

**SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN
(RE: PUBLIC HEARING – FY26 BUDGET)**

April 15, 2025 at 6:00 PM

Mayor Ruais called the meeting to order.

Mayor Ruais called for the Pledge of Allegiance, this function being led by Alderman Barry.

A moment of silence was observed.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Morgan, Goonan (late), Long, Fajardo, T. Sapienza, Kantor, O'Neil, Levasseur, Terrio, E. Sapienza, Burkush, Barry, Vincent, Thomas (late)

Mayor Ruais advised that the purpose of the special meeting is a public hearing to receive comments on the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 municipal budget and the proposed Community Improvement Program for the Fiscal Year 2026 period in accordance with the procedures established in RSA 44:10 and in satisfaction of any other local, state or federal law that may apply.

Mayor Ruais noted that the Clerk shall present the resolutions, the subject of which contain all of the appropriations as proposed, after which a brief presentation may be made and public comments will be heard.

2. The Clerk presented the proposed Resolutions:

“Appropriating to the Parking Fund the sum of \$4,976,749 from parking revenues for the Fiscal Year 2026.”

"Appropriating the sum of \$28,168,194 from Sewer User Rental Charges to the Environmental Protection Division for the Fiscal Year 2026.”

“Appropriating to the Manchester Airport Authority the sum of \$42,884,197 from Special Airport Revenue Funds for the Fiscal Year 2026.”

“Appropriating to the Manchester Transit Authority the sum of \$1,999,838 for the Fiscal Year 2026.”

“Appropriating to the Manchester School District the sum of \$236,499,925 for the Fiscal Year 2026.”

“Appropriating all Incremental Meals and Rooms Tax Revenue Received by the City in the Fiscal Year 2026 and held in the Civic Center Fund, for the payment of the City’s Obligations in Said Fiscal Year under the Financing Agreement.”

“Appropriating to the Manchester School Food and Nutrition Services Program the sum of \$6,300,000 from School Food and Nutrition Services Revenues for the Fiscal Year 2026.”

“Raising Monies and Making Appropriations of \$195,751,642 for the Fiscal Year 2026.”

“Appropriating to the Central Business Service District the sum of \$400,000 from Central Business Service District Funds for the Fiscal Year 2026.”

“Resolution ‘Approving the Community Improvement Program for Fiscal Year 2026, Raising and Appropriating Monies Therefore, and Authorizing Implementation of Said Program’.”

“Continuation of the Central Business Service District.”

“Authorizing the Finance Officer to Make Certain Budgetary Closings for the Fiscal Year 2025.”

Mayor Ruais advised that the meeting shall be open to public comments; each person when recognized shall come to the nearest microphone and state their name and address in a clear and loud voice for the record; each person shall be given one opportunity to speak and comments shall be limited to three minutes to allow all participants the opportunity to speak; residents and taxpayers shall be called upon first followed by all others.

Patricia Anglin, 17 Congress Street, stated:

I am a Ward 11 resident, taxpayer and graduate of the Manchester school district. I am 42 years old. You may be wondering why I am telling you my age. Today is my oldest son’s birthday. He is 25. I encourage you to do the math. I was a 17-year-old senior in high school and a single teenage mother. I am where I am today because of the

Manchester school district and its dedicated staff. I was not an ideal student. I frequently faced suspensions and detentions for alcohol, skipping classes and fighting. I graduated from Manchester Memorial High School in June 2000 with a seven-week old son. Today I am a nationally certified school nurse, illegal nurse consultant and I am on track to complete my Master's degree on June 1 with a 4.0 GPA. I am where I am today because 25 years ago my school community did not give up on me. The school nurse who insured I stayed healthy throughout my pregnancy, the administrative assistants who brought my school work to my home on their own time so I wouldn't fall behind because remote learning wasn't an option back then and the many teachers and staff who supported and encouraged me. Some of those staff members are still in our district today. I want to be upfront and say that I am not expecting you to approve the district's budget as requested. I am asking you to reconsider the amount. The Mayor is proposing \$236.5 million; an increase of \$2 million. When speaking in millions of dollars, it sounds like a lot of money but you get a more accurate impact when broken into percentages. Currently, inflation stands at 2.8%. If the school district were to maintain all programs and staffing from the past year without adding services, inflation alone would require the school district to have a budget of just over \$241 million for the next school year. While adding \$2 million might sound like a hefty budget increase, it results in a \$4.5 million shortfall compared to this year's budget after inflation. I understand the concerns. I hear about inefficiencies and top heavy spending in the district. Where we are now is a result of past decisions just as it is on the city side with wages falling behind for years. This is not something that can be fixed overnight. Dr. Chmiel is slowly making progress on this. Like everything in government, the wheels move slowly. I hear concerns but I don't hear those people mentioning the cuts she has made at the top and the steps she has taken to address those issues. Lastly, I want to bring your attention to the salaries of staff. This school year, the starting annual salary for teachers was \$45,000. For school nurses, it was \$45,202. According to the NH Housing Finance Authority last year, the average salary to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Manchester was \$55,160. I want to leave you with one final thought. When you invest in our education system, there isn't an immediate return on investment. Attendance and test scores don't increase one or two years after new

spending. The return on educational investment is seen decades later when those students are adults with their own families contribute to our community. Thank you.

Amy Colby, 3 Leda Avenue, stated:

My husband James and I are parents of three grown boys who have benefitted from a Manchester public education and we are both educators in the city. We work, play and live in our community. This is our home. I heard the Mayor's words on March 28, 2025 and I agree with them. The Mayor stated "you can't have a thriving city without a safe city. You can't have a city on the go without good roads, good schools or parks or housing." The Colby family is currently watching a 310-unit housing complex being built in our backyard. With these 310 units come children. Mr. Mayor, I can see from your budget that you are supporting road repairs, improvements to parks, essential services to fire and police and housing improvements. We don't see the support for the fiscally responsible budget for our schools. You were at the BOSC meeting on February 20 for this fiscally responsible proposal of \$246 million by the superintendent. As a taxpayer, I support this budget from the superintendent. Now with your proposed \$237 million, where will we cut? We have already cut through attrition. Where will we cut?

Teachers? Services? Programs? I can speak on behalf of my amazing and hard-working colleagues at Smyth Road School. As a reading supervisor, I know that we are extremely grateful for some of the drastic improvements over the last few years. Class sizes are won. Class sizes have improved direct instruction, improved behaviors and supported the sense of community that all children deserve. Class size matters. We have consistent PLC's, which are professional learning communities, at Smyth Road because of our staff. PLC's are directly tied to our unified art staff. They teach when we meet. PLC's are directly related to test scores, curriculum alignment and finding resources for some of the most needy students in the state of NH. We cannot share staff. We need to have common planning time. We cannot return to a poorly designed haphazard schedule for delivery of unified arts instruction throughout the district.

Unified arts matters and student outcomes matter. Your proposed budget would possibly cut teaching positions and share unified arts teachers between schools. It would undo some of the great work that we have been doing at Smyth Road. We have an amazing school and Alderman Morgan knows that first hand. We need to keep and

sustain some of the best and brightest teachers that I have ever worked with. Our community deserves the best. Our children deserve the best. We have a thriving community and we need to continue to support our thriving schools. Please support a full, \$246 million proposed budget. I repeat that it is a fiscally responsible budget from the superintendent. Thank you for your time.

Rick Chretien, 103 Cumberland Street, stated:

I grew up in Manchester and my wife and I own a home there. We have two children who were educated in the Manchester schools. I am also the Assistant Principal at Weston Elementary School and the President of the Association of Manchester Principals. I am from here and I am a taxpayer and I know the city really well. No one eagerly awaits receiving their next property tax bill. I certainly don't. However, the services provided by the city – water, trash pick-up weekly, plowed streets, fire and police protection offer piece of mind and we all know that good services cost money. They always cost money. That includes the cost associated with the Manchester schools. There is really no realistic way around these costs. This June, I will become a retired educator and taxpayer. I know that well educated graduates of the Manchester school system will be working to support my retirement. Taxpayers with children or even those with no children in the system benefit from educated students. Every generation had the previous one support their children. I, for one, will be willing to support those currently sitting at a desk in our schools. I will pay it forward for those who supported my own children. My own children and their friends have graduated from some prestigious colleges and universities. They are productive members of society and they were able to achieve success because of the dedicated educators in the Manchester schools. I ask, what specifically do you not think should be part of the school budget? What supports should be eliminated? What is your portrait of a Manchester school graduate? Is it someone who takes from society or someone who gives back to society? What exactly do you want to eliminate with a \$9 million cut and where did that figure even come from? Mayor Ruais, you sit on both the School Board and the Board of Mayor and Aldermen. I am interested in what your ideas are on where we might cut from the proposed budget? Do we need to cut \$9 million or do we need to cut anything at all? Thank you.

Rich Girard, 283 Orange Street, stated:

I have some questions, the answers to which should be known before adopting any budget. The Mayor said he funded contractual pay raises for the city's unionized employees, however, when asked by Alderman Kantor how much he put in the budget for that purpose, he didn't know. Does he not know because with the exception of the contracts for the police and Water Works unions, all of the city's contracts expire at the end of June meaning the city is not obligated to fund step or longevity raises? Also in response to a question from Alderman Kantor, the Mayor said he put \$7 million into the budget to fund the raises recommended by the recently received personnel study. He said there was a consensus on the Board to do so. What recommendation is he funding? There were several options provided and the Board hasn't publically discussed them let alone adopted them. Should not the Board first act to adopt a new system before massive raises, raises that will affect every budget from now on, are funded? Will adopting a budget that has those raises automatically implement the new personnel system? Rather than simply handing out these raises, shouldn't the city negotiate with the unions to see what improvements to management rights and efficiencies can be gained in exchange for such a substantial surge in payroll? At a recent Ward 7 meeting, the Mayor said that level funding departments meant there were no new employees. However, in his budget address he disclosed that he transferred three ARPA grant funded positions in the Health Department to city funding. Is that not a new employee expense for the taxpayer? Is the \$80,000 increase in salaries for the Economic Development Office another such not new position? Are the taxpayers funding any other such positions? Speaking of grant funded positions, how is the \$200,000 added to the Fire Department going to offset the loss of the SAFER grant when it runs out? Is it going to sit in a reserve account or is it increasing the department's operating expenses? Moreover, why is it being done? At the meeting where the Board approved the grant application, Chief Cashin said that once the grant ran out the positions would be absorbed in his budget by attrition. He said this multiple times in response to questions and concerns raised by Aldermen Terrio, Thomas and O'Neil. It doesn't seem as though the Mayor told the Ward 7 town hall that the Chief misspoke. What is the extra \$1.2 million to the Police Department for? What is the

basis for the 5% increase in DPW's revenues? Why is there a 21% increase in the subsidy to the Manchester Transit Authority and how has its ridership changed over the past five years? Why is the one-time increase in permit fees, which is due to the unnecessary construction of the new Beech Street School, being used to offset operating expenses instead of for one-time purposes. At more than 3.8%, the Mayor and this Board gave the taxpayers the largest tax hike in a generation last year. We can ill afford yet another tax increase. For the record, these questions are being asked within the purview of the state's right-to-know law. I will submit them to the Clerk and I trust they will be answered timely. Thank you.

Selina Santaneli, 546 Dubuque Street, stated:

I am a senior at Manchester West and I am concerned about these budget cuts. I might be a senior but my little sister will be attending West next year. This affects not just you or me but families in the future of the next generations. I can't speak for other schools but I can speak for West. I cheered at West for two years and within those two years we barely got by and we missed opportunities because we didn't have funding. I am sure other schools can relate when I say we already don't have enough educators. I, as a student, have lost opportunities to take courses because there aren't enough teachers to teach the class. Other schools have spoken about merging into block scheduling but they already don't have enough educators. Imagine how much more we could lose with a budget cut as large as this. The last few years, students have waited two hours for transportation home from school. We finally found rhythm and students are going home on time. Now we are being punished with a budget cut. Our involved students and faculty work tirelessly to make a school a place to learn, express yourself and reach your full potential. How is anyone supposed to thrive with less transportation or accessibility, less courses, less educators, less sports, lower quality meals and larger class sizes? That is all I have for you. Thank you for your time.

