

## SHARE THE PAIN: AN EQUITABLE BUDGET PLAN

The battle over the San Francisco budget intensified this week with dueling City Hall rallies between health care and public safety. To some extent, this dichotomy divides two sides that both exist to protect City residents. But the bottom line is the most basic question: how do we prioritize shrinking resources to reflect the values San Franciscans hold dear?

The Board responded with a symbolic vote to reallocate \$82 million from the Police, Fire and Sheriff's Departments to health and human services. Seven Supervisors shared the outrage that those of us in the nonprofit health and human service sector expressed when we saw a proposed budget that increases public safety departments by \$36 million, while slashing \$130 million from services for our most vulnerable city residents.

Over the next two weeks, the Board will review Mayor Newsom's proposed general fund budget that increases public safety departments by 6%, while cutting 24% from the Department of Public Health, 11% from the Human Services Agency, and 17% from the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families. Furthermore, while some city employee unions have made concessions, many will still receive generous salary increases, a fringe benefit package that exceeds 40% of their wages, and a larger city contribution to worker pensions.

Salaries exceeded \$100,000 for about 90% of Fire employees and 65% of Police employees in 2008. For years, firefighters have responded with fear campaigns to proposals for reasonable cost-cutting measures. A 2004 study by the City Controller showed that the City could save up to \$35 million by selectively removing some of our 42 fire stations, *with no harm to response times*, and increasing firefighters' hourly workweek. The Police budget includes funding for 2,118 full-time-equivalent officer positions, 147 positions above the voter-mandated requirement of 1,971.

With families and individuals facing unemployment, foreclosure and evictions, lack of health insurance, and the probable loss of State services, the current budget proposal makes no sense. During a time of economic crisis, the budget threatens to cut millions of dollars from community-based nonprofits that form the core of our health and human service system, including the majority of mental health, substance abuse, violence prevention, homeless services, and in-home health care.

For decades, our City has prided itself on "the San Francisco model of care," combining public and private funds to provide community-based, cost-effective, culturally-competent social services. These programs address the needs of the poor, the sick, people with disabilities, the homeless, seniors, children and youth, families, people with AIDS, the mentally ill, people seeking substance abuse treatment, and the unskilled and unemployed. This safety net ultimately saves money for more expensive care by preventing poverty, homelessness, institutionalization, hospitalization, crime and incarceration.

But this system is eroding rapidly due to years of inadequate City funding that fails to keep up with rising costs, living wage salaries, and growing community needs, as well as significant drops in charitable and philanthropic support as donors' assets dwindle. We have already lost many programs, and some organizations are on the brink of extinction. While budget deals

protect most city workers from layoffs in the near future, nonprofits face hundreds of layoffs and reductions to wages and benefits.

Today, San Francisco faces a public safety emergency. It's not a police or fire emergency, but one that is happening in the streets, shelters, health clinics and community-based programs. At this most dire time, we are losing our capacity to serve the most needy and vulnerable.

The San Francisco Human Services Network calls on our City decisionmakers to prioritize people, treatment and prevention solutions over a budget that emphasizes enforcement and emergency response. Our City's frontline nonprofit health and human services "first responders" need the same support their uniformed partners get from the City. To do less would endanger our shared future.

*Debbi Lerman is the Administrator for the San Francisco Human Services Network, an association of over 100 nonprofit health and human service providers.*