

**SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN
(PUBLIC HEARING - FY27 BUDGET)
April 14, 2026 at 6:00 PM**

The Mayor called the meeting to order.

The Mayor called for the Pledge of Allegiance, this function being led by Alderman Kaw-uh.

A moment of silence was observed.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Kaw-uh, Goonan, Dexter, Fajardo, Bonilla, Kantor, Trisciani, O'Neil, Terrio, Sapienza, Burkush, Barry, Vincent

Absent: Alderman Thomas

1. The Mayor advised that the purpose of the special meeting is a public hearing to receive comments on the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 municipal budget and the proposed Community Improvement Program for the Fiscal Year 2027 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.

The Mayor 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:

"Resolution 'Approving the Community Improvement Program for Fiscal Year 2027, Raising and Appropriating Monies Therefore, and Authorizing Implementation of Said Program.'"

"Appropriating to the Parking Fund the sum of \$5,142,275 from parking revenues for the Fiscal Year 2027."

"Appropriating the sum of \$33,804,234 from Sewer User Rental Charges to the Environmental Protection Division for the Fiscal Year 2027."

"Appropriating to the Manchester Airport Authority the sum of \$49,366,765 from

Special Airport Revenue Funds for the Fiscal Year 2027.”

“Appropriating to the Manchester Transit Authority the sum of \$1,999,838 for the Fiscal Year 2027.”

“Appropriating to the Manchester School District the sum of \$234,981,749 for the Fiscal Year 2027.”

“Appropriating all Incremental Meals and Rooms Tax Revenue Received by the City in the Fiscal Year 2027 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 2027.”

“Raising Monies and Making Appropriations of \$195,337,885 for the Fiscal Year 2027.”

“Appropriating to the Central Business Service District the sum of \$700,000 from Central Business Service District Funds for the Fiscal Year 2027.”

“Continuation of the Central Business Service District.”

“Authorizing the Finance Officer to Make Certain Budgetary Closings for the Fiscal Year 2026.”

*On motion of **Alderman Dexter**, duly seconded by **Alderman Goonan**, it was voted to waive the reading.*

3. The Mayor 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.

Vanessa Blais, Ward 4: I serve as the chair for the Board of Trustees for the Manchester City Library. For over four decades, the West Manchester Branch Library has been more than a place to borrow books. It has served as a lifeline for the city's west side students, aging adults, and parents. Thanks to former Alderman Cashin, a repurposed fire station was given a new life, continuing Manchester's legacy of holding space for community institutions. Today I am here to ask the city to honor that legacy with a \$60,000 increase

over our FY 2026 operating budget. This modest investment could make the difference in access to all of the materials and programming that have for many years been available to the people of West Side Manchester. The building that we lovingly call the branch, fills a role no other city facility can replicate. As the only branch library in Manchester, it brings essential services directly to the west side residents who might otherwise face real barriers reaching the main building. Public computers, free wireless access, digital resources, and meeting spaces are not luxuries. They are tools that connect people to jobs, education, and each other. For families without home internet, students preparing for school, or seniors seeking connection, this branch is the difference between access and isolation. The city has already demonstrated repeatedly that it believes this building is worth investing in. Repairs to the original slate roof, restoration of the clock tower, new energy efficient windows, and funding for forthcoming makerspace all speak to a long term commitment to this location, and the commitment extends beyond the building itself to the staff, programs and services that make the branch genuinely useful to the people who walk through its doors. That need has never been clearer, despite operating under tight budget constraints for nearly two decades. The branch has continued to deliver core services without interruption, and the community has responded. Public computer usage and new library card registrations have grown since the branch reopened after the devastating 2015 flood, demonstrating that demand is real and rising. The branch also partners closely with the adjacent senior center to provide a vibrant, intergenerational community hub. It hosts school visits and offers a quiet, more intimate environment many patrons prefer. Critically, this branch is accessible to everyone. A city bus stop sits directly in front of the building, meaning residents across the west side can reach it, an example of the kind of access the public institutions are meant to provide. Manchester has kept faith with the west branch through floods, fiscal pressures, and decades of change. The west side community deserves that practice of faith. A \$60,000 increase is not just a budget line. It is a statement that the city stands behind its only branch library and the neighborhoods that depend on it. We appreciate your support for the Manchester City Library and the work that you do for the people of Manchester.

Sean Parr, 244 Sagamore Street: I serve on the Manchester Board of School Committee representing ward two. I'm here tonight to ask you to approve an alternate budget that

funds our schools. I have distributed a briefing with the key facts, but let me give you the short version. The Manchester school district needs a minimum of \$11.5 million in additional local tax revenue in FY 27 to maintain education at current levels. At only \$3 million, the mayor's proposed budget does not provide that. Without adequate funding, we are looking at between 42 to 113 staff positions eliminated, the possible end of athletic programs, larger class sizes and cuts to transportation for 12,000 students; students who are among the most vulnerable in New Hampshire. Our district serves the highest proportion of free and reduced lunch eligible students in the state, has the largest multilingual population, and approximately 25% special education students. We are second to last in per pupil spending. The students who need the most are being funded the least. The solution requires a tax rate increase of approximately 6%, which exceeds the tax cap and requires ten votes from this board to override. I want to speak directly to that ask. For the median Manchester homeowner, a 6% increase means roughly \$16 per month above the tax cap rate. That's about \$0.50 a day. For context, Concord recently approved a 12.2% increase for its schools. We're asking for half that for a district twice as large and with far higher need. I also want to acknowledge something important. This is not just a school funding problem. I've read the responses from the city department directors, the fire chief, the police chief, the library director, the city solicitor, public works, the health department, and many others. Nearly every one of them has told you that the mayor's proposed budget is inadequate to the needs of their departments. The fire department cannot run a recruit school. The library might close the branch. The city solicitor's prosecutors are handling over a thousand cases each, the highest caseload in the state. This is a city-wide underfunding problem, and it's the direct result of years of level funding city departments while costs continue to rise. I understand that voting to override the tax cap is not easy, but I would ask those of you who are weighing that vote to consider this. The tax cap exists to protect taxpayers from runaway spending. It was not designed to prevent a city from meeting the basic needs of its children, its first responders, and its residents. Approving an override is not irresponsible. What would be irresponsible is laying off teachers, closing a library branch and leaving the fire department unable to train new recruits, all to hold a line that every city department has now told you cannot be held. Manchester students, families and employees are asking

you to fund our city fairly. I urge you to approve an alternate budget that reflects the real needs of this city.

Deepasha Giri, 74 Cartier Street: In the joint meeting of the school board and alderman, there was a comment made by an alderman in response to the request of additional assistance and resources, who said that all we need is to return to the basics. The alderman proceeded to claim that in their time, education was simple and effective, and we must stop looking at all these unnecessary additives. In response to the budget cuts and the generalization that education has no need for reform, I'd like to remind you that that notion is harmful to the communities our schools currently serve. To be very clear, we are not basic. We are not simple, nor are our wants and needs to be generalized to an individual experience. Every day I share a space with an incredibly diverse and talented student body, all of which have varying cultures, identities, and backgrounds that form their specific needs. When we ask for schools to be properly funded, it is to ensure we create opportunities and resources that support our students, and that includes every single student our district serves. The basis of public education is ensuring that all receive quality and considered education, and to demean the necessity of the very resources required to do that shows a deep prioritization by our mayor and aldermen for all, for those of all walks of life. I cannot say this enough. The students of the Manchester School District do not deserve to be sized down, fit into a box of standards and unaccommodated by a system built originally to serve all. What I can urge for is a well-funded budget that supports the programs and resources our students need to thrive. I can urge that you see our student body as a community of unending potential. Most importantly, the potential future taxpayers of Manchester. While you work to appeal to the current taxpayer population, you forget to invest and support the future of Manchester.

Jennifer Mugisha, 121 Ahern Street: I am a student. I also serve as a student representative to the Manchester School Board. However, I'm speaking today because I'm a student who cares about the quality of education that will be offered for the students after I graduate this June. I've gone to school in Manchester for my entire life, and I have two siblings who are in the district right now, and they will be going to school in Manchester far into the future. This evening, I would like to ask for the Board of Mayor

and Aldermen to pass a fully funded budget for the fiscal year of 2027. Although I understand that staying under the tax cap for the city and preventing strain on taxpayers is important, the education of Manchester's children is even more essential. I hope that as the Board of Aldermen make their decision about the budget, they keep in the forefront of their minds the importance and benefits of student athletics, transportation and class sizes that allow teachers to focus on each student efficiently. Our students are the future workers, current citizens, and the heartbeat of Manchester. They deserve to be invested into.

Leslie Want, 623 Belmont Street: I'm a school board member, and I want to just first say I appreciate everything you all do. I know it's hard to run for office. I know we all do it because we sincerely intend to do the best we can for our constituents and our wards. I want to talk about roads tonight. We have terrible roads and we all know it. Every day, we're driving and we're having difficulty. We were having cars break down because of potholes, etc. and I know that Director Clougherty came to the school district and said to us years ago, you have to keep up with your parking lots. If you don't keep up with your parking lots, it's going to cost you more in the long run. I believe Alderman Terrio was on that committee when we discussed that. And I'm sure you all have presentations on pavement, and the more you let them deteriorate, the more they're going to cost you in the long run. I want to pivot now to saying, you think about the investment in the city departments and they're lacking. Last year, \$12 million was asked for by Director Clougherty and you gave them \$6 million. Unfortunately, that's left us in a situation with our roads the way they are. By the same token, you underfunded the school district drastically last year. And although all the things you take care of are very visible, like trash and roads and snow removal, etc., our schools are not so visible what the end product is. You just saw a senior speak. So, you can kind of imagine what our end product is like. And we start in kindergarten. We work as hard as we can to help them. By the time they get to be seniors, to be wonderful human beings, they can go out into the world and be successful. But when you underfund us, it's much like the roads. You give us a shaky underpayment and then it's not going to work for the future. I just want to say, when you underfund, it costs more in the long run, and that's what's going to happen to our students too, if we underfund our kids' education. And so, I'm hoping that you will override the tax

cap this year and help us preserve the progress we've made. In speaking to a principal recently in the middle school, he was around when we laid off all those people in 2012. And, you know, he said, it's taken us so long to work back to where we are, but it'll take nothing for it all to just collapse down again if you don't fund our district. I'm hoping that you'll override the tax cap, that there are ten of you who are willing to do that, and that you'll do what's right for our children here in Manchester and for the future of Manchester.