Jaime Cenicers, 31 Prince Street, stated:

When I first heard about the budget cut of \$9.5 million that the Board of Mayor and Aldermen proposed, I felt shocked. I have had the honor of having a seat on the school board as a student representative from Manchester West. Through this experience, I

have developed great respect for my colleagues, the mayor and the aldermen. Because of that, I am very disappointed in this decision and frankly I believe that you are letting the students of Manchester down. These cuts would be detrimental to our schools which are already struggling. Reducing the budget will lead to lay-offs of educators who dedicate their time to making a difference in our students' lives. We are already facing insufficient staffing and limited class offerings. The hard work of our educators deserves greater appreciation and support. Educators should be paid more, not less. I, like many others, truly believe in this city and the potential that it has. Less funding means discontinuing support programs and middle school sports. Now I know that it is not regular and you guys don't respond back but I was wondering if I could get a raise of hands if you think the student athletes in Manchester are doing good things and achieving great things. This decision would adversely affect student motivation and could lead to increased behavioral and attendance issues. Additionally, imposing fees on high school students who rely on bus transportation is a step backwards for a district that is striving to improve attendance and engagement. As a senior graduating this year, I have personally benefitted from opportunities in school that have shaped my future and I worry for the younger generations in our city. Our leaders need to reconsider these budget cuts as investing in education is crucial for the potential of Manchester. As former Mayor Baines pointed out in the November school board meeting, "in asking young people if they plan to stay in the city, not one of them said yes." A poor education system will result in people choosing to leave our city and move to a place that supports their school district. I am going to pursue a degree in law at St. Anselm College. I think that as an adult who will eventually have a family of my own, if the leaders keep on deciding on things like this budget cut, sadly I will not put my children in the Manchester public schools due to the fact that I am not confident enough in the decisions that the leaders are making. Children are our future and I know that mine will deserve better. Thank you.

Lisa Howe, 24 Greenfield Street, stated:

I am a resident and homeowner in Manchester and also the parent of a sixth grader and a ninth grader. I come here today to express my deep concern about the Mayor's proposed budget, particularly the proposed funding for schools. The budget that was

proposed initially by the school board and supported by the mayor was tax cap compliant. In keeping its request within the tax cap with a compliant 4.27% increase, the school board put forth a balanced request and one that allows the district to keep up with inflation. Cutting that increase by \$9.5 million so that we have an annual increase of well under 1% and well under inflation means our schools will, for the second year in a row, lose ground. Each year this happens, the impact is compounded as we have a new lower starting point for the tax cap increase. I can't understand why we are requiring schools to go with far less than a tax cap compliant increase to divert funding to other departments which are being given an increase above the tax cap. This isn't about saving tax dollars. It is about diverting funds and those funds are being taken from schools and children and schools that are the poorest funded in the state. Our per pupil funding is the lowest in the state, far below the state average and now even that isn't being maintained. I have been encouraged by the progress that our district has made over the last few years. We chose to move here and to have our kids educated in the Manchester school district. Lower class sizes, updated curriculum, and maintaining facilities are all basic things that have been improved over the last few years. They are basic necessities but they won't be maintained if we don't provide funding that at least keeps up with inflation and our minimal per pupil funding. We were finally getting to a place where we could keep up with our neighboring towns and now that is at risk. We were giving COLA increases to teachers, which are appropriate and contractually required so that we don't lose the best and brightest teachers to neighboring towns but how do we keep up with that now? Not to mention that we are at a critical time for providing adequate resources for school safety, supporting students' mental health and for shoring up out-of-date facilities; all of that is now at risk. I am also disappointed that we haven't heard where cuts will be made when you proposed your budget. You were part of the discussion of the school board budget and that would have been a great time to discuss whether cuts could be made but that opportunity didn't happen. I would ask you all to do the right thing to maintain the district's tax cap compliant budget increase so we can keep moving forward as a district. Thank you.

MacKenzie Verdiner, 539 Silver Street, stated:

I would like to preface by saying the following testimony is brought to you by the organizing power of the Young Organizers United. We are a team of high school students dedicated to making positive change in our community. I would like to say that we do not accept this \$9.5 budget cut. In fact, we want more because we deserve it. I am 19 years old. I live alone. I have a full-time job and a car. Why? Because I went to school here and because our schools are good. Now, are they perfect? No. When I was at West High School last year when I graduated, there were two bathrooms that had two sinks that did not work. Is that acceptable to you? No. That is ridiculous. The reality of these cuts would make it an excruciating learning environment. Teachers already don't have enough supplies for their students. I just talked to a teacher the other day and she is buying chemicals for her science class because the ones she has have expired. She is a new teacher and they didn't give her any money for the school year. Are you kidding me right now? That is ridiculous. I understand that your top priority is your taxpayers. I get it. But you want to know who your taxpayer's top priority is? Their children. I am not saying that we need to increase the property taxes but I am saying that we need to come up with a creative solution to fill this gap. Our students will not stand for this and we will not stop until this gap is filled. We will not be ignored. Thank you.

Samuel Cruz, 20 Country Club Drive, stated:

I am 17 years old and I am a junior at West High School. First of all, I want to thank you guys for taking the time to listen to all of us. Thank you Mayor for taking care of our city. I have been a student at West for about three years now. I love the school. I am not going to lie to you. There are some things that you can improve but that is everywhere. I am grateful to be in this city and I like the schools. They are not the best but I really like them. I am here mostly because I want to be grateful for sports and I want to be grateful for wrestling and I want to be grateful for you guys giving me the option to play sports. A budget cut doesn't seem like the best option for our city and growth. In our community there are a lot of students who want to succeed. Many of us had a bad start at the beginning. In my freshman year I was a really bad student. I found sports and

saw a total change. I was back to good grace and back to attending all of my classes. At the beginning, I did none of that. I was skipping classes and doing stuff that was not right. I feel like the aldermen should take into consideration sports. A lot of these sports are improving students and it gives them a place to go after school. Some students don't have a good family or a good relationship with teachers or brothers and they look at sports as an escape from reality and do what you like. I feel like you guys should reconsider the sports. We have two wrestling state champs and our track team at West is really good. We also have a crazy good track team at Central. Our schools are not the best ones yet but if we invest in them we might see them improve. Something I also want to talk about is I heard that school buses will be cut and that is a silly decision since a lot of the students walk to school now but in the winter months I don't think it would be great. A lot of students already have bad attendance and don't like to go to school and if you take the bus away, it will make it worse. They will say I am not going to school today because it is snowing and there is no bus and what am I getting out of this. It is already bad enough and a lot of kids know that school is not that necessary. They just go because they want a diploma. I used to think like that. Now I think that school is an opening to the real world. I think you should consider that. I appreciate the time and appreciate you for taking care of Manchester. Thank you Mayor for having this meeting.

Chelsea Adrien, 167 Auburn Street, stated:

I am a member of YOU and a proud student and sophomore at Central High School. I am here to speak to you about the recent budget cuts. For years, it has been the narrative that Manchester schools are for lack of a better word dumber than the other schools in NH. To that I say why are Manchester schools expected to perform as well as the private schools that have the additional funding to get the tutors, materials and educators that they need? If test scores were low, which they are not, why would we punish schools instead of supporting them for these test scores. Also, I would like to add something about the paying for buses. I would like to add that I think it is the wrong idea because Manchester schools are already struggling with attendance. Schools are trying to get their attendance up every day. Why would we get students to pay for buses? Most students don't even have jobs. I know it is mainly for high schoolers but I

know a bunch of people in my class who don't have jobs. I didn't have a job until about a month ago and I used to rely on busing when I went to middle school. If I still relied on busing now, in the winter months I wouldn't have been able to afford the \$10 and I would have missed school. Thank you. We will not be ignored.

Grace Ngira, 435 Merrimack Street, stated:

I am a proud student at Central High School. I stand here not just for myself but for every student who is a part of the Manchester school district who are expecting to be given a chance to learn, to grow and to succeed. How can we succeed if our schools aren't receiving enough funding that we need? We will not be ignored. We are not just a number on spreadsheets. We are students; future dreamers, doctors, engineers, teachers and leaders. We are telling you that by cutting the school budget it will not help us but it will hurt us. Budget cuts will result in larger class sizes, fewer resources, outdated textbooks, broken equipment and now on top of that you are asking kids to pay \$10 just to get on the bus? That is just unfair. It is harmful. Many students rely on the bus to get to school, especially during the winter. Adding a price tag to transportation will only make things worse. Attendance will drop and students who are already struggling will continue to struggle more. We need leaders who understand that the future of this community depends on how we treat the students today. So I ask you, can we build a better future if we are not willing to invest in it? We are not asking for luxury. We are asking for recognition on these matters. We are asking to be seen, to be heard and to be supported. Once again, we will not be ignored. Thank you.

Zahra Albadani, 191 Maple Street, stated:

I am a sophomore at Central High School. I come here, along with many other students, to voice our concerns regarding the future of our community. Not only will this budget cut stop people from cooperating and participating in school but it will also have a visible impact on people's lives and futures. When the budget is cut, sports will start costing, buses will also require a fee, teachers will be cut and many more down sides as well. Do these negative actions really seem beneficial? If this is what our future will come to, me as well as all the other students that have come here today will stand here before you all to advocate for our community and what we believe is right. How do you

expect a better living condition and better school statistics when you cannot provide the funding that is needed? We require all the support you can give to increase this budget. We will not be ignored.

Mia Rose Taylor, 357 Amherst Street, stated:

I am a senior at Central High School. I have spent the entirety of my academic career within the Manchester school district. Now when I was around three or four years old, I was super eager to learn; so eager in fact that when my older sister got on her school bus I would bawl my eyes out and get a runny nose and the whole nine yards. It was because she got to go to school and I couldn't. When it was finally my time to go, I took my education very seriously and now as a senior I am proud to say that I am ranked 11th in my class. I have helped add a class to my high school and I will be the first in my family to get a bachelor's degree. I want to emphasize that I am not an exception. You have some of the brightest, charismatic, passionate students living in Manchester and I need you to invest in them. The mayor's proposed budget falls short from the school district's proposed budget by \$9.5 million. We already struggle as is when it comes to funding and basic school supplies like paper. At Central, we don't even have the basic necessities like menstrual products in the bathrooms. I personally walked into a bathroom stall that didn't have a lock on it. The schools are under staffed. We need this money. These budget cuts will cause teachers to lose their livelihoods which increases class sizes and exacerbates the teacher shortage crisis. It will reduce the cleaning services in our schools and it will make more students have to walk and charge high school riders who depend on the buses to get to school. This affects the 12,000 students and families. It affects the teachers and their families. This is a sizable portion of the community whom I am sure will not be pleased about these developments. Education is liberating. Education is a right. Education is how we ultimately improve Manchester. I urge you all to invest in the students and approve the school board's proposed budget. Thank you. We will not be ignored.

Simone Ali, 26 Carter Street, stated:

I attend the Manchester School of Technology part-time. I am also the President of the HOSA Chapter. I would like to start off by saying not only how important this school is

to me but to the hundreds of students that attend this school from the City of Manchester and surrounding areas. I am currently enrolled in the schools' Health Science I class and will be enrolled in the Health Science II class next fall. My passion for healthcare began when I was a child and will never stop. With amazing teachers like Ms. Gelinas, my passion will never, ever stop. The course that I am currently enrolled in is under major scrutiny and the Health Science I class will not be available for the 2025-2026 school year because of the teacher shortage. This health science course is a stepping stone to the LNA course and the EMT course and a stepping stone for students who want to have a career in healthcare. These budget cuts affect the students of Manchester like my sister who wants to go into the healthcare field. We are not only the future of Manchester but we are the future of the world. Teachers matter and students matter. Also Mayor, we have shared a passion towards track and field and with these budget cuts sports are under major scrutiny. Why? Students should have something that they are passionate about and for many, sports are just that.

Sofia Ali, 26 Carter Street, stated:

I am an upcoming freshman at Goffstown High School. In my sophomore year I plan and know that I will attend the Manchester School of Technology in Health Science. This is not a long time away as I know I will pursue my future in the classes you all help provide for me and many students. Me and the many people here today refuse to accept classes that are underpaid and under acknowledged. Schooling is a right that everybody deserves. Manchester schools are suffering with financial issues already and struggle to even provide paper to the students along with staffing at numerous schools. We deserve both. Not one or the other or none at all. You must rethink the ideas that you bring to the table today to help current students and the students to come. At the end of the day, we are a community. We will not be ignored.

