear to me that the Superintendent and School Board members believed that if they submitted a budget at or near the target, which most believed would have a damaging effect on the school system, that budget might very possibly be stamped "Approved" without further discussion. After all, why would the City Council question an on-target budget prepared by professional educators and approved by officials elected specifically to ensure the most appropriate education for our students? I now agree with Councilmen Krupicka and Smedberg that the Council should ask the School Board, again, to provide an on-target budget as soon as possible – clearly defining the programmatic impact of each reduction, so that the Council can make a truly educated decision regarding the funding allocation. We must be mindful that if we implement programs in robust budget years, only to eliminate them in tight budget years, current and prospective ACPS families will lose confidence in the stability and integrity of our school system, and we will not be able to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of a program or practice.

Further, I must voice my support of Councilman Gaines' position that steady, moderate growth is the best fiscal model. It was fiscally responsible to lower the tax rate while property values were sky-rocketing, to prevent taxpayers from being overcharged. It is also fiscally responsible to seek out and trim away excess fat from essential programs and services. It is not fiscally responsible, however, to pay homage to this current tax rate that was implemented under completely different circumstances, and now holds growth below the rate of inflation, preventing steady, moderate, and necessary growth. We all know that some costs increase without a corresponding increase in service level – like health and liability insurance, utilities, rent and retirement benefits. We are not going to refuse to pay the increases demanded by our insurance companies and landlords. So we must find a way to afford our employees a minimal

salary increase that would allow them to pay these same increases on a personal level. As a taxpayer, I'm less worried about a penny or two added to the tax rate this year than the five or six or more cents we may be forced to accept in a few years, to make up for profound austerity today.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning, and may this process result in an adequate, sustainable budget for our school system and our city.