Nick Want, 623 Belmont Street: I'm privileged and fortunate and have a wonderful wife, Leslie, who's on the school board. We do have different opinions on many subjects, and I'm here to talk more about what we've not done with this city. I'll address you specifically, mayor. You have a great saying which says a vision without funding is a hallucination. You said that many times. I really want to ask, what exactly is your vision for this city? Because you have drastically and unnecessarily underfunded it. The school board and the school district is one portion of it. But last year we had the opportunity to fully fund our city to the level that the tax cap allowed. And for some reason, you chose not to do that. So, we have a tax cap. As everybody I think is aware of, the purpose for the tax cap is to prevent, as somebody else illustrated, runaway spending. Someone can't just come along and say, we're going to spend as much as we wish and it doesn't really matter. So, we have a tax cap. But also, what the tax cap does, is it provides guidance. Most people here are elected but elected from the community, not necessarily full-time professional politicians. So, the tax cap provides guidance. This is what is an appropriate amount of money to raise the taxes on the city each year, so that we can appropriately fund our city. Last year, I think maybe my wife or someone else mentioned that highway was underfunded by \$6 million. We could have raised the taxes more last year. People don't want to pay taxes. I don't want to pay taxes, but I need to pay taxes, and I want to pay the taxes for the things that I have. I have a couple of challenges. I'd ask my representative, Alderman Fajardo, my independents, Aldermen Trisciani and O'Neil, I would like them to ask you directly in a meeting, mayor, what exactly is your vision for this city? How can you put forth a budget that drastically and dramatically underfunds this city? You have a fiduciary and a fiscal responsibility to ensure that everything is done correctly, that we have the financial money that we need in order to fund this city. And it's not that we're asking typically for an extension or to have more money than is required

simply to meet the tax cap. But in the last two years, you've drastically underfunded this city. And now, quite frankly, it's time to pay the piper. So, if you want a budget that appropriately gets us at least back to where we should have been based on the underfunding that you have done, I would ask our alderman here, in your responsibility to the city, to put in a fiscally appropriate and prudent budget that fully funds at least to the minimum level our city highway, police, fire, and of course, the school district. That you would underfund the school district so drastically to try and make up for your lack of funding to the city by so drastically underfunding the school, I think is appalling. I've got tenants who are leaving because of that. I'd ask the alderman to fund an appropriate budget. And again, I would ask my representatives to get a direct answer from you, because a vision without funding is much more than a hallucination. Your vision is a nightmare right now, and we need to fix it.

Gary Hamer, Ward 10: I live in ward ten and represent ward ten on the school board. I am primarily here tonight to talk about the school district budget for fiscal year 27, but it would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that the budget on the city side looks to be inadequate as well. There looks to be gaps across the board in all city departments. We find ourselves as a city in a very difficult situation and facing some daunting challenges. There are no easy answers. The school administration has been very transparent in laying out multiple scenarios that would occur if the school budget is not funded at levels that fall above the tax cap. These scenarios contain various levers that would be pulled if the district does not receive additional funding. Lay off teachers and administrative staff. Cut transportation services and increase the walkout rate. Cut athletics or implement pay for play fees. Increase class sizes. Cut supplies and extracurricular activities. No one I've spoken to likes any of these options. None of them. Over the past several weeks, there's been a lot of numbers thrown out there. To me, these are the numbers that matter. On average in New Hampshire, cities and towns allocate two thirds on average of money raised through property taxes to schools. That's certainly not the case here in Manchester. Fiscal year 25, the percentage was just 46%; fiscal year 26, the percentage dropped to 43%. The mayor's proposed budget drops that percentage to 37% in fiscal year 27. Manchester is already second to last in the state per pupil funding. As you know, and we've heard it over and over again, the Manchester School District is the most complex

and most diverse school district in the state. 53% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch. 25% of our students require special ed services. 20% of our students are English language learners. The continued underfunding has moved the school budget into a situation where we have fallen behind the rate of inflation in the past three years. The Manchester School District needs \$11.5 million to even maintain current levels. That would be a 6% tax increase, which would translate to \$16 a month on the average Manchester homeowner. To do this would require an override of the tax cap. If this does not happen, there will be major impacts to staffing, class size, athletics and student transportation. It will result in a major educational crisis in the city if school funding is decreased once again this year. If there ever was a time to override the tax cap, this is the year. No city or school district should be held hostage to a tax cap.

Chrissy Simonds, Ward 10: I had originally planned to come here tonight to speak about the school budget. As a single parent, I know all too well how difficult it is to balance a budget. I understand the difference between needs and wants and the tough choices that come with it. I mean, my son would want a pair of sneakers for \$200, and I'm like, no, that's not within our budget. That's not realistic. But after speaking with residents of Evergreen Place, an assisted living facility on Beech Street, I realized I needed to speak about something else because there is no one here advocating for them. My mother lives at Evergreen Place and I visit her and the other residents every Sunday. I've had the chance to talk with them, to listen, and to understand what their daily lives are really like. The sidewalks surrounding the building are in poor condition. They're uneven, cracked, and unsafe for them to walk. Because of that, the residents can't walk safely around their own home. For many of us, the sidewalk is something we don't think twice about. But for them, it's the difference between independence and isolation. And these are not just residents. These are veterans. These are retired school teachers. These are firefighters, people who have spent their lives serving our community. Now, something as simple as stepping outside for fresh air or taking a walk becomes a risk. We're here tonight discussing the budgets and priorities. I understand because I live that reality every day. I also know this: our students are fortunate to have parents and educators and community members that will show up, speak out and advocate for them. The residents at Evergreen Place don't have that same voice. So tonight, I'm asking you to consider them to prioritize

safe, accessible infrastructure, starting with the sidewalks and allow people to live with dignity. Because the people who once took care of this city deserve a city that now takes care of them.

Suzanne Chretien, Ward 10: I'm here to talk about a different aspect of school funding. I have spoken with the aldermen about the budget for the school system and the desperation many of us feel for our students and parents. As a state representative, I'm quite worried about the fact that the state is failing at its duty to financially support public schools. The governor just signed a bill that completely ignores the judiciary and the state constitution in their ruling that the state underfunds public schools. If you wonder where that money could come from, let me just say that we would have had millions of dollars we could have accessed if the legislature hadn't voted to eliminate the interest and dividends tax. This only helped the wealthy and large corporations like Amazon and Walmart. New Hampshire has a problem with revenue, but it doesn't necessarily mean new taxes. The state and this city should want to educate all children. They should want families to remain here. They should want them to open businesses here. They should want their city and state legislature to support the most important people that we should be concerned about, the children. 90% of our students attend public school, and some are of the understanding that the Education Trust Fund is to pay for its public schools. But that is not completely true. I have no problem with parents having choices as to what is best for their child, but not at the expense of public-school funding. Your property tax money is now also paying for private, religious and private charter schools. The legislature also killed a bill in this biennium to cut targeted aid funds, only to Manchester, to the tune of \$10 million. This decreases our available resources for the neediest of students. We are in a time of great turmoil, and there is rapid change in how and what we teach children, with technology and AI coming to the forefront more quickly than we can even imagine. New Hampshire has not invested in creative revenue sources to stop the rise in property taxes. This is a huge task and I understand that, but it is worthy of our very close attention. It is a priority to take care of our children, and if we don't, we are just going to fail as a city and as a state. Supporting our schools is for the success of the next generation, the one that will be taking care of us. I know there are many issues on the city side to consider, but your priority should be the children that live here and their families. It starts with

schools and they should be the centers of our community. One important thing to remember is that many of the majority party at the statehouse now do not want the state to fund schools at all. Think about what that will do to your property taxes.

Gavin Telfer, Ward 3: I have come to speak in support of increased funding for the Manchester School District. I'm asking point blank that members of this board support one of the alternative budgets proposed by the Board of School Committee that goes above and beyond what the mayor has put forth. I'm in support of exceeding the tax cap in order to do this. The Board of School Committee has worked diligently to approve multiple budgets. And unfortunately, even the most expansive of those proposals, which I am supporting, by the way, only gets us about back to where we should be as a district and in line with the rest of the state. That's what happens when we starve our schools over the past few years. We ask our superintendent, administrators, teachers, and staff to do more with less. And they do it because they care about our schools and the children in them. But the reality here is that they are maxed out. The most recent budget proposed by the mayor is simply not good enough. It will require the district to find more than \$16 million in cuts that it just doesn't have. I understand that the mayor is required to submit a tax cap compliant budget. Given that, I would ask the mayor, does this look like adequate funding for the school district to you? You've talked about being a father and wanting to see a healthy school district for children like yours. You have folks who do this great work in our schools telling you that this is not enough. What more do you need to hear? What is your vision? To all of you, I know that it is a political risk to propose and or support a budget that exceeds the tax cap. It takes a little bravery, but I wonder what type of community are you hoping to be a representative for? Decades of research suggests a link between thriving communities and those that support their public schools. Failure to do so leads to all sorts of things like unemployment, crime, young professionals leaving the city. I could go on and on, but I only have three minutes to talk to you all. Ask yourself, do you want to be sitting here in a year, in two years, in five years, and looking at tangible gains made in the public schools and elsewhere? Or do you want to see a city headed further downhill, where at least you can say we didn't vote to exceed the tax cap that one time?