Shams Muecdard, 287 Weston Road, stated:

I am a member of YOU and I am a student at Memorial High School. I am here because I don't agree with the mayor's proposed budget. Our schools deserve more money because students are passionate about their education. If we don't have enough money for schools, our students might suffer from lack of supplies and

transportation. Students in sports might not be able to play and that is not fair. Sports is a way for students to engage and a way to get together. Don't take these things away from us. Giving us more money for students will provide up-to-date textbooks and technology and offer a better environment for students. As a student, I care for my education and so do the rest of us. We want these funds for better learning and the well-being of students. We deserve a budget increase and we will not be ignored.

Serena Mackay, 594 Wellington Hill Road, stated:

I am a 14-year-old sophomore from Founders Academy, one of the charter schools in the Manchester school district sitting before you today to testify on behalf of the thousands of students in this district who will be affected by this proposed budget. As a non-profit charter school, Founders is dependent on the transportation that the city provides. With this budget cut, buses will fail to come to our school and students. How many of these students are children of single-parent, low income households? Parents who have to work in the morning and care for their households at night? Leaders who truly possess empathy find no sense in making these students pay \$10 weekly to get to their houses. Education is a right. It is not a privilege. It is society's mutual agreement that students without the proper resources in and outside of their classrooms will be limited. Not just academically and not just in clubs or extracurriculars but also in their capacity to make change. We cannot expect that students will be resilient by themselves. We must face the hard truth that the lack of a proper budget to address our students' needs is essential to their success. Like what our fellow organizers said, education is liberation but liberation will cease to exist when students are bound to study in an environment where they are deprived of basic school supplies, basic facilities and basic hygiene products. Progress should be inclusive. No child should be left behind. To conclude, I would just like to mention that I am a first generation immigrant from a third world country. I am the first in my family to study in the United States and I experienced the education of the Philippines firsthand. These students, us and our families immigrated in search of a better life. America is a country of dreams and as long as this country starting from the district level cannot properly fund its academic institutions, America will fail to live up to this expectation. Help us, the youth, to make change. For the last time, we will not be ignored. Thank you.

Nick Want, 623 Belmont Street, stated:

I appreciate you being here today. I actually want to talk about the tax cap which is not a popular subject and I happened to wear red because I thought it was a nice color. I do support the Manchester teachers even so. The tax cap offers us an opportunity and was voted on by the city of Manchester taxpayers to limit the amount of spending that we should provide in times when things are difficult. What it also does is provide a guideline to us, particularly to those who may be inexperienced and not knowledgeable about how the finances of the city work. We are in a situation where the tax cap allows for a 4.27% increase but for some reason, Mr. Mayor in your leadership role you are recommending a much lesser amount which doesn't make any sense. Think about this. You have a contractor that comes to your house and tells you that you need \$4,270 worth of repairs for the roof, caulking windows, paint your floors and stop the dripping leak to maintain the quality of your house but you say well I am going to spend \$1,920 on it. Why would you do that? Particularly when you have access to the resources to spend the money necessary to get the work done. So Mr. Mayor, you are proud to talk about being in the National Guard and I respect that and I support that and I am proud that you are in the National Guard. I ask because I do not know what position you have. Are you an officer or an NCO?

Mayor Ruais stated I am an officer.

Mr. Want stated thank you for clarifying that. I didn't know. Again, I thank you for your services but imagine though if you are being asked to go out on a mission, perhaps a dangerous mission if you get deployed, and someone says well we have resources and we could requisition the resources to fund your unit but we are not going to provide you with medical supplies or firefighting gear or the ammunition and fuel that you need. How would you feel about that? Your responsibility, I would say Mr. Mayor, particularly as an officer, is to make sure that you provide a leadership role. The tax cap provides a limitation but also guidance as to what should be appropriately spent in this city when needed. Currently there is no reason to not spend 4.27%. To clarify to my fellow taxpayers because I have heard multiple people say this...they think that the taxes on their property will increase 4.27% of their assessed value. It is a 4.27% increase in the

tax rate. So if your house is worth \$250,000, your taxes would go up \$209 or \$.57/day. If it is worth \$500,000, it will go up \$1.14/day. That is less than a cup of coffee. I checked this morning and a cup of Dunkin Donuts coffee is \$2.81. So which homeowner would not spend money on repairing their own property, \$4,200 and go buy cups of coffee instead. Thank you for time and again I challenge you and I ask you for your leadership. You say that vision without funding is a hallucination. Those are your words directly. I have heard you say that a couple of times now. We need you to follow through. I don't want you to exceed the tax cap but you should be spending at least to the tax cap because that is what the taxpayers in Manchester asked you all to do. Thank you.

Okiyanah Neptune, 274 Main Street, stated:

I am coming here today to address the school budget cuts and my thoughts on it. When I heard about these budget cuts, the first thing I thought about was the future of our youth. I know that I am in only in high school but these budget cuts make me think about my younger brothers and sister and the education that they will have in the future. I think about the education of my friend's younger sister and how she became so passionate about learning more in math and was able to adhere to her interest by being offered an advanced math class in her middle school. However, because of these budget cuts I believe that there will be a lack of opportunities and experiences for growing students. We already lack opportunity when it comes to course diversity and club options but because of these budget cuts and the effects they may cause, it makes me worry about what opportunities these young minds will have. I know as a growing mind myself that without the chance to upgrade to harder classes and work with teachers I would have never made the progress I have now. I urge you not only as a student but older sister worried about the future for everyone I love and their opportunities in the education landscape. These budget cuts only seem to do more harm than good. Reconsider the futures you are changing and whether you are changing them for the better or worse. Thank you.

Deepasha Giri, 74 Cartier Street, stated:

I am addressing you today in response to the recent budget cuts made to the Manchester schools. I come to you today not only as a school board rep who aims to advocate on behalf of the students of Manchester West and their needs but for myself as a student in the district. Defunding our athletics, facilities, transportation, supplies and educators as if they are disposable is completely unacceptable. The necessity that these pose in our schools is unnegotiable and for there to even be a debate weighing the importance of each poses a humongous issue. Our educators are deserving of security in their work and the necessary resources to provide students with a quality education setting us up for our futures. Allowing for these budget cuts to take away some essentials within the classroom, but even outside the classroom such as transportation services and facilities, only further provides the detrimental impact this will have on our schools. This decision has not been made in the best interest of the students in the Manchester school district. The mayor has made no such efforts to convince the students of Manchester that 1) he has a plan for how these budget cuts will benefit the students and the plans he has personally constructed for the foreseeable future, and 2) has made no efforts to take a step into the classrooms, the communities and the experiences that students of Manchester have had to live through and how these budget cuts will impact them and how the current budgeting system continues to serve as an injustice to its students. These budget cuts are not the only struggle the Manchester schools have seen. I urge you to look around, learn about and understand the Manchester schools beyond the view of a mayor and aldermen and recognize that we are struggling as is. The students of Manchester need funds, not cuts. We need adults to represent our current needs and to believe in our success, not make plans to stop our gradual progress and bring everything we have worked for to a halt. I do clubs that struggle to fund our daily activities. I have done sports that found it too difficult to find ways to and from games and with uniforms that were outdated. I know friends who have relied on our transportation services and have gone through the bus shortages and the 4 PM bus times. These impacts are personal and to watch as they seem to be nothing but little expenses that don't mean much invalidates the experiences of everyone affected. Something that means nothing to you, can mean everything to me. I come to you as a student alongside the empowering and hardworking students who

represent themselves to you today. Our school communities are vibrant in connection, ideas, culture and experience. Act like the mayor of Manchester, the largest city in NH, the city that houses the largest population of marginalized communities, a city of many different stories and a hell of a lot more potential than your budget set us up to be. If you are looking to better understand Manchester and parts of it you may not resonate with, I would love to discuss with you further and I am sure anyone who has come here today would do the same. Finally, represent the future of Manchester; the students. Represent the young minds meant to one day fill your shoes and advocate to fund us in a way that insures our success, not stunts it. We deserve better from adults that meant to do as much as they can for us as students and we hope you will do that as a person. Thank you.

Leslie Want, 623 Belmont Street, stated:

I am a school board representative. First of all, I would like to thank all of you for the work you do on behalf of the city I love so much and thank you for listening to my comments. I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge how well our committed students demonstrate how much they have accomplished in our schools. I would like to begin my comments by apologizing publically to Mayor Ruais and to Superintendent Dr. Chmiel. Last evening during our school board meeting, I used strong language that I should not have used. I regret characterizing the motivations of both of these hardworking individuals. I am sorry that my emotions go away from me. I will try in the future to not use inflammatory language to make my point. For the last nine years, I have gone through this budget process and this has to be the most difficult year for me. The reason is that we have made so much progress in recent years. Thanks to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, we have been able to lower class sizes, implement new curriculum in both math and reading, and dramatically increase graduation rates. We have students that go to Ivy League schools and on to good paying jobs, as well as the military service; all thanks to the funds that the schools receive from the city taxpayers. The school district supports every child regardless of their ability and their socioeconomic status. Your board has helped support NH's largest school district that has the highest percentage of free and reduced lunch students, special needs students and multilingual students. The needs are far greater in our city than in any other town

or community across our state. In the past, this board has supported foreign language in middle schools, health classes in middle school, and additional social workers. We still have all of those things thanks to the leadership that looks to keep the momentum going. If we want to continue to increase positive student outcomes in Manchester, we must invest in our schools and not lose the gains that we have made in the last 10 years. Please help us continue to improve our public school system here in the great City of Manchester. The \$9.5 million cut to our tax cap compliant budget will mean changing the transportation radius from 1.4 miles to 2 miles walking. Can you imagine that? We will also have to charge students to ride the bus. It is undoubtedly going to increase absences and will certainly affect student outcomes. Please fund the budget that supports our district's vision to provide a transformational learning experience that insures that every learner has high quality post-secondary options to obtain a technical certificate, gainful employment and/or a two or four-year degree. Thank you.

Ava Dittbenner, 120 Linda Lane, stated:

I am a sophomore at Memorial High School. Mayor Ruais, I first met you at the "Are You Smarter Than a Breakthrough Student" event. I was so inspired by one quote you said – "a dream without funding is just an idea." I loved that you cared about me and about others and about this city or I thought you did because after speaking so heartfelt about such amazing programs helping these kids, you turn around and attempt to ruin their day-to-day learning. You are trying to gut Manchester education when it was already gutted to begin with. Programs like Breakthrough can't always be there to make up for the loss you are trying to create. Teachers love education. They love their jobs. My mom, a teacher at Southside Middle School, loves her kids. I have met many teachers at my school, Memorial, who have uplifted me. A few of whom are even in this room. They wouldn't have that opportunity if class sizes got larger. What is going to happen with the budget cut? Teachers are going to have to deal with more students who each have individual needs; needs that can't be met with too many kids in these classes. Added to that, the kids won't make personal connections to their teachers. Some kids don't have any adults to turn to with their successes, their hopes and their dreams. Teachers want to be there to hear every story, every moment, every time they pass a test, and every time they win sports. Speaking of sports, you like basketball right

so why would you let multiple sports be cut from the middle school level? The same with clubs. I am the editor of the Memorial Memo at school. It only has three members including myself. Would that be cut because it is not essential? What about drama club? Most of the budget or drama club comes from the advisor herself as it is already underfunded. You act like you want the best for kids in the Manchester school district. You showed up to that fundraiser that day telling people how important education is and how important these kids are yet you cut costs, leave passionate teachers out to dry, force kids to walk almost two miles to school every day because the bus routes were gutted and continue to have teachers pay out-of-pocket for their own supplies. I hear your words but I see your actions and as Shakespeare wrote, “a man may break a word with you sir but words are but wind.” Thank you for your time.

Mayor Ruais stated as a procedural motion, I would ask for a recess so we can call the next meeting to order and then recess and come back to this public hearing.

*On motion of **Alderman E. Sapienza**, duly seconded by **Alderman Barry**, it was voted to recess the meeting to call the regular Board of Mayor and Aldermen meeting to order.*

Mayor Ruais called the meeting back to order.

Jessica Spillers, 73 Jobin Drive, stated:

I am the school board rep for Ward 8. You have all seen me a lot lately and mostly about how the mayor’s proposed budget will hurt the progress the school district has made but tonight I want to focus on some good things coming out of our school district. We have so many talented students with an array of interests and skills and they take these things to the next level. Our Central robotics team competed in the World Championship. Fourteen students were selected for All State Music. Forty-seven were selected for NH Scholastic Art Awards. Memorial and West football teams made it to the play-offs and just last night we recognized student athletes who have won state championships and qualified for nationals in swimming, wrestling and indoor track. Our schools are also the central location in which students and families access critical resources. Did you know that multiple schools have food pantries including closets

maintained by their staff or a community partner? Did you know that the city's dental van partners with the district to provide dental care to students at school? Did you know that the district employs occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech pathologists and extra help in reading and math? Amoskeag Health and the Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester are on-site to provide counseling. Events like CelebratED and Spring into Summer have become community-wide gatherings that I know I look forward to. Our schools provide lots of services that we take for granted and parents I want you to really think about this. What happens if we cut school back to just the necessities as I have heard many people propose? Reading, writing and math are necessities but so is art, so is robotics, so is sports, and so is debate. The schools provide transportation for anyone further than one and a half miles from their school, including kids in parochial and charter schools. What happens to attendance if that has to change to two miles? Who drops the kids off then? What happens when gaps in OT, PT and reading and math occur and kids can't get what they need during the school year? Well they have to make it up in a summer program. Who takes them to that summer program that is across town? Will parents have to search on their own for those services at a private agency? Will there be more kids like my daughter who sat on a wait list for eight months to get extra help? Will you have to pay co-pays, pay more for gas, take the heat from the boss about those weekly appointments? Let's be real. Those private providers don't offer flexible scheduling and it is rare if they have a sliding scale for rates. It is why they are private. People want to know that Manchester is investing wisely and not just spending to spend. Everyone has their own opinion about that but I like to think that we are doing a pretty good job, especially with what we are given. Graduation rates have increased by 3.54% from FY22 to 24. Meanwhile, for once the state lags behind us at 1.66%. We are making decisions with the long-term in mind whether it is the kids, the teachers, the schools or the community and I hope you see the central role that our public schools play in Manchester and choose to invest in them. Thank you.

Katherine Norley Cunha, 75 Sprague Street, stated:

I did not mean to sign in but I feel that I could speak. My children went to Bakersville and Southside. My daughter is currently a sixth grader and my son is a tenth grader. I

work at West High School. When my children were in Bakersville, I saw how much was needed in the schools especially with supplies when I was on the parent teacher group. We were constantly trying to supply the classrooms using fundraisers and all this different stuff. At West, I see that there is always a lack of things we need in the school. Having a budget cut will just make it even worse. Thank you for your time.

Creig Lessieur, 105 Platts Avenue, stated:

More important, I have been a teacher at Memorial for the past 23 years and am currently a social studies teacher. I will try to keep my remarks brief. I have seen the district go through many phases in my tenure, both good and bad. Up until now, I would say we have been on an upswing. The mayor's proposed budget effectively kills that momentum with respect Sir. Our upswing was made possible partly because of the federal ESSER funds that the district received due to Covid-19 and it allowed the district to reach a point where most of our needs were being met. It took 23 years for me to finally see that happen. What we need to do now is maintain. If we cut funding to our schools, all of this progress that we have gained will disappear and based on past practice, we will never be able to reach this level again. I liken it to the ambulance and the fence analogy. For years, we have had an ambulance waiting at the bottom of a cliff to treat those that fell placing Band-Aids on the self-inflicted funding wounds but for the past five years we have been able to build a fence to prevent that fall in the first place by planning ahead and realizing it is cheaper to prevent the funding injuries than reacting to them. We have to remember that every cut has a cost. What we need to do now is keep the fence maintained. Everyone in this room knows that if the fence falls, we will never be able to rebuild it again. Thank you for your time and consideration on the issue.

Zoe Grenier, 66 Ash Street, stated:

I am a social studies teacher at Central High School and a member of the Manchester Education Association. I was born in Manchester, educated in Manchester public schools and am a proud current residents of Ward 4. I love living and working in Manchester. I love teaching the same students who make up my own community. I sit before you tonight not to beg for mercy from the precarious position I stand in as a first

year uncertified teacher but as a reminder that when budgets are cut we stand to lose motivated disciplined people from our school district. The new teachers that I work with are some of the most hardworking, creative, hopeful and well-loved educators. This is what we stand to lose with these unprecedented levels of underfunding. Every veteran teacher I have spoken with has a story about a phenomenal new teacher who got pink slipped and left for a district with better funding and better pay. I want to remind everyone here that we are certainly in our position for the money. Every single educator in this city makes magic out of scarcity every day. The mayor's budget has expressed a desire to fund economic development but I implore the board to think into the future. What will the economic state of this city look like when academic performance dwindles, graduation rates drop and years of unsustainable class sizes drive out the best teachers not to mention that education is community development. Teachers are not business people. Our bottom line is not profit. We don't measure growth in dollars. Our bottom line is the success of our students and our community. For those in government and public service, the following is a conversation we should be having with ourselves daily before we clock in. What is the purpose of governing, organizing and funding a society? Is it to profit, to pay off, to amass wealth to the detriment of our children and future generations or is it to be a creative force that educates and liberates and supports so that every student, every worker, every member of our community can live with dignity and fulfillment? We have the money. We have the capability. Do we have the will? To those on the board who have a record of standing with the educators of your city, I want to express our collective appreciation. To any members of the board who are brave enough to change their minds today and begin standing with us, I thank you as well. Like I tell my students, it is never too late to start doing the right thing. To those who remain unconvinced by the testimony today, I want to remind you who put you in your seats and of a November that will come sooner than you think. To the educators behind me, I want to remind us that regardless of outcome, the fight has just begun because when we fight, we win. Thank you.

Julie Cusano stated:

I am a kindergarten teacher at Beech Street School, a former teacher at Wilson Elementary and before that a City Year Corps member seven years ago at Northwest

Elementary as a newly licensed teacher. I am extremely worried about the potential \$9.5 million cut to our schools. What has been currently proposed will have lasting impacts on our students and staff. Over the last several years in this district, I have seen and experienced firsthand how large class sizes impact the learning and teaching environment. As a corps member, I served in a classroom with 30 third grade students in it. As a teacher at Wilson, each year my class size sat between 23-25 students. This year, with all the efforts the district has made to keep the class sizes lower, I feel like I am finally able to provide the care, attention and support that every child in my classroom deserves with a smaller class size of 20 students. With this current proposed budget, it is hard to say that we wouldn't end up violating our own district policy regarding class size caps. We simply can't afford to go backwards when we just started to make gains on this issue. The research around smaller class sizes is abundantly clear - more individualized attention for our students, stronger student-teacher relationships, higher test scores and greater student engagement. This is what we should continue to strive for. With a cut this large, we are also looking at the possibility of not being able to hire teachers or fill much needed positions after folks retire or leave our district this year. Special ed caseload are high and will continue to increase without adequate staffing and support. This directly affects students who are legally entitled to services that must be met. Watching the Board of School Committee meeting last night and hearing about every cut that would need to be put in place in order to fit this \$9.5 budget cut was deeply unsettling. The potential of charging high schoolers to ride the bus and increasing the walking radius for students to two miles is not only inequitable, it would erode the work the district has done to increase attendance for all students. Cutting funding for sports, supplies and more. What message is this sending to our students, our teachers and the greater community? All students in Manchester deserve a quality, equitable education on matter their background and every child in this city deserves the best that we can give them to be successful. This current budget proposal needs much more consideration in order to be able to do just that. Our teachers and students are extremely resilient, hardworking and put everything they can into their work. I think this packed room and the voices of students that we heard tonight in our schools is a testament to how much we care about the betterment of this city and this district. With all of the voices that you are hearing and will hear tonight, I hope that you

revise and fully fund the original budget to give our teachers, students and staff the necessary amount to meet the needs that our district faces. Thank you.

Courtney Menswar, 106 Hoyt Street, stated:

I am proud to have been born and raised in Manchester. I currently work as a school counselor at McLaughlin Middle School and am the mother to a fourth grade student at Jewett Elementary School. Tonight I stand before you deeply concerned about the proposed \$9.5 million cut to our school district's tax cap compliant budget. This is not just a number. It represents real consequences for our children, our educators, and our community's future. Let me be clear. Cutting \$9.5 million from our schools means losing a lot of qualified and talented teachers. When we lose teachers, we lose stability, mentorship and most importantly we lose the opportunity to give our students the attention and support they need to succeed. This will result in larger class sizes which will make it harder for students to get the individualized instruction they need. That is hard for any student but for students that receive special education services, are on a 504 plan or are part of our diverse population of English learners, it is devastating. All students rely on targeted instruction and consistent support to fully access the curriculum. With fewer teachers and support staff, that becomes almost impossible. Language barriers widen, gaps in achievement grow and let's not forget that many of the families as we know are already facing the crushing weight of poverty. This already puts students at a disadvantage and cutting the school budget strips away many of the lifelines meant to help them succeed. The impact can be deep and often long term. For many of our students, school isn't just a place to learn. It is often their safe space, a source of stability, meals, guidance and hope. Slashing funding could mean fewer counselors, less opportunities for sports, reduced after school programs and limited access to other essential services. We are a district full of promise but we can't ask our students to rise while we pull the ground out from under them. Cutting this budget doesn't just weaken our schools, it weakens the entire community. So I ask you to think not just about dollars and cents but about dreams and futures. Let's work together to find another way forward. Our children and this great city deserve it. Thank you.

Shauna Gagnon, 35 Fessenden Lane, Weare, stated:

I was raised and educated here in Manchester and have worked for the Manchester school district at the middle school at Parkside for the last 19 years. I am here because I believe that the budget proposed by the mayor will have real and damaging consequences for our public schools, our students and our educators. One of the most alarming outcomes of this budget is the likely increase in class sizes across our city schools. This doesn't just mean crowded classrooms. This means less one-to-one attention for students, more stress on teachers, and a decline in the overall quality of education. It means our kids, especially those who need extra support, are more likely to fall through the cracks. This budget also potentially cuts essential funds for classroom consumables; everyday work materials that keeps learning hands-on and engaging. We are talking about science lab supplies, math manipulatives, computers and art tools. These are not luxuries. They are the basics of an effective education. Without them, our classrooms will suffer, our students will be asked to learn with less, and our teachers will reach deeper into their own pockets at a time when we are all dealing with rising living costs. We must remember that the budget for the school district shows the public what we value. We encourage our students to work collaboratively and to find common interest. We need our public officials to set the example and collaborate with our superintendent and Board of School Committee. A better budget is possible. Keep our classrooms supported and staffed, protect our students from being packed into overcrowded classrooms without the resources they need to succeed because if we are not investing in our children, then what are we investing in? Thank you.

Amy Atkins, 103 Franklin Street, stated:

I am proud to say that I am a special educator here in the Manchester school district. I work every day with students who have incredible potential; students who learn differently, who may need extra support but who can absolutely thrive when given the right tools and opportunities. Since returning back to school after periods of remote learning, we see what happens when we invest in our students. With proper supports like specialized instruction, speech and occupational therapy, classroom aides and inclusive programming, our students with disabilities have made real, measurable

progress. They are reading. They are solving math problems. They are building confidence. They are graduating and many are going on to college, technical programs and employment. These supports aren't luxuries. They are necessities. At McLaughlin Middle School, we often talk about doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do but doing that requires investment. When we cut support, we don't just impact special education. We impact entire classrooms and entire schools because when one child struggles without help, the whole classroom feels it. Our students are not just numbers. They are children with unique needs, aspirations and potential but for many of them school is already a daily struggle. One made harder by years of inadequate staffing, underfunding, and lack of resources. These challenges aren't theoretical. They are lived realities and they affect every student in our schools. This proposed budget cut would push us to a breaking point we can't afford. Now we face the reality that a budget cut will only exacerbate the situation. It will eliminate the resources we have left, further reduce the ability to provide individualized support and set us back in our mission to help every child succeed. This isn't just a budget line. It is the future of our children and the future of our community. These students are our responsibility and we cannot afford to fail them. They deserve more. Thank you for your time, consideration and commitment to insuring that all students regardless of their abilities have a chance to thrive.