Debbie Howe, Ward 1: I have two children, a 20 year old and a 15 year old, who have been educated in Manchester schools. I'm here tonight to show my support for Manchester schools, and I urge the Board of Mayor and Aldermen to pass a fully funded school budget that moves our district forward instead of backwards. Manchester's student body is the largest and most diverse in the state, and yet Manchester's spending per pupil is the second lowest in the state. Manchester is the only municipality in the state where the school district receives less than half of the annual municipal budget. The proposed tax cap budget comes in at only 43.5% of the annual budget. It is no longer a matter of the district teachers and students trying to do more with less money. With the tax cap budget proposed this year, \$16 million will need to be cut from the current school budget. There are no easy cuts to be made. Staff would be cut, which would increase class sizes. Cuts to transportation services would make only those students living two miles or more from school eligible for busing, creating more opportunities for students to miss school and potentially fall through the cracks. Cuts to athletic programs remove a reason some students come to school, and athletic programs represent a major source of school spirit and city pride. Families making a decision to move to New Hampshire have more than 150 school districts to choose from, all of which allocate more municipal funds towards their school districts in order to become a great small city. Manchester needs to be able to attract young workers and families willing to establish themselves in Manchester, not push those families and young workers away due to underfunded schools. Manchester schools should be the reason families move to Manchester, not the reason families move out. My children and all Manchester students and families deserve so much better. Tonight, I ask of you, please vote to override the tax cap in order to pass a budget that will help keep Manchester schools on the right track moving forward.

Sue Corby, 2094 Elm Street: I believe I'm here tonight to voice my support for fully funding the schools. I believe that a strong school system, a fully funded school system, makes for a strong city. It attracts people. People want to move here. Home buyers, renters, people who will be proud of the city and make contributions to the city, start businesses, get things going, make contributions. It enhances our property values because it increases the values of our homes and therefore the taxes that we pay in to make our contributions through our property taxes that funds the city services and the schools that

we need. I also support a strong school system because I think that when students are well prepared for the workforce or for future further academic study, those students become solid, positively participating adults in our city. If you make the investment now, you lay the groundwork. Now maybe you won't need as much welfare, housing support, food support, police attention later on. So that is our moral imperative because it's our responsibility to educate all, each and every one of our students. But it also makes economic sense. I urge you to do everything possible to fully fund the schools. The schools were underfunded the last two budget years, 25 and 26. I don't think they even kept up with inflation. You just can't be cutting taxes these days. The inflation is way too high. So, we're not going to be able to cut taxes. And in fact, people need to expect that their taxes will in fact increase every year. That's how we make a contribution. So, in underfunding, it seems that it should be clear that down the road like this coming year, we're going to need more money for our schools than previously. Fully funding the schools and other needs our city has may lead us to have to go over the tax cap. We voted for a tax cap and with that we voted for a method to meet the kind of financial crisis that we are in right now. It was anticipated that things might come to this. This method for you is for you to vote to override the tax cap when and if necessary. And I believe it's necessary this year. Thank you for all you do and for your consideration of all the different ways of looking at this.

Nicole Gammella, Ward 7: I am a mother, taxpayer, and educator in Manchester. I follow both the school board and BMA meetings closely, and I'm not here to simply argue about this year's budget. I'm here to advocate for something bigger by sharing a perspective about what true, sustainable change must look like for our city, and how that, in turn, will help to reach the goal of a balanced budget while keeping taxes affordable in years to come. Too often, we focus on isolated line items, shelters, low-income housing, school funding, as if more money alone will solve systemic problems. We debate the cost of shelters and resources without addressing why people become unhoused or how to move them into permanent stability. Money applied without system change is a bandage, not a cure. Board members are right when they say money doesn't automatically fix schools or raise test scores. But let's ask the question of why. Why are student scores so low? The truth, outcomes reflect the system's students live in unstable housing. Family stress, lack

of support and city priorities. Our budget can prop up services, but if underlying systems are broken, we'll keep patching leaks with duct tape until the pipe bursts. So tonight, I'm not asking for specific increases to schools, roads, or any one area of the budget. But rather I'm asking you to think critically. Ask what does true reform look like for Manchester? Commit to developing evidence-based systems and frameworks that produce measurable, sustainable results for all areas of concern on the city side or the school side. Coordinate across the boards and with district leaders and with those who are working the front lines. United action, not fragmented fights over budgets. Advocate with our state and federal representatives, so Manchester's needs are understood and addressed beyond our municipal ledger. These problems weren't created by any one leader sitting here today, but with your choice to hold one of these seats or positions, you have the responsibility to lead change that is so critical to all of us living here. As a mother, taxpayer, educator, and lifelong resident, I urge you to prioritize the long-term solutions over the short-term fixes. Go out and talk to the people of the city regardless of your designated ward, but moreover, listen to them regardless of their party lines or differing opinions. Take personal agendas and bias out of the decisions and truly focus on solutions for the many rather than the one. As a mother, I'm raising my children to be independent thinkers. It costs nothing to respect others by listening to their thoughts about a topic, regardless of your personal feelings. This is a message I will always give to those I meet. And while it costs nothing to listen, it does cost us if our priorities are rooted in a tunnel vision perspective rather than focusing on the big picture. We need to find real solutions to the many problems that regularly get discussed in vicious circles at board meetings, rather than continually budgeting for temporary fixes. Strengthen the system so Manchester, the Queen City, can truly be the best mid-sized city that we all want her to be. Together we stand. Divided we will fall.

Erica Livingstone, 137 Vinton Street: I have two children in the Manchester public schools and I have been teaching in Manchester in a self-contained program for over 20 years. A self-contained program is a specialized placement within the district that is recognized by the state. I can only speak on what teachers and staff of these programs have been doing for the past 20 years have been nothing but amazing. These students work so much harder than any students I know. I don't want my group of students to be scrutinized for

a fine line in a budget. They have to work harder to talk, walk, learn, stay healthy, and to socialize. They are the first ones to be dismissed and thought of less than, and they are the first ones to see the budget cuts. The teachers and staff in these programs go through more than anyone truly knows. The teachers and staff at these programs are working miracles with barely any materials as it is, and oftentimes lacking staff support and specialized needs. I could go into details, but that is not necessary. These are the students that others feel are not capable of learning. I hear data and standards all day long, but sometimes the growth of a student is more than numbers. I know my students won't show up on the numbers that the district and state care about, but work the hardest and deserve so much more. They already live in a world that isn't made for them. The least we can do is give them the education they deserve, whether that is modified scissors, adaptive chairs, Velcro boards, task boxes, switches, communication devices, the list goes on. They deserve to access their education just as much as anyone else. When I hear about the cost of students and specialized education, I feel it gives a negative output and that this group of students is not worthy of the cost. All students deserve a free and appropriate public education.

Julie Turner, 285 Ray Street: I'm speaking tonight to urge you to override the tax cap and deliver a comprehensive budget to the schools and city. I'm hopeful that the stories I share with you resonate as you work together to find a solution. Anything under a baseline budget poses real threats to our schools. My family has been attending Manchester public schools since 2012, when my son began kindergarten at Webster. He proudly graduated from Central last June. My middle daughter will graduate next year and my youngest will graduate in 2031. That span is 19 years, 19 years of different budgets, class sizes, teacher contracts, curricula, and leadership. I'd like to say I'm a bit of an expert on the topic of where our district has been and where it is going. It is with that expertise, I implore you to consider overriding the tax cap and dream big for our schools. Here are three truths to consider. First, a baseline budget secures low class sizes. When my son was in fifth grade, he was in a class with 31 students, we now have a class size policy in place that caps fifth grade at 24. That is a huge difference in a district where 25% of our students are identified with special needs, 20% are English language learners, and 53% are on free and reduced lunch. In that class of 24, six students have IEPs, five students are

multilingual, and the 13 free and reduced lunch students have increased challenges. Our district embraces our diversity and our teachers go above and beyond to support their students. Increasing the class size will diminish the attention and care that each student receives. It is contradictory to demand higher academic outcomes but dilute the engagement. Lower class size ratios cost money and we cannot go backwards. Second, a baseline budget allows us to keep up with relevant curricula. When my son was at Webster, there was no set math curriculum. Teachers tried to teach the same content in each grade, but there was no purchased program, so it was up to each teacher to cobble together the best math lessons they could. Math was inconsistent across grades and between schools, and learning gaps were inevitable. Similarly, when my daughter was in middle school, she came home to report that they learned about China today in a social studies book dated 2000. This was 2022. Today we have vertically and horizontally aligned curricula in all subject areas. Relevant curricula like Ready Math, Amplify, and Savvas cost money. We cannot go backwards. Lastly, a baseline budget will help us retain and recruit highly qualified teachers. When I was first seated on the school board in March of 2021, the most common call I received from the start was from teachers telling me they could leave tomorrow to go to a surrounding district and receive a \$10,000 pay raise just based on steps. The continued teacher shortage is statewide, and in recent years, we have been able to secure market competitive contracts to help stabilize turnover and attract new hires. Competitive contracts and benefits cost money, and we cannot go backwards. Lastly, the improvements in our district over the past five years have been significant. I'm here for the long haul, and I hope that our teachers and administrators are, too. Please provide our schools the opportunity to grow and thrive and find the courage to override the tax cap.

Nicole Lora, Ward 6: I'm here to talk to you about my concerns about the school district budget and ask you to override the tax cap and support a baseline budget for the district. I have lived in the Manchester area for almost 20 years, and during that time I have been a social worker in a variety of settings, working often in collaboration with the Manchester School District. I have seen firsthand how our teachers and administrators go above and beyond with very little resources. I've also had the privilege of seeing how special our families and our students are. Our students are so dedicated and so talented, and they

don't need me to say that for them. They showed you earlier tonight. Our students always show up. For the past 13 years, I've been working with the school district through the Access Academy program, which I know some of y'all are familiar with. It's a college access program at Saint Anselm College, and any given Monday or Tuesday, we are lucky enough to have about 100 Manchester School District students from the four high schools who come to our campus to learn after a full day of learning in your schools. And not only do they do that, they wait for an hour at their school because of our bus shortage and our budget, just to have the opportunity to do that. I don't know about you, but when I was 16 years old, I think that might have deterred me from going on to do more school, but not our students. They're committed and they're dedicated and they show up. So, it's time for us to show up for our students and the potential \$16 million deficit in the cuts that we've been hearing about tonight are not showing up. And this is not just going to hurt our students. You've heard from other community members tonight. It's going to hurt our future. I've lived here for almost 20 years. I remember what Manchester looked like. Many people have worked very hard to revitalize our city and invest in industry. Some of those people are in this room tonight. If we underfund our schools, we're going to undermine that progress. People are not going to want to raise their families here if they don't have the opportunity for a good education. We're already seeing that our state has stay work play, which is dedicated to having young people stay here because they aren't. And we need our young people to stay. When we look at our workforce challenges in the state and in the future as an aging state, those workforce challenges are challenges in Manchester, too. We need a school district that not only prepares our students now to address those challenges that we have now and we know are coming, but we need a school district that supports families to thrive. I'm urging you to override the tax cap and support a baseline budget, not just for our children, because they deserve it and are awesome, but also for our future. Thank you for your time and your service to the city.