Katie Howe, 95 Wagner Street, stated:

I am a reading supervisor at Jewett Street School. Although this is my ninth year as a teacher in Manchester, it is my twenty-third year as a public school educator. I have never seen anything like the pure love that Manchester teachers, support staff and administration have for their students and the powerful connections they make. At Jewett, we have some wonderful traditions. At Halloween, we have a pumpkin carving contest. The pride our students shine with when going through the pumpkin gallery, excitedly showing their creations to the captive audience of their teachers, moved me to tears the first time I saw it. We have an annual student made gingerbread house display and I can't tell you how many teachers I have seen making quick repairs with toothpicks and hot glue guns, offering reassurances and tissues. We have an annual kickball game, staff versus fourth graders. I have already had seven third graders ask if

they can run for me. I guess they are not sure I can get around the bases as quickly as a pinch runner could. Every child needs to know that they are cared for and Manchester teachers take this responsibility very seriously. My own children, a Central graduate, a fifth grader at Southside and a fourth grader at Smyth, know how loved they are at home. I am still unspeakably grateful to Mrs. Bresler, Mrs. Pothier and Ms. Seares among many, many others for being an additional source of support and care for them. My daughter, Aerie, who is a four-year scholar athlete at Central High School where my husband also works, is a junior at the University of New England. She is a dean's list pre-med student and last weekend captained UNE's Cheer Team to a first place finish at nationals in Daytona. Nationals. She received a top notch education at Central but it was the staff that cared about her and supported her that gave her the confidence and drive that made her that national champion. Manchester school district staff are special. My amazing colleagues at Jewett, the brave souls who taught and mentored my daughters, and everyone in between. Mayor Ruais and members of the board, it is very important to me that you know that. Thank you.

Erica Livingstone, 137 Vinton Street, stated:

I am a parent to an eight-year-old and a ten-year-old who attend Manchester schools and I have been teaching at McDonough Elementary for 21 years. Twenty of those have been in a special ed self-contained program kindergarten to third grade, so a very specialized program. My team and I work with the most unique and specialized population. My students need additional supports to walk, to talk and to interact with their educational environment. My students need contracted services and anything we can get our hands on to help them. I know when the district is struggling to hire OT's, PT's, and paraprofessionals, sometimes those contracted services step in and help us out. It has been a passion of mine to work with this population for as long as I have and everyone keeps asking me are you coming back next year and I absolutely always do. I understand how difficult things are for all of you when it comes to budgets and figuring out what may feel impossible. Often I walk in and feel the same thing. I wouldn't want to be in your shoes and I don't know if you would want to be in mine but we need all of the support we can get. All children in Manchester, including my own two children, deserve the best even if it is the hardest. I hope one day the students of Manchester

will give back to the community that supported and helped them achieve to be the best version of themselves. To see the day-to-day highlights and the lows that can happen with public education, I invite you to come in to the classroom and see what we do. Just come in and say hi. Everyone would love that. I really hope that everyone can really think that even though it seems impossible, it can happen. Thank you.

Sean Russell, 146 University Circle, Hooksett, NH stated:

I have been teaching at Central High School for 21 years. Thank you for having us here and thank you for listening. I appreciate it. Thank you for the work that you do. I haven't been here in a while to speak and that is a good thing. I have to reiterate that I am not going to say a lot of the things that were said earlier because they were said so well but what Mr. Lessieur from Memorial said is correct. We are in an upswing and that is one of the reasons I haven't been here. Things have been going very well. Obviously the pandemic was tough for everyone but even afterwards things are on the upswing and we would like to keep it that way. I am an English teacher. I am not great with numbers so I will just give you one number to think about. That is \$257 million. I took a look at the percentages, I can do percentages, for the Bedford school district, our neighbor. If we were to apply those numbers to our city versus school services, the schools would be getting about \$257 million. So with our tax cap compliant budget, we are already saying that our students are worth \$10 million less than the Bedford students. If we go down to \$237 million, we are saying that they are worth \$20 million less than Bedford students. I don't want to say that. I know the students. I heard them speak. Some of my students were here tonight speaking or students that I know from Central. They are worth a heck of a lot more than that. All I am asking is that you do the right thing. That's all. Thank you.

Julie Turner, 285 Ray Street, stated:

I respectfully submit a letter on behalf of the Board of School Committee. It is endorsed by all 12 wards and our two at-large members. Tonight I would like to highlight some of the progress that we have proudly made in our district over my four years on the school board. We have decreased class sizes and increased our athletic offerings which have improved engagement and participation. We have improved transportation by no longer

contracting busing services but bringing that department in-house at a tremendous cost savings to the district. We have increased the level of cleanliness expected in our buildings. We have negotiated better contracts with our district staff, including overdue wage increases for paras, principals and teachers finally making us competitive with surrounding schools and allowing us to recruit and retain high quality staff. We have seen marked improvements in curriculum, professional development, safety, nursing and are finally done kicking the can down the road by investing in our facilities. These are all a result of the outstanding leadership from our superintendent and her team and I could not be more proud. As an earth science teacher with a Bachelors in geology, I would like to think I am a bit of an expert in the field of erosion. With rocks, it is the process of gradually wearing away rock, soil and land and reshaping landscapes over time. With the mayor's proposed budget, erosion of the progress in our city schools is similar. This cut in funding will weather away what we have grown over the past few years. It will, with certainty, negatively reshape the landscape of our district. With the proposed decrease in funding, we will see the wearing away of services, support, morale, athletics, attendance and staff. We will need to pause the expansion of sports offerings, including middle school softball, baseball, wrestling, cheer and unified sports. This decrease will erode student to teacher interactions, enrichment and elective opportunities as we will see a reduction in our workforce through attrition. The mayor's budget will wear away the growth we have seen in improvements to transportation, curriculum and professional development. Last year, the district drew down \$9 million of their rainy day funds and have already budgeted another \$4.5 million from those same funds. We cannot solely rely on those one-time funding sources to fill holes in our budget and families rely on the cooperation of the aldermen to help life up our teachers, students and schools with a fair and responsible appropriation to our district. To make sure we are all working with the same facts, I would like to highlight that the Manchester school district is the most diverse district in the state and has historically been one of the lowest funded on a per pupil basis. That is still the case today despite increased appropriations from the state. Additionally, our city schools are home to 60 different languages and some of the most unique student needs in the state. Specifically, we have a special education population that makes up 23% of our student body and a multi-lingual learner population that makes up 20%. Remember, our city is obliged to

provide a free and adequate public education for all students, including those with extraordinary challenges and expenses. It is difficult to do that with the mayor's \$9.5 million decrease. I implore you all tonight to reconsider the proposed allocation to the district. Please allow the 4.27% increase in tax revenue instead of the suggested 0.85% and appropriate a complete budget to the district. Thank you.

Julie Langlois, 1205 Goffstown Road, stated:

Currently, I am a sophomore at Manchester West High School. I want to talk about the millions of dollars that you plan to take from school funding. I am sure you are all very well aware how much the things like teachers, athletics and supplies are needed for kids. I also don't know if anything I say will change how you feel on this topic. I care about my education. You want to take millions of dollars away from my education. I felt reasonably upset when I heard about these plans. Kids need lab equipment, transportation, and Chrome books. Fewer resources for students who are in need of more support, special ed programs, they need funding. Taking funding away would hurt not just the communities but their futures. Transportation is incredibly hard to get. Taking more money away could completely demolish the idea of transportation for some kids for things like field trips and sports teams. If you have been worried about test scores or grades or anything like that, taking millions of dollars is not going to help. We are the next generation. We need good educated teachers and staff that will put in their time and effort for every single student. There is always a shortage of staff so taking away money means less classes. That one kid that you are worried about, maybe their test scores aren't the best, you could be taking away that moment when they meet that special teacher or they take that special class that changes everything for them. When you take away teachers, they don't have a choice. If you have given up on us because of our test scores and performance, taking away the things that mean the most to us is not going to make anything better. Students are horribly stressed. Teachers are already worked to the bone. I am part of clubs and sports that mean so much to me and I feel heartbroken knowing that this could impact those. I have this teacher who is in the first few years of teaching meaning that he has a higher chance of being laid off or fired because of these cuts. When I heard that, I knew I wanted to speak. No, I had to speak. He is a teacher I can 100% rely on. If I have a problem, I am going to him.

He has no hesitation when you need help or just someone to cry to. I know that without his support this year, I might not even be in the position I am in right now wanting to speak in front of all of you. I beg for you to reconsider before making any decisions. Thank you.

Madison Richardson, 303 Ash Street, stated:

I am a sixth grade language arts teacher at Southside Middle School. I am also a year book advisor, student government advisor and assistant coach of the Manchester Co-op Women's High School Hockey Team. Public education is the bedrock of our communities. It is where our children learn, grow and discover the potential they carry within themselves. It is where young minds are shaped into the leaders, innovators and problem-solvers who will guide us into the future but today this invaluable system is under threat. Our school budget is being slashed and those cuts are dismantling the very institutions that have served us for generations. Let's be clear about something. Cutting the public education budget is not just a financial decision, it is a moral one. The effects of these cuts reach far beyond numbers on a balance sheet. They affect us, the teachers who dedicate their lives to inspiring and educating our children. They affect the student who rely on school not just for education but for a safe environment and sense of belonging. They affect our communities which rely on educated skilled individuals to maintain progress and innovation. The reality is that public schools are already struggling to do more with less. Teachers are underpaid and overworked and resources are stretched thin. Cutting funding further would only deepen these challenges. It would mean larger class sizes, fewer teachers or support staff such as paraprofessionals, and diminished outlets for students like sports, after school clubs and the arts. You are not cutting costs. You are cutting opportunities. You are cutting the chance for students to receive the kind of education that can transform their lives. Every child, regardless of their background, deserves access to a quality education. Cutting funding would make that dream less attainable for countless students who are already at a disadvantage. Thank you.

Heather Lonergan, 426 Somerville Street, stated:

Mayor Ruais and I actually graduated in the same class at Salem High School Class of 2004. Coincidentally, we both find ourselves serving the same community. My sphere is a bit smaller. I am a paraprofessional at Jewett Street School. Though I imagine our goals are similar, to protect the well-being of those we have promised to serve, it is in that capacity that I am here before you today. In my job as a para, I often see kids when they are struggling. Whether those struggles are academic, social or emotional, I do my best to guide them and help them to learn to cope with their environment and achieve. I am able to do this because I am supported by an amazing staff that provides a safe and productive learning environment. If class sizes were to increase to proposed levels and staff was reduced, the children that would suffer the consequences would be the ones that I work with. They work so hard to do their best in less than ideal conditions for them and the last thing they need is one more hurdle to leap over. When addressing the MSD staff at the beginning of the school year, Mayor Ruais actually invoked the names of a few of our mutual educators. I would like to do the same today. Rhonda McCune taught me that if you are going to ruffle feathers, make sure you are improving the community too. John Griffin taught me that even people on hard times deserve dignity and respect. Chuck Siefert taught me that speaking to a crowd through a microphone is not that scary if what you are saying matters. Thank you for listening to me talk about my favorite thing, my Jewett Tigers, and the beautiful community that we have. I hope you will take my words to heart when you make your decision.

Kathy Turgeon, 202 Straw Hill Road, stated:

I am a taxpayer. On top of that, I am a retired teacher. I brought up my children in Manchester in the public schools. Both of my children are teachers. My granddaughter is the Valedictorian at Central High School this year and will be going to Dartmouth. Manchester schools have served my family well and we served Manchester well. My husband also was a teacher. When I retired in 2006 after 40 years working in Manchester schools, I thought these schools are going to be good. We set some good background and we set some good rules. In my career, I have gone door-to-door selling raffle tickets at my principal's condo in order to buy supplies for Weston School. I have also run off worksheets on the back of used, out-of-date forms from the

telephone company when we didn't have paper. I expected that Manchester would move on from this and that this would not be a fate. I was a city reading specialist under Title I. I lost my job and was RIF'd two times. Alderman Morgan, we do lose our jobs. Teachers do lose their jobs and it hurts morale and the city. Manchester has a vibrant, innovative millyard. According to our Senator, Keith Murphy, we need to be able to provide quality housing but even more important a quality workforce in order to attract and retain quality businesses to keep our city economically sound. This is not good. We cannot attract businesses by saying we offer an adequate education. Do you want an adequate business? No. We want the best businesses and we need to attract the best and provide a quality workforce through our Manchester public schools. Thank you for your time.

Liz O'Neil, 639 Hevey Street, stated:

I am on the Board of School Committee for Ward 11. Like so many folks that have already spoken, I am a proud graduate of Manchester public schools graduating from Central High School in 2012. I am who and where I am because of Manchester schools and I became a teacher because of the educators in this district. My hope tonight is that you hear each voice and reevaluate the mayor's proposed budget. The conversations that we are having and the reduction of the budget negatively impacts staff morale. Fear of involuntary transfers, loss of professional time and an increase in class sizes reduces staff morale. When staff feel unsupported, they leave and this directly impacts our students which is the reason we are all here. Telling educators to do more with less is a shameless cop out that perpetuates burnout and high turn around. We spent a significant amount of time this year as a school board discussing methods to increase attendance in our schools. We have heard from community members throughout the year about their frustrations. I have to stop and say when children cannot afford to travel to school they will not attend. We can create as many policies as we want but if children can't get to school, they won't come. We owe it to the children of our city to invest in their futures. The budget proposed by the mayor is a clear disinvestment in the future of this city. We also owe it to the city to listen to each other, work together and create pathways forward that enrich and support our students and families. Thank you.

Jessica Gifford, 3 Falcon Crest Way, stated:

Thank you mayor and aldermen for your service to Manchester. I was born in raised in Manchester. My family is a Manchester family. I was born over at the Elliot and my mom so loved the care she received there that she decided to become a nurse there going on 30 years now. My sister lives in Manchester and became a teacher here. I followed in my family's legacy of serving the people and children of this great city and I became a public school teacher teaching foreign language at Parkside. I loved my education here. I am a proud alum of Weston Elementary School, Hillside Middle School and Central High School. My education prepared me so well that I was accepted into one of the nation's top schools, Johns Hopkins University, where I graduated with honors and went on to work in public service and eventually worked abroad for the U.S. government. Like many young people, I left where I grew up but when it came time to decide where to settle down, I chose to move back here to Manchester to raise my children and educate them in the same public schools I went to, all my siblings went to and my nephew recently graduated from before going on to serve our country as a Marine. I can go on and on but needless to say, I love my city and I love our schools. When deciding to return to live here, the quality of the schools was a huge factor in my decision. I want the best for my children and I see that in our schools. Our schools in Manchester are great. I see how my children's teachers love and care for them while they give them a great education. My daughter loves her school, Weston. She loves her teachers. She loves the after school program. She loves her friends. She loves the Trunk or Treat and Bingo Night and Math Night and Literacy Night. My preschool son sees how much my daughter brags each day and is so excited to start kindergarten there next year. They both love walking through the lobby at Weston and seeing a ceramic tile I painted there over 25 years ago. As a teacher, I can also see the other side and I can see how much my fellow teachers do the best they can with limited funds to help our students every day. Every teacher I know pays out of pocket to provide more and better things for our students – snacks, materials, paper, fidgets, supplies, books and pencils. Hundreds and hundreds of pencils. We are used to this. We are used to making the most out of low funding but I don't know how we can make any more with even less. So as a parent and a teacher, I am shocked to hear

that there is a budget for the school district that is proposed to be underfunded. This means less teachers for my children. This means less programs for my children. This means less not only for my children but for my students. As a lifelong Manchester resident, I find this unacceptable. On another note, one of the best things I love about our city and this country is our ability as individual people to come forward and share our testimony and have our voices heard. This is democracy right here right now. However, if you cannot see it from your vantage points, earlier there were more than 100 people standing in the hallway all the way to the ground floor and as you can see more than 100 people unseated throughout the room. This is an important issue for our city so please reconsider the budget to fully fund our schools. The best investment for our city and our future is in our children. Thank you.

Tara Haarlander, 21 Westland Avenue, stated:

I am a special education teacher at MST High School. I am a graduate of the class of 2001 Manchester Memorial and this is my 17th school year with the Manchester school district. MST provides a vital educational pathway for a diverse group of students, including those with disabilities who benefit from academic and career and technical programs. I am speaking to you tonight with much anxiety and fear about what a \$9.5 million cut in funds will do to our district. It will cause loss of opportunities, experience for our students, loss of educational personnel, expertise, support people, mental health and wellness leaders, social workers, etc. Also increased class size and school safety concerns. Additionally, this cut potentially will impact students with special needs as well as opportunities we provide to our students and youth throughout the Manchester school district. Some special education services that will be impacted. As an inclusion trained professional, I take much pride in my current position integrating academics and preparing underclassmen for their CTE or career and technical program or certificate. Cuts will reduce specialized staff and support personnel. It will impact student progress academically to achieve a spot in a CTE program. Impacts to transition planning process over their high school career will be devastating and most special needs students can stay through the age of 22. Preparing our youth for post-secondary life whether it is furthering their education, employment or independent living is a critical component for all students. These cuts could severely limit our ability to provide a

robust plan or the achievement of goals while growing up in Manchester. To conclude, I strongly urge you all to reconsider these cuts and recognize the critical importance of fully funding education in Manchester and at MST so that students can reach their full potential. Thank you for your time and allowing me to speak with you this evening.

Alyson Lewis, 118 Seames Drive, stated:

I am a homeowner and a voter. I am also the guidance counselor at Highland Goffes Falls Elementary school and I have a seventh grade son at Southside and a second grade daughter at Jewett Street. Children needed trusted adults to grow academically, socially and emotionally. In my opinion, the reduction of staff that would need to occur to stay within the proposed budget would be the largest detriment to our students. We will have fewer classroom teachers, interventionists, special ed and support staff. I asked my colleagues to share some of their concerns. One of our third grade teachers shared with me that this year with her small class size of about 20 students she is able to offer intervention small groups three to four times a week. She can consistently assess and tailor her interventions to her individual students. She is very concerned that if her class size goes up to 30 children next year she will not be able to give them that individual attention. Children who this year can fairly easily be moved up academically if they are falling a bit behind will continue to fall behind next year if that is what happens and it will be much harder for them to catch up. One of our fourth grade teachers shared with me that three years ago when our fourth grade classes did have 30 students a piece, it was my first year ever working in a school and the stress in that classroom which I feared was normal but luckily with small classrooms it is not. The children behaviorally struggled and they didn't have the support they needed and the teachers couldn't give them what they needed and overall it wasn't a good situation. One of our special ed preschool teachers is very concerned that if we have less special educators in our district and the same number of special education students, we very well may not be able to provide them with the legal obligations that we have to give them a safe, appropriate and adequate public education. Furthermore, I heard from one of our paraprofessionals. She shared with me that she was a student at Highland when she was a child. She had an IEP and she got the support of a paraprofessional. She ceded that that was the support that gave her the confidence to feel like she could

succeed as a student, graduate high school and she came back to work as a para because she wanted to give that support back to her community. As a parent, I am concerned for my children if their class sizes increase and there is less support staff. They have both been given Title I interventions and they have been able to succeed and grow as students. I would just ask you to please give the full funding to our schools. Thank you.

Bryce Kaw-uh, 639 N. Bay Street, stated:

I am here tonight because our city budget is a reflection of our shared values and unfortunately our mayor's budget is an embarrassment. This budget does not fix our roads. This budget does not repair our sidewalks. As many have shared tonight, this budget does not support our schools. I did the math and Mayor Ruais is leaving at least \$6 million on the table. His budget is so far below the tax cap that the massive gulf between his proposal and the tax cap itself could fully fund what DPW needs with over \$1 million to spare. DPW made it clear that they needed \$12 million to adequately repair our roads and sidewalks. The mayor's initial proposal includes \$7 million. Do we, the people of Manchester, not deserve to have our roads paved and our sidewalks fixed? It is entirely within your power to accomplish this and yet you are choosing to kick the can down the road or what is left of the road after this winter. The mayor's budget speech also sounded a lot like an Apple keynote. As they say at those events, we are proud to announce our best i-Phone ever. So Mayor Ruais is proud to announce the best school budget ever. It is the most ever allocated after all except that is true with any incremental budget even if you add just \$1 compared to last year. Even if you fail to keep up with inflation. It is a really disingenuous way to frame the budget and I believe the public deserves better than the mayor's self-serving political spin. Mayor Ruais, we shouldn't be playing politics with our students' futures. You are on the school board yet you have abdicated your responsibility to our community's children. You have had every opportunity to jump in here and share what you think deserves to be cut from the Manchester school district's proposed budget. Do you want to charge high schoolers to ride the bus? Do you want to cut back on school district investments into Alderman Morgan's sports programs? Do you want to remove bilingual education opportunities? It is hard to say because you haven't stepped up to make your case. At

the end of the day, it is clear that we can do more while still respecting the tax cap. That is what the school board thoughtfully requested. Your decision to arbitrarily propose a significantly lower budget reeks of political gamesmanship. Although forcing a massive budget reduction at the expense of important educational services is financially conservative, it is not fiscally responsible. We cannot just cut, cut, cut without considering the costs. We have seen the dire impact of that haphazard approach at the federal level and our community here in Manchester deserves so much better than that. Thank you.

Alice Ouellette, 150 Dwight Street, stated:

I am a seventh grade student at Henry J. McLaughlin Middle School. I am here tonight because I am worried about the proposed \$9.5 million budget cut and how it could affect important classes and after school programs like art, band and chorus. These aren't just fun classes. They make school tolerable for the kids who don't like school. They are what help kids learn and grow in so many different ways. It is also used as an escape for most kids where they can stop thinking about stuff at home like their home life or an argument that they had with a loved one. I have been playing the trombone for three years now and it helps me focus better on my other classes too. I look forward to playing it in band every day. Even though it is a lot of work, I think it is cool to see the younger kids looking up at band and telling themselves that they want to do that when they get older. Being a part of the band has helped me make a few close friends and it is cool to see about 100 kids on stage knowing their brains sync up as one when they play music. If the program gets shut down, then lots of kids like me will miss out on big opportunities. I know a few kids in percussion that are really good and have an extremely bright future ahead. If they were not allowed to play at school, they would lose these skills. This is why I think that the budget cut should not be put in place. Thank you for your time.

Christina Ouellette, 150 Dwight Street, stated:

I am a proud graduate of a NH public school. That is where I discovered music and my passion for teaching. My teacher sparked my interest in learning. I am especially proud to be a NH public school teacher of 23 years. I came to Manchester because my

children are Manchester students and I wanted to give back to our community. Many of our students struggle with trauma. They have big feelings and emotions and they are learning how to fit in with their peers. Schools are a crucial part of social and emotional development. Being included and having a safe environment is crucial to these kids. At my school, we currently have a social worker, a school counselor and a teacher who work with our students who struggle with their emotions and their behaviors. This funding is necessary to support our students in their social emotional needs. Many teachers buy their own supplies and depend on crowd funding such as Amazon and Donors Chose. My first year teaching in Manchester, I had three young ladies who wanted to play the violin. Every week they came to lessons and every week I would say I am sorry but I don't have any instruments. Finally, I was able to tell them I have an instrument for each of you. One exclaimed I knew you would get us an instrument. I just knew it. If my project hadn't been fully funded by a donor, I wouldn't have had these instruments. When field trip forms go home, some parents are able to pay for the trip while others cannot afford it. Many of our parents are in survival mode and cannot afford the extras. Additional funding in education is going to lessen the gap between the haves and the have nots. Our public schools support students who struggle with everything, including academics. If there is less funding for our public schools, who supports these children? Who helps them? Or the children who come to school speaking another language? They are trying their best to learn and keep up with the curriculum but are exhausted at the end of the day from translating all day long. School is a safe place and for some their only place to get breakfast, a hot meal or a hug from a teacher who is always smiling and happy to see them. All our staff in our public schools are providing so much more to these kids than the curriculum. We are building community, teaching them lifelong skills and providing a sense of belonging. Our students depend on us, the public schools and the teachers, and right now our kids are depending on all of you. Thank you.