Erin Kerwin, 291 Ray Street: I'm the state representative representing wards one, three, ten, eleven and twelve. I want to start with something every resident of Manchester needs to understand because it will define not just this budget, but every budget that follows. In the state budget cap, a cap was placed on targeted educational aid. That cap applies to exactly one city in the entire state, Manchester. No other community is impacted, just us

and our taxpayers. Beginning next year, Manchester's education aid will be capped below what we are entitled to under the state's own formula, resulting in roughly a \$10 million loss every year unless that cap is repealed. And that cost doesn't disappear. The state has downshifted its responsibilities onto the backs of our city's taxpayers. There is no guarantee that we can repeal this cap. When there was a chance to repeal it this year, there were six Manchester representatives who voted not to repeal it. So, we are being asked to do more with less while our taxpayers are being asked to make up the difference. That is the reality behind the numbers you are considering tonight, because alongside that, the proposed school budget leaves the Manchester School District with a \$16.5 million deficit shortfall. But this is not just about this year, because next year we face that \$10 million loss from the targeted aid from the state. So, the question is not just how do you close a 16.5 million gap today. It is whether you're preparing for a \$26 million problem tomorrow. If we build a budget that barely works this year, we are setting ourselves up for deeper, more damaging cuts next year. We need a budget that reflects the reality we are in and prepares us for what is coming. And we need partnership. I am asking each of you and the mayor not just to act tonight, but to stand with us next year when we fight to remove that cap. Be in the room at the hearing. Use your voices. Help us make it clear that Manchester cannot continue to be treated differently from every other community in the state. Please make sure that we do not have representatives from Manchester voting to increase our residents' tax burden, because it's not just a school issue, it's a city issue. Strong schools are the foundation to a strong workforce, a strong economy, and a strong community. We have made real progress and we cannot afford to go backwards. The decisions you make here will determine whether Manchester is prepared for what's coming next. I'm hopeful, but hope requires action. At the very least, I urge you to pass a soft override on the revenue side so the schools can balance their budget and the city. That is also very important. And yesterday, open enrollment came out of a committee as ought to pass, and I anticipate it passing the House, unfortunately. If open enrollment passes, Manchester's budget is going to be decimated and our taxpayers will not be able to pick up the pieces. Everyone in the city should be calling on the governor to veto SB 101, the open enrollment bill.

Peter Denio 484 Vinton Street: I'm a Manchester resident of over 20 years, a parent of four. I have a 22-year-old and a 20-year-old, and I still have my two youngest here at Memorial High School. I'm also an eighth-grade teacher at Hillside in Manchester. I'm here tonight actually, because I thought it was karaoke and I got tricked. But while I'm here, I'll just say a couple things both as an educator and as a parent in the district. I would echo a lot of the same sentiments. There's lots of numbers, specifics, but maybe some things for you to consider that might be blind spots. First, I want to thank the members of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen who have visited Hillside over the last couple of weeks. I think that this was a great model of leadership by walking around, and I hope that those conversations and those visits help to shape that. 250 kids in a cafeteria is a lot different than a number on a spreadsheet. So, I think that it's important for you to see it in real time. First, the budget process itself puts our schools at a huge disadvantage. So as many or all of you know, the surrounding towns have their budgets set. They are posting positions and they are having interviews right now. They are offering contracts. I have a friend who interviewed in Bedford last week, and another one who is interviewing in the next few days. And with that and the rhetoric around budget shortfall and potential cuts in Manchester, we are at a huge disadvantage. We have young, dynamic teachers who are applying for districts in neighboring towns. And it would be a devastating loss for us to lose them, but they have to consider that as well. So, to be direct, this budget process, if they have to wait until June to hear what the budget is, we're way behind. And I would ask that somehow the school portion of the budget be considered somehow differently so that we can compete in March when other towns surrounding us have already approved their budgets. That's all I have to say. Conversely, when we don't have a budget until June and we finally start to post and interview for positions, we've lost out on a lot of great candidates who already have contracts signed in other surrounding towns. So, you can draw a pretty straight line. Any thriving city has to have thriving schools, and the quality of those schools has to be built on the quality of the candidates that we can secure. So, if we talk about recruitment and retention, I would love for a little bit of that to be spread across the school system as well. I realized that the board only approves an amount for the budget and don't decide how the money gets spent. That said, I would echo a lot of the sentiment about increased class sizes. It would be detrimental to our students and to our staff. 25 to 30 students in a classroom now is not

what it was even five years ago. It certainly is not what it was when we were all in school. The complexity of the needs that these kids face, look at youth mental health, statistics are staggering, and putting 25 to 30 kids in a room is going to be problematic, to say the least. Keeping class sizes small creates more opportunity for attention and to consider the adults as well as we think about retention of teachers. Teaching in a classroom with 30 kids who have very specialized needs is a daunting task. We want to make sure that we are protecting our most vulnerable populations.

Chris Turner, 285 Ray Street: I want to recognize that this is a difficult budget season for Manchester and actually for many towns across the state. So, I really appreciate your time and effort to understand the needs and options for funding those needs. I came primarily just to provide some facts and information. This is from the State Department of Education and also the State Department of Revenue: of the 54 New Hampshire districts providing K-12 education, Manchester is ranked last in per student spending in seven of the last ten years. We briefly improved, the second lowest in 2023, and third lowest in 2024. But last year, we slipped again after passing a budget that decreased in inflation adjusted dollars. So, to put that in perspective, last year Manchester spent \$18,020 per student, while the state average was \$23,833, about a third higher than Manchester's. Those figures are already normalized per student, so they already account for enrollment declines over that period, which has affected Manchester and actually most districts across the state. So, the takeaway is simple. Manchester spends education tax dollars efficiently. We do more with less, and we do it while serving the most diverse student population in New Hampshire, which brings opportunity but also some challenges. We do benefit from economies of scale. It's the largest district in the state. But when we compare to Nashua, which is a similar size, we spend less per student and our administrative salary costs, which I've heard people talk about it's bloated, it's an over spending top heavy school district, both district and building administrators is roughly the same as Nashua's on a per student basis. The exact numbers are hard to come by. Most of the costs that we have, along with most other school districts, are salaries and benefits. And those are driven by class size, which you've heard about unfunded state mandates, which are plenty and a statewide teacher shortage. Like every organization, a school district has to continue to search for ways to do more with the resources it has. But it's not top heavy,

bloated, or inefficient. Comparing property tax rates between towns comes with a lot of caveats. But for perspective, Manchester in 2025 local education tax rate sits in the bottom third of all cities and towns in the state. At the same time, over the nearly 25 years I've lived in Manchester, we've repeatedly deferred major facility investments in order to maintain lower education tax rate compared to other towns. This created a growing backlog, one that we're not talking about developing or addressing today, but that's something that we're going to need to be addressing in the future. So, we're not overspending, not inefficient. And we're operating at the low end of funding and education tax rates statewide. At this point, we've exhausted the one-time spending in temporary measures to make up the gap. There are no remaining options if we don't override the spending cap and tax caps this year. Deep, meaningful cuts are necessary. And that's hardly a way to encourage young families to move to or stay in Manchester.

Glenn Ouellette, PO Box 1006: I know you all have your pictures. You all have your wards. We are a city of one. And when I hear more often than not that we close things on the west side, which has about 35,000 of our people, it's a big faction of our community of one. I don't know if I'm right, but I should believe that the old fire station on the west side is an historical building. And we should be able to apply for some federal funding. We need to do more of that because there's less of it to come. So, we need to do our due diligence to get our federal taxes back that we pay here out of the city of Manchester, the state. For years, I've been saying that somehow the biggest city of Manchester, who pays probably the fair share of the taxes because there's more of us, we don't get our fair share back. Why is it that smaller towns think that the city of Manchester is so different? We're from the same state. We need our elected officials to fight for those dollars that belong to us. As it comes to the budget between the school and the city, they're all important. We are trying to build a city of one. By the way, we are a city that is now growing. A lot of properties are being built. That means they're further down the road. You will have more taxes to collect and to use in spending. We can only hope that inflation comes down so it doesn't override that. Public education is not public education if students have to pay to do sports, to do music, other curricular activities. Public education is not public education if we have a half \$1 million not funded for special ed. We are a city of one and every single citizen in this city requires their needs. Now there has to be a balance. But sometimes we

overspend on some things that we really don't need and other times we underspend. For example, if you have a hole in your roof, you fix it. You don't wait till the roof is done. For the past 20 or 30 years, our schools have been underfunded to repair because they wait till the building is falling apart. And then we sell the schools at about 25% off the dollar of the taxpayer. And these people who buy it make apartments and make millions. We need to close some of those habits that are not in the best interests of our citizens. Thank you. I hope that you all vote for the right thing.

Mary Georges: Thank you again for the opportunity, and I thank you again for your work. I know it's hard work. We try all of us, to do the best. And if we are here because we love our city and we want our home to be the best, that's why we cannot sit down. We need to stand for good. I'm speaking today as a state representative for families, educators and students across Manchester and also for the seniors who are taxpayers, strong public schools are important to the health and the future of our city. They shape our workforce, support our neighbors and give every child a chance to succeed when schools have stability and clear resources. Students thrive and the entire community benefits. I encourage you to continue transparency, communication, and collaboration through this budget process. Families want to understand how decisions are made, and they want to know that the district is planning responsibility for long term success. Many seniors in our city live on a fixed income, and rising property taxes put real pressure on them. This increase affects our ability to stay in our home, manage medical costs, and maintain stability as we age. Seniors want to be part of the budget conversation, and we want transparency about how decisions will impact us. We care deeply about community and we want to feel included, respected. I encourage the district to continue engaging seniors directly because our voice matters and our experience offers a valuable perspective.