Saylor Mylly, 49 George Street, stated:

Today I sit before you not just as an advocate or a student of the Manchester school district but as a voice for our children, our future and the very foundation of our community. I urge you to consider the far reaching implications of cutting our school

budget. Education is not merely about textbook and classrooms. It is about shaping the future of our nation and creating a society equipped to tackle the challenges of tomorrow. Manchester schools have been a safe place for many students for many years. Personally, my life has been chaos to say the least. If it wasn't for my educators who have supported me and helped me grow, both scholastically and as a person, and the numerous extracurriculars I have had the opportunity to participate in, I would be a vastly different person than I am today. Every dollar spent on our schools is an investment in our collective future. Manchester is the largest city in NH and has the highest population of marginalized citizens in the state. The best way to build Manchester into a vibrant thriving city that it can and should be is by putting as many resources as humanely possible into our education. Education is the most powerful tool we can provide our children. Consider the programs that will be affected by these cuts. Arts and music which already struggle with funding, will fall to the wayside. With our teachers already spending money out of their own pockets for supplies, how can we justify this much disregard. Physical education, which promotes health and well-being combating the alarming rise of child obesity and mental health issues, will be significantly disrupted with a cut this large. Special education services insure that every child, regardless of their learning challenges, receives the support they need to thrive. These programs are not luxuries. They are necessities. Reducing funding means sacrificing the enrichment that makes our school environment where every child can flourish. Let us not forget the dedicated educators who work tirelessly to inspire and empower their students. Teachers are not just instructors. They are mentors, confidantes and role models. They invest their time, energy and love into our children often going above and beyond to insure that each student feels valued and supported. Let us not compromise the quality of our education for our children by questioning the worth of our educators. Moreover, the consequences of budget cuts extend beyond the classroom walls. A strong school district enhances property values, attracts new families and strengthens our communities. A well-funded educational system is a beacon of hope and opportunity. When we invest in education, we invest in the future of Manchester; a future where our children can compete on a global stage, innovate and contribute to society with confidence and creativity. Today, I beg you to envision Manchester not as it is but as it could be; a community where every child has access to

a high quality education where teachers are supported and our schools serve as centers of opportunity and hope. This vision is attainable but only if we commit to maintaining and even enhancing our school budget. We owe it to our children, to ourselves and to the future of our community to make education a priority. Thank you.

Caleb Lelesi, 11 Carriage Way, stated:

I may not agree with how the education system is run but I can tell you that these budget cuts will ruin beautiful schools. The high school I go to, West High, is already struggling enough. We are talking about \$9.5 million. That is not just a minor adjustment. That is not tightening a belt. That is a sledge hammer to the foundation of our future. Let me be real with you. Students are already dealing with broken heating systems in the winter, outdated textbooks older than some of the teachers using them and the class sizes make it nearly impossible to learn. Now you want to cut deeper to take away from what little we do have? This isn't just numbers on papers. This is teacher jobs and after school programs and counselors and lunch programs and special education support. These are things that keep some students going; the things that make school feel like a lifeline instead of a sentence. Here is the ugly truth. When you make cuts like this, you don't hit everyone equally. You hit the kids who are barely making it. You hit the families that rely on schools not just for education but for stability, safety and hope. You want to talk about preparing the next generation? Then why are you gutting the very system that is supposed to do that? West High isn't perfect. Far from it but it is a community full of students who are trying, teachers who care, and a staff that gives more than it ever gets back. We need more support, not less. If you take this money away, you are cutting the legs out from under schools that are already crawling. I may be a student but I am also a future voter and I promise you this. If this budget goes through, we will remember, we will organize, we will speak out and we will show up because education should never be the first thing you cut. It should be the last. We are the future. Invest in us or prepare to answer for the consequences when the foundation of your society crumbles. Not because we failed but because you abandoned us. Our motto is "Live Free or Die" but at this rate we are only going to die. Thank you for your time.

James O'Connell, 265 Prospect Street, stated:

I am a school board member at large. If I was a teacher, I think on a night like this we would all get up and stand up and turn around a couple of times to get our engine levels up. I appreciate you being here for the last two hours and your patience and attention. I have noticed that you have paid attention and I think that is important so thank you for that. I know it is not always easy. There are a couple of things I want to say. I look here tonight and on the left side of the room and I counted the names as I walked up right now. That is 28 people sitting in these five seats right here. That is 28 and we would need another 10 in these two rows here and that is the 38 people who are going to lose their jobs in Manchester because of this budget. Right? Think about them. If they were sitting there in police uniforms how would that look? How many former fire chiefs and others who fought in our Fire Department for years would tolerate that? The roof would be coming off. If half this room were filled with police officers who were losing their jobs in June, the roof would come off. We are losing 38...and I want to put something in perspective. We are losing 38. The budget that the BOSC put forward including spending \$4.5 million of reserve rainy day funds. We used \$9 million last year. In the discussion we had last night in our meeting about what these cuts might mean, we talked about all of the things you have heard here and we included another \$3.8 million in one-time funds. So everything you heard will happen and we will still be using \$4.5 million plus \$3.8 million of rainy day funds just to get us to there. I worry that as you are all listening that some of you may discount this and put it down as these people are like chicken little and the sky is falling. It is not. You try finding \$9.5 million out of your budget right now. I don't know how you would do that. I do want to say because time is short that I so much appreciate the students who came here tonight. It is intimidating to come into a room like this for any of us but I am very proud of the students we saw from all of our high schools – MST, West, Memorial and Central. We also saw a young lady just now from Henry J. McLaughlin Middle School. I am especially grateful to the teachers who are here tonight who have jobs and work to go to tomorrow and they are in here tonight fighting for their students to say this is not right. I would like to say this. It is important that we talk facts. When people look at where the numbers are, I want to give you a number that I mentioned last night that is very important. If the budget as proposed goes forward, this Board will have given the

Manchester Board of School Committee and the district just over 1% per year as an increase for the last six years, since 2020. So I might be a little less kind than my earlier colleagues who were very grateful to past boards and what they have done. I know what past boards have done. Past boards in this city have underfunded this district again, and again and again so we are least well-funded school district in the state and if this budget goes ahead, the taxpayers of Manchester will have been asked to spend 1% a year for the school district for the last six years. That is not true on the city side. Thank you and I look forward to working with you in the coming weeks to find a better solution.

Kristen Venator, 565 Oak Street, stated:

I am the proud parent of two children who go to Central High School. I had no intention of coming to speak tonight but after last night's school board meeting, both of my children encouraged me to be here. My son was one of the athletes who was recognized for his role on the indoor track relay team. They won the D1 state championship. I am proud to say they made it all the way to nationals where they broke the NH state record. My husband and I are so proud of him that he is continuing his athletic career at the collegiate level. Sports is what keeps both of my kids and so many other students motivated in the classroom. If it was not for sports, my son would not be on this path. This didn't start at the high school level. Sports need to be offered at elementary school and middle school in order to have success in high school. If it was not for sports, my son would not be going on to college. Student athletes become more confident, self-disciplined, set goals, stay organized, and have a sense of community in the school and on the field. My daughter and I were watching the school board meeting. My husband and son had just gotten home. That is when the superintendent presented her potential cuts. My kids were appalled. They heard sports being cut and they told me I had to be here tonight. They were saying how can they make further cuts when we just get by as it is? They often compare their experiences in the classroom and outside the classroom to peers in other districts. I remind them to be Manchester proud and to have Central pride. All potential impacts that the superintendent listed of what could happen if sports are cut, I have seen firsthand. Both of my kids have lost teammates for a season due to behavior, attendance or academics but everybody

deserves a second chance. Once those students realized the impact, they were able to bounce back and come back the next season. I am afraid that if athletics are cut, many of those students would not have the motivation to bounce back. Another item I wanted to quickly address is transportation. For years, I wanted more money for transportation. Central is unique. We have no on-site parking facilities. Kids travel one to two miles to Livingston, Gill and other facilities. If you extend the walking distance, those kids would now have to walk even further to their practices. I wish Manchester gave more opportunities for busing because getting to practice after school should not be a barrier for student athletes. Mayor, I hope you reconsider your proposed budget and realize that any impact is going to have a direct impact to student success in the classroom. Thank you.

Kevin Criscione, 380 Rimmon Street, stated:

I want to talk about the DPW funding as well, which is relevant to the schools. Please, if you care about the city, fully fund the DPW and school budget requests. I want you to just think of potholes, the last pothole you hit, potholes the size of birthday cakes, broken sidewalks that are inaccessible to seniors and folks with disabilities, sidewalks and the school children and the seniors and families that use them and how repaving is an opportunity for economic growth, pedestrian infrastructure and quality of life that is show to attract investment and improve our community. Speaking for DPW, this is a rare issue of bipartisan agreement. I really hope you can answer the concerns of many of your constituents and fund DPW's request. These aren't mutually exclusive – the school and DPW requests. I do think that roads and schools and other investments will pay for themselves over time with the economic investment attracted to Manchester by making it a better place to live. Thank you.

Bob Fuller, Buttonwood Avenue, stated:

I am the Vice President of the MEA. I am also a proud social studies teacher at Memorial High School. I have been teaching here in the city for 28 years. I was born in this city and educated by Manchester public schools and I have seen a lot over the years. What I am seeing here, I just can't really explain it. It is my understanding that some people have been asking questions like it is a lot of money and what are we

actually getting for our money. Well as a fiscal conservative at heart, I would be asking the same question. With that, I have some numbers for you. Per pupil spending in the Manchester school district right now is \$17,733 which comes out to 159th out of 162 districts in the state. Now while that sounds alarming, a few years ago we were last. With increased funding, the district has been able to make steady and measurable gains, such as the following: attendance is up 3% over the last three years; the graduation rate is up 3.5% over the same period; test scores across the board and I had to be a little bit of creative averaging to dig out this sort of stuff but I can tell you right now they are up 2% since 2021. Dr. Chmiel's budget request is for \$246,050,206, which by the way is the full tax cap of 4.27%. Now the CPI which of course is the rate of inflation which we have been following will continue to fall with a large decrease projected for next year. Again, as someone who has seen a lot I understand that sometimes we are short-sighted but the fact of the matter is that planning for the future is so important. That is what we tell our kids. So with CPI, in the last three years we had 6.5%, 3.4% and 2.9%. Now the current national rate is 2.4% so that three year rolling average will actually go down. We will be back here at the same time next here all of the sudden with less money to allocate and bigger problems. At the very least, we should be allocating the full amount, if not even a little bit more because the fact of the matter is that planning ahead would be a little bit better. Now the mayor's budget is at a 1.94% tax increase which is much less obviously than the 4.27%. These numbers just don't make any sense and the fact of the matter is that for most communities in the state they fund most of the budget in the schools where Manchester is saying we have to go backwards. Well that is not how we should be doing it. We should be putting more money into the schools because that is actually what grows our property rate. People are talking about paying too much in taxes. Well as our property value goes up, that is a good problem to have. The fact of the matter is that what I am requesting here tonight is that we fully fund the Manchester school district. As a teacher here who has been doing this for a long time, give us the tools and we will do the job. Thank you.

Sue Hannan, 13 Sundown Drive, Derry, stated:

I have taught for like 174 years now. I taught at Hillside for 18 years but now work in professional development and credentialing for the district and I am the President of the

Manchester Education Association. Hearing these speakers tonight, I know you are listening to their passion and their pride, hearing their needs, and understanding their anxiety as they may be facing an unnecessary lay off. Our educators, including our para educators, administrators, administrative assistants, nurses, and others who interact with our students every day are the most integral part of an education. They provide the stability, nurturing, challenges, care, guidance, support and ethics that the youth of Manchester most need as examples of caring and trusted adults. In the Manchester school district, we are at the point of having the right staff and the right amount of staff to grow and improve public education. Obviously, we all have common ground here. We all want our schools to function well, to teach students in innovative and rigorous ways, and for our students to excel in their studies. Our data is showing that we are doing just that. We can't interrupt this positive flow and start moving backwards. MSD has worked so hard to pull out of last place in per pupil funding and starting salaries and average salaries and in graduation rates. We are succeeding but our current model needs to continue. Dropping any funding now puts the district in a deficit model that would set us back significantly. This is a tax cap compliant budget that has been presented by the school district. It doesn't require you to override anything. It doesn't show any wasted spending. It shows responsible financial moves. Anything that cuts money from the tax cap compliant budget will interrupt services and education. We are at a fortunate place to have a tax cap at over 4% and we now the next years will be very lean in that department. Let us show you the human side of this. This is 38 people standing behind me. For elementary, 10 of them will go. For middle schools, 18 of them. For the high schools, 9 of them plus 8 at the district level. This is what it looks like. These are real people who may be forced to move away because they can't live in the city anymore who can't provide for their families who are the sole providers for insurances and wages or single parents. Seventy hundred fifty to one thousand students will be affected as their classes will be consolidated and they will have less room and attention in them. We are not going back to the days of we do more with less. We are at a time of we do better together. Every cut comes with a cost. Thank you.

Ian Coburn, 72 Prospect Street, stated:

As a teacher at West, I actually haven't been home yet because I run a club after school as well. I grew up in this city. I went to Smyth Road and Hillside and Central and then off to UNH and now I teach at West. I have never not been a legal resident of Manchester. Like I said, I sink a lot of time in to this city and to these schools. I run multiple clubs. Some of you might recognize the sweatshirt. I volunteer with the Central robotics team. I volunteer as an advisor for a D&D club at West. Last spring, I ran a disc golf club. I also have been involved with the Weston robotics team in the past. I was a multi-sport athlete as a student. I would just like to go through a few of the cuts that we are scheduled to make. Cutting staff that are not teachers. A lot of the speakers today talked about the teachers. I personally am not afraid of losing my job. I think that is not necessarily in the cards but the non-teacher positions such as custodial staff where my classroom doesn't even get cleaned every day and like one of the students said earlier, we have several bathrooms in the building that are just not functional right now. I have girls go to the bathroom from class and they are gone for 20 minutes and they come back and I ask where they have been and are like well I went to this bathroom and it is closed down and I went to this bathroom and it is closed down and I went to this bathroom and there were 10 girls vaping. Another point. Letting kids pay for sports. We are not talking about students like where I was and like many of you probably were and like many of your students are. The students who need these activities the most are not the students who have parents who care enough or are able to come to these things. We are cutting these services for the students who are barely scraping by. For the students who are the poorest of our students. Their parents cannot make these events because they are working or because they have their own issues. Paying for sports. Someone mentioned earlier that the West and Memorial football teams made the playoffs for the first time in forever. If you charge money for that sport, that team will be cut in half. I say this obviously anecdotally but I know these kids. I talk to these kids each and every day. They cannot afford it. Make them pay for the bus? They can't afford it. They won't come to school. We will not see these children. I think I have made my point and I would just like to ask you guys please,

please do not give the answer to our poorest students that they get all the time in every aspect of their lives – oh, they are just the poor kids, who cares.

Mary Georges, 18 Blodget Street, stated:

I am so proud of you because this is our city. When I first arrived in Manchester, it felt like a large village with many international students eager for opportunity in a bigger city. We witnessed that significant growth and development transforming Manchester into a vibrant urban center. We can truly be proud of our Queen City. We need to be proud. All of you here can be proud to have a big city because before it was not a big city. I know you care. I know all of you do care because you stay here long. There are those who stay long and if you didn't care, I don't think you would. You care for your city and for your people and because you love this city. I love the city. I got an education and that is what I give back. I got my education here in Manchester. I went to school here and got a Bachelor's degree and Master's degree and I am giving back now. I am working very hard like you do too. Education is a key. I can tell you on Thursday I was driving from Concord to Manchester and I walked into my house and my daughter said mom you matter to who. One of my colleagues said the school can ask for a donation. They will do a budget cut because the school can ask for a donation. This is not wise. I am asking you to work really wisely. Please protect our city. We can be proud of our city. You don't look like people who don't care. Please. To have a better city is to have a better education. Better education is a better city. This is what we are looking for. Please, I am begging you. I cried on Thursday. Please don't have the schools ask for a donation. You can do better to help the education for our children. All of you are parents. God Bless You.

Gavin Telfer, 98 Sagamore Street, stated:

I have one child in the Manchester public schools and will have another starting kindergarten in September at Webster. I am not a NH or Manchester native. I grew up in Wisconsin but I have lived here in NH since 2008 and in Manchester since 2014. To tell you the truth, we came here and thought we would be here a few years so I could get a jump start on my career and then head back to the Midwest but we stayed and we stayed in Manchester in part because of the sense of community. One of the pillars,

foundations, of that community we are concerned is at risk and it is at risk because of the proposed \$9.5 million reduction to the tax cap compliant budget that was unanimously approved by the Board of School Committee. Now I am speaker number 55 so I was going to tell you if I was up here earlier about all the ways that this would negatively impact students, staff, families, community members and the community in general but so many people have done that already. Many, much more eloquently than I could. So right now I just want to say that I hope you all have been listening and listening with an open mind. Like really listening. I think if you have done that and came here not with your mind made up on what you were going to do but listened to the people who this is going to affect I am confident that you will vote to fully fund the Manchester public schools. Please don't let us down. Thank you.

Johanna Clasby, 10 Woodbury Lane, Boscawen, stated:

I am currently a teacher at McDonough Elementary School having spent my last 14 years teaching at Henry Wilson Elementary School. Through its closing last June, I completed my first year in Manchester at Jewett Street Elementary and I lost my position due to a reduction in force along with 163 of my other highly talented and dedicated colleagues; many of whom are employed by other districts and remain there now. I was hired back at Wilson well into the first trimester of the following year. Classes had to be reorganized and my first grade students had to be taken from the teachers and class communities that they had established relationships with. Data had to be recollected halting instruction and delaying critical differentiation for our population of high academic need. Mine and my students' situation was not unique. If we don't approve the budget presented by the BOSC, we will gain lose quality educators that cannot just be replaced. Position cuts will call for movement in our district and any momentum that has been made with building level procedures and working relationships with students and families will be lost. I know that your job is extremely difficult and I want to make clear my sincere gratitude for the work that you were elected to do. These are not just numbers on a spreadsheet. They represent denied resources and opportunities for our students who deserve the best that we can offer. Every dollar that we take away or deny is taken away from our students' safety, development and their potential to thrive as productive members of our community. This is not just a

funding request. It is a lifeline for our students, teachers and schools that are already stretched out as much as possible. This budget increase will provide critical support – more teachers, up-to-date materials, academic and behavioral support and more engaging learning environments just to name a few. Please do the right thing and give our schools and our city the opportunity to thrive.

Jonathan Reyes, 226 Karatzas Avenue, stated:

I am here to talk about the budget cuts. I am a senior at the Manchester School of Technology and I want to focus mainly on the extracurricular activities. Without the necessary funding from the community, some of these activities won't be able to run at the scale that they once were. Take my robotics team for example; an activity that is quite near and dear to my heart. Although making robots is the main focus, we do so much more. From running workshops at the public library to marching in the Manchester Pride Parade, we are able to foster community of S.T.E.M. intellectuals. By cutting funding for activities such as robotics, how do you think this makes us feel when we work so hard to show that we love our community. Last year, the only reason my team was able to attend the world championship in Houston, Texas was because of the funding provided by the school board. Being able to represent my proud city of Manchester to the entire world, and yes I do mean the entire world; people from Mexico, Palestine, Israel and so many more countries. It was an amazing experience and we made sure to let them know that it was because of our mayor and the school board that we were able to attend the world championship. By enacting these budget cuts not only are you telling the community of Manchester that these activities that lead to such amazing career opportunities in the future don't matter, but you are also telling the world that our public school system doesn't matter at all. I ask you again. How do you think this makes us feel?

Kaydence Jones, 345 Coolidge Avenue, stated:

With me is Marian Haff. We represent the Manchester School of Technology and the students of the Manchester school district. Ms. Haff stated we came today to speak on our concerns with the budget given the school district this year. One result of this budget cut is that transportation would become more difficult for students as the one-

mile mark would turn into a two-mile mark which means that the school buses wouldn't be picking any student up within two miles. Ms. Jones stated factoring in bad weather and low income families, this could be a disaster. With intense snow in the winters and the heavy rains in the spring, this could cause students to face harsh weather conditions like flooding and blizzards which put them at risk. Ms. Haff stated these students would likely be walking an hour to school. In order for them to make it to school on time, they would have to wake up extra early. This makes students tired which means they are not focused in class and not learning what they need to. Ms. Jones stated this can badly affect their scores in the school and that reflects our district, as well as we students and our future. Ms. Haff stated we understand that you want to balance the city budget but a city starts with its people. Ms. Jones stated by cutting the budget, you are sending a message to the community that our students and our education don't matter. We, the students, are the next generation to be living here and we will be making the decisions to stay, work and play. Ms. Haff stated although we are graduating this year, we still have siblings, friends and family who are not. Ms. Jones stated we can only wish that the people we hold strong to our heart get the same education, if not better. Ms. Haff stated we respectfully request that you take our words into consideration and respect our time as much as we respect yours. Thank you.

Sean Parr, 244 Sagamore Street, stated:

I am the ward 2 representative on the Board of School Committee. I also chair the Education Legislation Committee of the school board. One of the things we have done on that committee is we have made a commitment to advocating for the priorities of the school board. We have a list of priorities that we have all approved unanimously and one of those priorities is fully funding our school district. I can say confidently with the reiteration of the support of the school board from yesterday's meeting that we, the Manchester School Board, are in full support of the budget that we put forward to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen. I will read the letter that we are submitting to you this evening.

To our colleagues on the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, we the Manchester Board of School Committee, are writing in response to the city budget as

proposed by the mayor. We deeply appreciate our joint work to support the funding of our schools for our students. We know that city governance involves difficult decisions and we recognize the weight of balancing fiscal responsibility with the needs of our residents. However, we are writing today to formally express our collective rejection of the mayor's proposed budget in its current form. Although we understand the intention to address broader municipal challenges, the proposed reductions to public education funding would have devastating consequences for our students, our educators and ultimately, the future of our city. Our schools are not merely line items in a budget. They are the heart of our community and the foundation of our city's future growth and prosperity. We as a board are united in our commitment to strengthening and supporting our schools and our students because we know that a strong, well supported school system helps everyone in our city. If enacted as written, the proposed budget that the mayor put forward would necessitate many harmful cuts and reductions to student services including cutting teachers and support positions forcing increases in class sizes across the district, reducing individual student support in differentiated learning hurting all of our students, halting the growth of our athletics programming, undermining special education services disproportionately affecting our most vulnerable learners, and undoing the progress we have seen over the last several years. Cuts like these drive families out of Manchester and they can also deter potential new teachers damaging recruiting efforts. Bottom line, they hurt our students, our families and our city. We remain hopeful that together we can find a path forward that upholds our shared commitment to the children and families we all service. We welcome the opportunity to engage and continue dialogue and collaboration to craft a budget that reflects the values, priorities and long-term vision of a thriving city with excellent schools. We urge you to reconsider this budget, reinstate the budget as unanimously approved by the Board of School Committee and commit to fully supporting our 21 schools and 11,865 students. We look forward to seeing an update. Thank you for your consideration.

Brian Fanning, Fox Hollow Way, stated:

I am not an employee of the Manchester school district and not a parent and was not born and raised here but I would like to start a family at some point. I know, Mr. Mayor, that you also recently started a family and I could not in my good heart stay in the City of Manchester knowing that this city will have a heavily underfunded school district. I have been here all night and have not heard anyone say this so I would like to say I am giving you permission to raise my taxes in order for our school district to be fully and adequately funded. Thank you.

Mayor Ruais advised that all wishing to speak having been heard, the comments presented shall be taken under consideration with actions by the Board.

*This being a special meeting, no further business can be presented and on motion of **Alderman Terrio**, duly seconded by **Alderman Levasseur**, it was voted to adjourn.*

A True Record. Attest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Normand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

City Clerk