Shams Muqdad, 287 Weston Road: I attend Memorial High School. As part of Young Organizers United, we are asking that you create a budget that meets or exceeds the tax cap. Like many students here, I believe school funding matters because it shapes the quality of my education and the opportunity for students like me. When schools are properly funded, we have access to updated textbooks, technology, and even basic transportation to school. Without enough funding, these resources may be harder to

maintain. As a junior, I built meaningful connections with several of my teachers. One of my core values is building strong connections and maintaining clear communication. I've been able to develop those skills through my relationships with my teachers. School isn't just about learning content. It's also about having people who support you and guide you. Teachers write recommendations, give advice about the future, and help students build confidence. They are there not only to give us assignments, but to also help us understand difficult materials and encourage us when we are struggling. These relationships make a real difference. When students feel comfortable, they are more likely to ask questions and participate in class. However, without enough funding, schools may have to cut staff or increase class sizes. This makes it much harder for students to give individual attention and for students to form those important connections. Finally, investing in schools is investing in the future of our community. We will be supporting the local economy and contributing to the well-being of the residents, including those on fixed incomes. I promise that if you do not vote to prioritize and support our schools, then we will not support you guys either and leave Manchester. Thank you for listening and please consider creating a budget that at least meets the tax cap.

Grace Ngira, 435 Merrimack Street: I am a student at Central High School. I live in Ward four. I am a student at Young Organizers United and here speaking today upon the new budget. School is important to me because it shapes not just my education, but my future and my sense of belonging in this community. At Manchester Central High School, I have found opportunities to grow through our academics, leaderships, and activities that have helped me discover who I am and what I care about. My classes challenge me to think critically, especially in subjects like history and English, which connects directly to the career I hope to pursue one day. Beyond the classroom, school gives me access to programs, clubs, and resources that I would not have otherwise. Whether it's participating in student organizing, writing for the school newspaper, or playing music, these experiences depend on having a well-funded school system. Without proper funding, these opportunities will begin to disappear and students like me will lose the chance to fully develop their skills and passions. School is also where I see the real impact of funding decisions every day, where buildings are not maintained and when classrooms lack materials or when students do not have enough support. It sends a message about what

is valued. Investing in our schools is not just about education. It's about investing in our future of our entire community. We all want to succeed here. We students want to continue growing in this district and feel proud of the education we receive. But that can only happen if the city is willing to invest in us. Therefore, if you do not fund our schools, Manchester risks families leaving to a point of no return.

Zoie Ouellette, 248 Prospect Street: I'm here to talk about the state of the budget in the local schools and what will happen if there's not a budget that meets or exceeds the tax cap. My education is very important to me, and teachers are an essential part of learning. In my personal experience, a smaller class size promotes engagement and allows students with a stress-free way to ask questions that they may not have asked in a large group. Freshman year, I had intense social anxiety and I was terrified to speak in front of my classmates. But at the end of the year, my English class only had around 6 or 7 students in it. So as the year went on, I got more and more comfortable, which resulted in my grades boosting because I was able to ask questions to the teacher without hesitation. While my larger classes, I never spoke a single word and my grades suffered as a consequence. If the budget does not reach where it is supposed to, in order to support our schools, there will be layoffs or teacher cuts, and class sizes will get larger. This will not only impact kids who are socially anxious, but every student. Teachers will need to change their curriculum in order to compensate for the larger class sizes, as well as the lack of financial compensation for their work that is required to teach a class, resulting in a degradation of student engagement and quality of effort on everyone's part. Along with the fact that the facilities and overall cleanliness of the schools are on an unacceptable level, even after all the advocating me and my peers have been doing. And due to the inadequate effort from our cleaning company Aramark, I do not know if I would like my future children to have the same level of education that I am currently receiving. Defunding our schools shows the students that they are not a priority and they are not important enough to support. You cannot expect students to perform at their best and try as hard as they should when they attend a school that is not reciprocated and you cannot expect them to stay residents in a city where they do not feel their priorities are valued. When I graduate in 2027, and see that our basic needs, like toilet paper, are not met in the schools, I will be moving out of Manchester and possibly even New Hampshire, and

my peers agree to do the same. New Hampshire needs more young adults in the population in order to support people in their retirement, those who live off state aid, and every other person who has lived in the city. But we will not stay if there is no priority to meet our expectations.

Ava Nguyen, 777 Grace Street: I'm here today as a member of Young Organizers United and a student of Central High School, to talk about the downsides of not having enough funding. As an active member in my community, education, sports and clubs are extremely important in character development, not only for me, but for every other student to ensure students get the most out of their education. Things like clubs and sports need to be funded properly so the legacy can continue. Funding is crucial to improve student outcomes. It boosts graduation rates and sets students up for success in the long run. Maintaining essential equipment, accessibility, and overall success depends upon having a budget that can support those needs. I, along with many other students, sometimes struggle to pay for clubs and activities because an application or entrance fee is always required. This makes it hard overall for students to get involved in their communities. Therefore, a higher budget is needed for our schools so students can thrive. If the budget isn't increased, families, young people, and students like me, will end up leaving Manchester. Our schools deserve appropriate funding. We as students are the future. Investing in our education is investing in our futures.

Mackenzie Verdiner, 181 Wilson Street: I know you guys can't respond, but I'm going to ask a question. I'm just going to ask you to nod or shake your head yes, if you agree. Do you think students deserve to have soap in the bathroom? Nod or shake your head. Do you think they should be able to lock the stalls in the bathroom? Nod or shake your head. I'm here today to talk about the budget like many others. I'm the coordinator of Young Organizers United, and we are asking that you create a budget that at least meets the tax cap, if not surpasses the tax cap, to ensure the needs of our students are met. I'm a proud graduate of Manchester West High School, and during my time at West, I played sports. I was involved in clubs and I did the best I could as a student. The city of Manchester and the district did not do its best to support me. There's no theater program at West High School. I don't know if you saw, but recently I'm pursuing a career in modeling, and I have

a poster up on Elm Street right now because of my modeling career. If I had that opportunity at West High School, maybe I could have exceeded more. But because somebody at the time decided that the theater program should not fit in the budget, that's an opportunity that I did not get. West High School has a frequent flooding problem in the winter due to the snow. There are bathrooms at West that are permanently closed and in desperate need of repair. These are things that could all be changed if you chose to fund the schools. And I can only speak on my experience, but I know it's not a unique one. Many students in the district wish that their school did more, and because of you all and your decision to continually underfund the schools, our needs are not met. These budget cuts will be strangling our current students and the students of the future. And I promise you that if you continue to underfund our schools, we, the young people of Manchester, will leave and we will not come back to work. We will not come back to expand business, to buy property, to raise our children. We will leave and we will never return. If you want to live in a city and in a state where there are no young people to work to contribute to your Social Security when you retire, if you want to live in a city that has no future, then by all means vote on a budget that reflects that. But if you want to live in a city where families feel supported and where there are young people to care for our elders, and when students have their basic needs met, like having soap in the bathroom, seriously, go look in the bathroom and check if there's soap, then vote for a budget that shows that you care or else we will leave and you'll be all alone, wondering why business isn't thriving. You drove us away. If you have any questions for the students about our experience in attending the schools, I encourage you to join us at a YOU meeting. We have some of the brightest leaders in the city that come to our program and try to make a difference in our community, and I think that there's a lot that aldermen could learn from listening to our students.

Barry Brensinger, 400 Whitford Street: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to our school budget. I'm realizing that it's pretty difficult to follow these brilliant young students, and I want to thank them for being here tonight. Once again, we find ourselves in the throes of a challenging budget season, this one particularly difficult. We've seen multiple school budget proposals and seemingly countless numbers. We've heard talking points from all sides of the debate and are nearing decision time. My hope is that having

crunched the numbers and weighed the options, we will pause for a moment, clear our heads, and simply ask ourselves what is the right thing to do. What makes sense for our city, not just in this challenging moment, but for our long run? There are those who say that our schools are overfunded, yet few, if any, institutions in the State of New Hampshire are as scrutinized as our public schools. We have 107 sources. Each one of which goes through intense public budget review. If there were real waste or a silver bullet solution to school funding, it certainly would have been found by someone by now. And among all of those budget conscious sources you've heard multiple times tonight, our district is near the bottom of funding of dollars spent per student, while also teaching the most diverse and complex student body. The challenges of which have grown dramatically in recent years. Does it make sense, then, to repeatedly underfund our schools and still expect to achieve the success our students deserve and our community needs? Following years of uncertainty, we finally have capable and stable district leadership with the superintendent and team that are committed to the success of our students, while also performing their work with great prudence and practicality. Does it make sense not to support them after years of decline? Many indicators, such as attendance, academic performance, and graduation, are on the rise in Manchester. Programs and policies developed and implemented by our school, teachers, and leaders are moving us in the right direction. Does it make sense to undercut them now? Eliminating critical staff positions and increasing class sizes? Recently, members of the New Hampshire Business and Industry Association, including many I have spoken to in Manchester, declared that declining workforce is the single greatest threat to the future of our businesses and economy, and our public schools are the place where the majority of our future workers develop their intellect, life skills, and fundamental work skills. Does it not make good sense to invest in them today to enable their success and ensure our future? I believe the answer to these questions are clear and compelling, and urge you to please do what is right for our students, our schools, and our city. Vote to override the tax cap in this moment. It is the right thing to do.

Richard Girard, 283 Orange Street: A new law went into effect with the State of New Hampshire this year. It's called the Students First Act. I don't think it applies to the city of Manchester, but it's the state requiring school districts to provide certain information to its

voters before the budget is adopted, and whether or not it applies to the city of Manchester, it probably wouldn't be a bad idea for you folks to require this information from the schools, because we hear a lot about funding. Is it too much? Is it too little? But you know what we never talk about? Where's the money going? So, the state law requires school districts to provide a ten-year history on the average per pupil cost before voters vote on a new budget. The same for administrative salaries and also the same for average teacher salary. I'd like to suggest in Manchester, though, that you not only request that information from the schools. You ask about the numbers of teachers over that ten-year period of time. You ask about the numbers of principals. You ask about the numbers of administrators, which at the district would be the director and coordinators level or above. So, you can put into context all of these numbers, I would also suggest you ask about transportation costs, because when the district brought it in house, they told you it saved money, but they hid it in the budget. You can't actually see transportation line item anymore. Same with the nurses. So, you might want to see where the more than 77% increase in state aid over the last three budgets, from \$61 million to \$108 million, has gone. You might want to see where the more than 25% increase in overall budget, from \$191 to \$238.5 million. You might want to see where that money has gone. How do you know whether or not the money is being well spent, or whether we're overfunded, underfunded, or correctly funded if you really don't know where the money is going? See, that's your job as the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, with due respect, to ask the people who are looking for money from you to provide the goods, the data, that shows where the money is going and what results you are getting for that money. And let's talk about the budget. We keep hearing it is tax cap compliant; it is not. The school district admitted at the joint meeting that they're including the statewide property tax in their tax cap calculation because it's collected and withheld locally. However, it's assessed by the state and appropriated by the state. The tax cap budget you folks work with is what you appropriate, not what the state appropriates. They're padding the numbers. We might also do well to take a look at what's happened over the last three budgets. \$36 million fell from the sky, and the board gave it to the schools. And July 1st, that budget went from \$191 million to \$227 million, literally overnight. The following year, you gave them a \$1 million increase, followed by another unexpected \$6.5 million increase in spending. Where did it go? And they have used \$21 million in one-time funds to cheat the tax cap,

to make pretend revenue was coming in to avoid spending cuts, which if had been made in real time, there wouldn't have been a \$16 million alleged shortfall you're looking at now. It could have been fixed two budgets ago for \$3 million bucks. So, the more you kick the can down the road, the more this problem grows. So, take a look at how much money has come in over the last three years. Take a look at where it's gone. And then ask yourself what are the results. And start to hold the schools accountable.

Kathy Turgeon, 202 Straw Hill Road: I was thinking the other day, Andy's publication had a pizza contest. They were ranking them. There was no category for adequate. There was no category. Chrissy, I'm sure when you are purchasing products for your salon, you don't ever say, give me your most adequate, please. No, you want the best. When the firemen are going out to fight a fire, they don't want a flimsy uniform. They want the best. Why then can't we have the courage to override this budget and to provide the best for our students and our children? Why would you, as a businessman who's looking to come to Manchester ask, what kind of schools do you have? Well, they're adequate. No one wants adequate. No one wants a doctor who's adequate. We need to equip our students so that Alderman Dexter, we don't have an inadequate police force. We have adequate people. The best; we want to be able to retain and hire the best. We don't want to have to sit and listen to all of this every single year. Make a decision that you want the best for the city and for the children. I am turning 80 years old in June. I have been speaking on this subject since 1973. Enough. Mayor and members of the board, get up to Concord, demand they put that money back in the budget and tell them we will not be satisfied with adequate. I am on a fixed budget and I don't mind paying extra taxes because it will make the city better.

Dylan Torres, 672 Lake Avenue: I graduated from Central High School. While I love the culture in our high schools, I have noticed a consistent trend of our schools not being properly funded. We regularly appoint Aramark, a company that has shown for years to fall short of decent. The bathrooms are trashed, while the sink's being fixed is appreciated. It doesn't go unnoticed. At Aramark, the cheapest option of three was chosen despite disappointment from them on all sides. This isn't an isolated incident, but the result of regular cuts to the budget of Manchester schools that has resulted in the losses of

teachers and classes over the years. Despite this, the school budget is at risk of being cut down yet again, spreading the budget of our schools even thinner and will result in students paying out of pocket for basic services that should be a given. This is not the attitude towards education that I would want from a city that I hope to have a family in someday, or from a mayor that claims to care about schools. If that tone doesn't change, I and anyone else who can afford to care about the education of students will be leaving this city. If you can't exceed the tax cap budget, then at the very least meet it. It exists for a reason and students and teachers shouldn't feel the consequences of that not being understood.

Jess Spillers, Ward 8: New Hampshire as a state, we don't have a spending problem. We have a revenue problem. Cities and towns across the state are crunched for numbers, and Manchester is no different. Until the state can figure it out and Concord, we have to take care of ourselves. Whether it's roads, whether it's police, fire, parks, or schools, we have to be willing to invest in ourselves. For now, in the mayor's proposed budget, nothing is sacred and it's frankly a self-inflicted wound. We have seen the effects of remaining below the tax cap these past few years. The school district has depleted its emergency funds trying to keep resources available and jobs intact so that our students can have the best. But that won't be the case if the mayor's budget goes through. Bring it up to a baseline. Override the tax cap for all of our sakes. Doctor Parr has shown and anyone can go do the math on their own, on average, a 6% increase for a family living in an average house just like myself will see a monthly increase in their taxes of \$16 a month, \$16 for funded schools, versus thousands of dollars for any private school. Count me in. \$16 for DPW services, \$16 to meet the needs of fire. I'm willing to pay that. And I know many people who are asking you to do the same. I'm going to go off script for a second. I wonder how many of you have been to Jewett Street School? That's where my daughter goes to school. There are close to 400 students in a building that was meant for 250. When Hallsville Closed, the administration over there absorbed all of those students. No questions asked and they provided for them a loving, caring, safe environment. They greet the students every day at the door. I see it myself. My daughter is saving up bucks so that she can become principal for a day because she thinks she can cheat the system and also get the \$50 lunch at the same time. Because if she's principal for the whole day,

that includes lunch. Our children deserve the best. And if a fire station was crumbling, we would fix it. If the police force needs new vehicles, new gear, we give it to them. But when Hallsville closed, we didn't do anything about that. It is almost double the size it should be. I am incredibly frustrated. I will pay \$16 if it means my child gets the education she needs. This is the beauty of living in a city. There are hundreds of thousands of us, and if we all pull together as a community, we can make it happen. I am imploring you to wake up and listen to what we are saying. We want this, we want it, and we are willing to pay for it. So please override the tax cap and give our city what we deserve.

Lawrence Bryant, 195 McGregor Street: I'm relatively new to Manchester, but I am a concerned citizen nonetheless. Just have a quick story for you. Came here in 2024, but I grew up in Camden, New Jersey, and when I was in the fourth grade, my favorite teacher had to put on a program for Black History Month. For some reason, she insisted that I recite parts of Martin Luther King Jr's I Have a Dream speech. Honestly, I was scared at the time and I just flatly told her I did not want to do it. She persisted through my protests, but eventually she did what any good teacher would do to resolve an issue with a student. She called my mother. My mother came to the school and they had a short conversation. I think he can play MLK. He doesn't want to do it, but I think he can. My mother shot me more than a little side eye and said, well, I think he can do it, too. You can probably guess what happened. I did that performance at my school and then several others throughout the city. Being ten years old at the time, I had no say so at all. But it wasn't because they did not care about my opinion at the time. It was because they cared more about my potential for the future, and they refused to surrender me to the misplaced idea that I had gotten from an abusive father that I did not have any. That is the power of a concerned and caring teacher working in concert with a loving and concerned parent. So, what I'm really asking you for tonight is not necessarily buildings and books and bleachers. There's more to be done in those areas, but you're already working on those things. I'm really asking you to care for our education system personnel. No one goes into public education to become wealthy. They do it because they care. But we need to care for them. They're human beings. They have needs to meet, obligations to fulfill, and lives to live. So, to the extent that we can let us invest in our education system personnel so that they can invest the best of themselves in our students while attending to their own lives in economic

security and personal dignity. I know this is important to you. It's important to me. I appreciate your time and effort to deal with these issues. I know that is not easy to try to allocate finite resources against great and growing needs, but to the extent that we invest in our educators and our students, that is the extent to which we will secure our community's future. So, I just ask you to go through this process with as much deliberation and intent as possible on behalf of our students, because their future is our future.

Eric Ratinoff, 7 Valley West Way: Next time, I am definitely coming earlier. These are some tough acts to follow. I'm the parent of a junior at Manchester West and a seventh grader at Parkside. I'm also the head boys track and field coach at Manchester West. I'm here tonight to ask this board to build a better budget, one that honors our city's commitment to our students, to our families, and to our shared future here in Manchester. Most of the people who have spoken before me have covered the facts, and they are sobering and they're hard to argue with. But I want to tell you a story. My wife and I are both public school kids, and we believe in the civic value of supporting public schools. But when our oldest was approaching school age, we were told you can't send your kids to Manchester schools. Thankfully, we ignored that advice. We've not only sent our kids to Manchester schools, where they've been taught by some of the most supporting, caring and creative teachers we could have asked for, we've also invested our time and our energy in supporting our kids and all kids in many ways. And we have not been alone. For more than a decade, we have committed to and invested in Manchester schools, and at every step we've done so in partnership with families, teachers and administrators who care about our students and believe in the future of Manchester. That's why I'm here, asking for this board to build a budget that shows that the city also cares about our students and the future of Manchester. I'm asking you to build a budget that invests in our schools and in our students and teachers and families, as those students and teachers and families have invested in those schools. So many of our students, including many of the students that I coached today, are already at risk. They're dealing with poverty, food insecurity, housing insecurity, challenging home situations, and the challenges that already come with being a kid in 2026. Passing a budget that forces the district to take drastic measures, but they're laying off teachers and staff, raising class size limits, cutting bus service, or making student athletes pay to play will just put our students at even

greater risk. But this is not just about our students, although I would hope that they and their futures should be enough to motivate this board to build a better budget. No, this is about the future of Manchester. Everybody says the kids are the future, but it's easy to say that. The reality is the future isn't someday far off. The future is now, and it is in the classrooms of Manchester public schools every single day. If we truly want to be the best midsize city in America, we have to invest in our kids. And they all are truly ours because they are the future of Manchester. Tonight, this chorus of voices is asking you to commit to building a budget that doesn't give lip service to caring about kids, but it is truly worthy of those students and our collective future.

Austin Bouchard, 11 Eagle Nest Way: I'm here tonight speaking specifically in reference to school funding as a Manchester taxpayer, as a business owner, and as someone who wants exactly what families in the city should want: strong academic mastery in the core subjects for the students of Manchester, delivered with honesty, discipline and fiscal responsibility. Let me be clear about what this is not. This is not anti-education. This is not anti-teacher, and this is not anti-child. This is a demand for accountability. And it's also a recognition that the city, the people of this city, are not being asked to make these decisions in a vacuum. The last three budgets have raised taxes. Now there's talk of overriding the tax cap when 62% of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck. 55% of Americans could not cover the cost of a \$1,000 expense tomorrow without going into debt. Homeowners are under pressure. Renters are under pressure. Seniors are under pressure. So, when the public is asked yet again to absorb more, it is not unreasonable to ask whether this system is being managed responsibly. Over the last several years, the district's spending has grown dramatically. At the same time, enrollment has declined. The district has benefited from extraordinary temporary funding support, COVID era money, elevated state aid, and one time trust fund reserve dollars and record facility spending. And yet, here we are again, being told that unless the city spends more, the system is in crisis. I agree that there is an emergency, but I think it is a different emergency than the one we keep hearing about. The emergency is that spending has risen, student population has fallen, and the district still remains near the bottom statewide in academic outcomes. The emergency is that taxpayers are being asked to fund larger and larger budgets without being shown clear, measurable return in core academic mastery. The

emergency is that policy choices and management choices keep increasing costs while the result remains weak. And that matters because this did not happen in a vacuum. The district chose to move towards smaller class size targets, more staffing layers and more learning spaces, and broader structural changes and how students are taught and organized. Those are policy choices. Those are spending choices. And I have yet to hear a clear statistical case that those choices are producing stronger proficiency in math and reading. I also want to say this plainly. I understand that Manchester serves many economically disadvantaged students. I was one of those students. I remember what it was like as a kid when the slightest increase in expense affected the food on the table. I was one of those kids and I understand these challenges a lot of these students face, and it's not that I do not care. I care very deeply. Caring about students does not mean abandoning standards. It does not mean writing larger and larger checks without demanding proof that the strategy is working. Not that students feel better, not that they have more sunlight. Not abstract language about climate and wellness or readiness. I mean real academic indicators. What increase in math proficiency is expected? What increase in reading proficiency is expected, what improvement in attendance is expected? What reduction in disciplinary incidents is expected? And for all of these, on what timeline? Because if the answer to weak outcomes is always more and more spending, but nobody can define the benchmark for success, then this is not a serious strategy. It is just a spending request. I do not doubt people's passion, but let's not sink the ship of state with a wave of good intention. The people of Manchester deserve a school system that is not only compassionate but competent. Not only passionate, but measurable, and not only expensive, but effective.

Wilda Turenne: I'm here for a different cause. I'm here for Nick Turenne who was killed on December 6th, 2025. I'm sure you guys have heard about it, but I'm here today because our family has so many questions. And of course, none of the authorities can answer. None of them. And even still now, and I just want our family's voice heard and his name heard as well so his name is not forgotten. He needs to have justice. I'm here for Nick, a life that matters. A name that deserves to be spoken in a story that must never be forgotten. Nick was not just a headline. He was a son, a family member, a friend, a human being, as all of us are here who deserves, which now he's gone, he should have

deserved dignity, respect, and the right to live. But on that day, they chose to kill him. Manchester Police chose to kill him for no reason. Which when that happened, one of the authorities already cleared he was not armed. He did not have any weapon at all. But somehow, I'm sorry to say it, maybe they tried to kill him because of his color. I'm here. I know this is not the issue that is being discussed tonight, but I just want you guys to hear my feelings. And that our feelings are still hurt. We are still thinking about him. We still don't know why they have took his life. So please, we do need an answer.

Rachelle Turenne: On December 6th, my nephew had been killed. Until now, we don't know why. We need answers. We need new body cam. We need everything we can. He was just 24. He was killed and left like a piece of meat. Nick came to USA on April 2nd, 2009. My dad decided to bring him here. Maybe for a better life. If we ever knew he was going to be killed, we should have left him in Haiti. He was just 24. My question is color is a crime? Is being born black a crime? He was no harm. I understand he may be running from the police because he was scared. We need justice for Nickenley.

Ophelia Burnett: I am the program associate with the American Friends Service Committee. I'm also on the board of Black Lives Matter, and I stand here before you not only as a Healing Justice program associate, but as a woman rooted in community, in care, and in a deep commitment to justice. I come to you today carrying the voices of many families, mothers, fathers, neighbors, people who are hurting, people who are watching, and people who are asking a simple but urgent question: will our community be protected or will our pain continue to be ignored? This is about our community. People here in Manchester, across New Hampshire, demand the truth, accountability and undeniable proof that every life is valued and protected. We come together in peace, but stand unwavering in our purpose, and we will not be moving until our call for justice is met with action. Tonight, I ask you truly to sit with those words, because this moment is not just about one incident. It is about a pattern. It is about a growing fear that the systems meant to serve and protect us are not always doing so with fairness, transparency, or humanity. And when the trust is broken, it is not easily restored. We are not here in anger. We are here in purpose. We are here because we believe in the possibility of a city that leads with integrity. A city where accountability is not optional but expected. A city where

transparency is not delayed but delivered. A city where every resident, no matter their background, can feel safe, seen, and valued. We are asking for clear answers. We are asking for honest communication. We are asking for leadership that meets this moment with courage, not silence, because silence creates distance and distance creates distrust. But truth, truth builds bridges. Truth restores faith. Truth allows healing to begin. And let me be clear. This community is ready to heal, but we cannot heal without justice. We cannot move forward without accountability, and we cannot ask people to trust the system that has not yet shown itself to be trustworthy in this moment. So tonight, I stand here with both conviction and hope, conviction that we will continue to show up peacefully but powerfully. Hope that you, our elected leaders, will meet us not with resistance, but with responsibility. We are not asking for anything unreasonable. We are asking for every human being for what they deserve, which is dignity, transparency, and protection. Let this not be another moment where our voices are not heard but our voices are being honored. Let this be a moment where you choose to lead with courage. Because we are watching, we are standing, and we are not going anywhere until justice for Nick is served.

Griseliz Glenn: I am the Healing Justice leader in the O So Beautiful reentry program. I just want to say you, mayor, you stand in front of the city and you talk about public safety. You've supported rolling back bail reform, arguing that people should be held before trial because they might pose a risk. That is a standard that you chose before anything. I want to acknowledge the family, that they are still waiting for answers. They are still waiting for closure. And while they are living with that reality, the officers involved have been allowed to return to duty. That should not sit right with anyone in this room. A young man, 24 years old, lost his life and to this day, the public has not been given a clear or transparent explanation of how or why that level of force was necessary. What we are seeing is a slower, quieter, process without the same level of accountability. The public is told to expect at the same time, the officers involved to return to duty, carry weapons and continue to exercise power and authority over the public while the investigation is still ongoing. This isn't about assuming guilt. It's about applying standards evenly. If public safety is strong enough to justify holding a civilian before they are found guilty, then it should also justify restricting an officer after they have used deadly force. Both of those positions cannot exist at the same time without contradiction. We have seen how quickly

the system responds when an officer is harmed. There is immediate visibility, immediate urgency, and immediate calls for accountability. That response matters, but it should not depend on who the victim is. Right now, what the public sees is a delay and the system that appears to protect itself first, and then the public is asked to trust that system. Trust comes from accountability. It comes from honesty, and it comes from integrity. You were all voted in by the people in this city. You are all paid by the people of this city, which means that you answer to the people of this city. This body funds this police department. It appoints leadership, and it has the authority to require and implement change. So, the responsibility is not unclear. It sits right here. The question is straightforward. Will the same standard of public safety applied to the public, also be applied to law enforcement in this city, or will accountability continue to depend on who you are? Because right now that is exactly how it looks. And that's not public safety. It's a double standard.

King Downing: I do not want to be here. I'm the director of the Healing Justice program for the American Friends Service Committee, and I came up here from New York City almost against my will, because I came at the request of a family who is already heartbroken and frustrated. Within three months of this happening, some of them are hurting so badly that they can't even come up to speak. So, I'm just going to take a moment, and I'm going to ask the family members to raise their hands. Even those of you who haven't spoken should be recognized. Please raise your hand. All of the family members, and then keep your hands up. I'm going to ask anybody who came here as part of the community or extended family who are also here looking for justice for them. Okay, now I'm going to ask the rest of the people here who clearly may not know much about this. How many people here feel that this family should get justice? How many people feel this family should get justice? Okay, almost every hand. And that's why we're here. We're here because time and time again we see these kinds of deaths. They are disproportionately people of color. And what do local people say? They say it's a national problem. Well, you can't have a national problem without a bunch of local problems. And it appears that Manchester and New Hampshire have a local problem. 41 deaths in New Hampshire between 2013 and 2025. Eight in Manchester. I might be wrong. Those are the numbers I've come up with. And in the US, there are over a thousand people who are killed by police every year, and they are disproportionately black and brown. So, when

we talk about it being a national problem, we want to drill back down. What can you all do about this? Passing it off to the state is really a shirking of responsibility, and I would like each of you to do everything that you can to understand what happened here, to beat the bushes in the community and find out who saw what, and pass that information on to the sources. We can't wash our hands of this problem. These families can't buy insurance against these kinds of deaths. The only thing you can do is hire a lawyer afterwards and try to get some sum of money that will bring back something that can't be brought back. So, we're here quietly, peacefully. We are asking for you to step up and not wash your hands. And if I have to plant an image, imagine that it happened to your son or daughter or your nephew, that they got scared, ran away from the police without a weapon and got shot down. Would you just wash your hands of it? Whatever you would do as elected officials, you need to do for them. And I'm going to leave it there. And we can't say it's a societal problem. I've sat down with police chiefs from all over the country, and they say it's a societal problem, but none of them ever say because it's a societal problem, reduce my police budget and put the money towards the societal problems that are leading with conflicts. I leave it all to you to do the right thing for this family.

Tara Haarlander, 21 Westland Avenue: I am a homeowner, Westland Ave in ward nine. Speaking as an individual, I am an experienced educator. A State of New Hampshire, duly certified educator and I was born, raised and stayed in Manchester. I am an inclusion trained professional, year 19 in the Manchester School District. I stayed in Manchester because of my education here in the Queen City. It was of high quality and provided me with opportunities and mentors that encouraged me to become the educational advisor, teacher, leader, caseworker and professional that is extremely committed to our public schools, youth programs, and our community. I am speaking to you tonight about the mayoral proposed budget focused on health and welfare. No cuts. More resources. Restore food and health and development programs such as Snap food accessibility and collaborations with our New Hampshire Food Bank and opportunities. Reinstate, choose or hire an Office of Youth Services coordinator and programs to assist and guide our youths that are facing hardships, especially our middle and high school students. Culture and recreation. Renew our community spaces. For example, in ward nine we have the Bishop O'Neil facility. When I was younger, I played summer league basketball there.

Now, our preschool children use this space for their classrooms and other play opportunities. We also have the Ballers Association in ward nine, other businesses, including AmeriHealth Caritas, which is beneficial for our Manchester families who need assistance with Medicare and Medicaid, health care in general, and transportation needs for our friends and family. Additionally, we also use the Bishop O'Neil space for our ward nine elections. As an elected select person, we would care to have a welcoming space for our neighborhood and community voters. Mr. Mayor and Aldermen, fully fund and restore our city services to make our community a better place to live and grow. Lift up programs like Victory Women of Vision that supports youth development, family life, and growing up in Manchester, New Hampshire. Lastly, our city libraries are amazing resources for educators, elders, and youth alike. Hosting movie nights, developmentally appropriate play days, books galore, and a rich history that you should be proud of as a city leader. Thank you and please fulfill your roles as elected officials and appropriately fund our home.

Erin Martin, 895 Belmont Street: I just want to take a minute to thank Nick's family for bringing awareness to this issue to our city. It takes a lot of bravery and courage, so, thank you. I'm here tonight to discuss how strong schools make strong communities. Mayor, I enjoyed your most recent news profile. Your pride and investment to make our community stronger was evident in just the past year. I've seen with my own eyes your commitment to Manchester and its residents. You attended my late brother's funeral last June. Not knowing us, but supporting my family and offering your continued support. You participate in local road races. You come to the Manchester City Arts Festival, taking time to stop at each table to connect with the artists. Your actions show engagement in our community and care for its residents. And we all know one of the most important parts of a community is its public education. Budgets are often talked about as numbers on a page, but they're not. They're moral documents. They show what and who we value. For me, this is about my seven-year-old daughter. She's in first grade in our district and is absolutely thriving. She has an incredible teacher, someone who didn't just stop when the class met proficiency targets. She met each student where they were and held the bar high so everyone could not only achieve but excel. My daughter comes home excited to read, to pick out books. She loves learning and knows science words that I still don't.

This is what great educators can do when they have the resources they need. They can unlock child's potential. But here's what keeps me up at night: this isn't guaranteed to continue. If the mayor's budget becomes law, we could lose over 100 school positions, which means fewer teachers, larger class sizes, less individualized attention, and fewer opportunities for the thousands of students in this city. Manchester's the largest school district in the state with some of the highest needs; it is the only district in New Hampshire where schools receive less than half of the municipal budget. Schools have been underfunded for the past three years, and that's a choice. Our state has not done its part. Our governor and state lawmakers have continued to provide the least amount of state support in the country. And the burden falls on cities like Manchester. But here's the difference. You have the power to do something about it. In the coming weeks, you have a difficult choice in front of you. You have the power to pass a budget that fairly funds both the city and our schools. You have the power to prevent deep cuts and ensure that what my daughter is experiencing in her classroom isn't the exception, but the standard. Because this isn't just about my child. It's about the 12,000 students in this district. It's about the kind of city we want and can be. So, I hope you take this budget, push it aside, sharpen your pencil, and start over. I ask you to think about all of our kids, every child in this city, because years from now we won't remember what the tax rate was. But we will remember whether we showed up for our children when it mattered most.

Ammar Sehic, 111 Carroll Street: I am a senior at Manchester High School West and proud to be the valedictorian of the class of 2026. I've been part of this district for my entire life, from my first days of kindergarten to the students standing here tonight. Before I talk about my own experience, I want to highlight something bigger than me. Every school in this district has a music program. It's one of the few things that connects us across buildings, neighborhoods, and backgrounds. Music isn't just an elective, it's a community within our schools and a part of Manchester's identity. When we talk about cuts, we're not talking about one school or one group of students. We're talking about something that touches every corner of this district. I want to speak as someone who grew up in Manchester schools, and as someone whose life changed when joining the band in sixth grade. That was the year I found a place where I belonged, a place where I learned discipline, confidence, and leadership. A place that kept me grounded when everything

else in life felt uncertain. For the past four years, music has been the heart of my high school experience. I've served as drum major since my sophomore year, and I've watched our program bring together students who might never have spoken to each other otherwise. I've seen students who struggle in the classroom come alive in rehearsal. I've seen new students find their first real community. I've seen music give people a reason to show up. But programs like ours don't survive on passion alone. They rely on instruments that need repairs. Equipment that needs replacing, and buses that get us to performances and competitions. When the budget is cut, these are the first things to disappear. Not because they're unimportant, but because they're easy to overlook. If you've never stood in a band room and watched what it does for our students, I've been lucky enough to experience opportunities that shaped me for the person who I am. Participating in the annual Salem Band show and attending Georgian Parks Drum Major Academy for two summers in a row. Those experiences taught me leadership, responsibility and how to bring out the best in others. But I'm not here to talk about what I gained. I'm here because I'm afraid of what the next generation might lose. There is a sixth grader in this district right now who is just like I was: curious, unsure, looking for a place to belong. And if these cuts go through, that student may never get the chance to discover what music could have meant for them. They may never hold a well-maintained instrument, traveled to a performance, or learn from mentors who changed their life just like how mine did to me. And once those opportunities are gone, they don't come back easily. I'm not here to argue numbers. I'm here to remind you that every cut has a face, a name, and a future attached to it. Students deserve more than the bare minimum. They deserve the chance to grow, to explore, and to be shaped by experiences that only a fully supported public school can provide. I want to leave you with one question, one that I hope stays with you long after tonight. When we make decisions about what to cut, are we protecting the opportunities that help students discover who they can become, or are we limiting them before they even have the chance?

Richard Dichard, Principal Manchester West: I am the very proud principal and 20-year veteran administrator in the City of Manchester. I spent most of my time at 9 Notre Dame Avenue, and I spent a little time at 535 Beech Street. That's the addresses of Central and West High schools in the city of Manchester. We could be changing up the speech order

in the graduation, Ammar. We have the 8 a.m. slot, and I think you should be able to get everybody energized and ready to go. I want to talk about a few things that I've experienced in my 20 years in Manchester and specifically my ten years as principal. I have never worked any following school year with more staff than I have had the year previous. Not once. My profession is principal, but you could say that I've been a butcher because if you all don't choose to override this tax cap, there's a person here in the back of this auditorium, my boss and superintendent, who's going to come to me and she's going to show me a number. Could be a one, could be a two. If we're talking in the hundred range, depending on the number you guys give us. It could be 5 or 6. I don't know, ladies and gentlemen of the board, and Mayor Ruais, I don't know what those positions are going to be. I can't fathom running my building with any or much less than I have. That's tough. That's tough. I'm going to have to tell Ammar or Deepasha who's already spoken, I can't run this AP class. I just can't do it. They won't allow me to run a class under ten. I don't run many under ten. I run a few because we have to keep those classes going. These are very, very difficult times. They are; I understand it. I don't think the average person sort of understands the true economics of all of this. The economics are about inflation. They're about laws being passed up in our state legislature. We have millions of dollars right now that go to that end up going to private institutions in New Hampshire rather than our public institutions. And folks call that educational opportunity and educational equality. I, as a taxpayer, have a problem with that. My taxes go to city services. And so, the state funding is, obviously, it's been called by the Supreme Court, unconstitutionally low. I would encourage, Your Honor, you and members of this board to have a conversation about when the State of New Hampshire is going to address what the Supreme Court has already ruled. When is that going to happen? I don't need to tell you. I've already explained to you. People have already explained to you what the cuts are going to cause. I'll leave you with this. We get a supply budget every year. Two years ago, my supply budget to run West High School was \$76,000 in change. This past school year, it was \$46,000. I run a 700-student high school on \$43,000. Folks, that isn't easy. You've got big decisions to make, and I wish you the best. And thank you for listening.

Elyza Agosta, 390 Orange Street: I currently sit on the board of the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission and the MTA. I took on these roles because I care about

affordable and safe transportation. Although today, I speak as a resident and a homeowner, specifically a homeowner who bought a house in Manchester because I could walk to work. I wanted to bring up two things that I saw that were a little concerning in the budget. One is that I don't see that DPW got fully funded and got the amount of money they need to adequately pave the roads. I also saw that we're no longer paying our membership fees to the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission. Why do I bring this up? Because in both these cases, I think it doesn't make a lot of long-term financial sense. If we're talking about the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission, the commission has helped bring in millions of dollars of grants. Just look at the Build Back Better \$44 million grant from 2022. The RAISE grant of \$25 million. They were instrumental in bringing in both those grants as well as millions of dollars from the state ten year plan every year. In fact, if we're looking at saving money or trying to find different revenue sources, I think we should actually lean in to more collaboration with the Southern Planning Commission, because I don't actually think we're utilizing them to their full potential. Along with that, if we're talking about transportation planning and we come back to Manchester and are into DPW, paved roads and intact sidewalks are essential ingredients of a functional community. They're the foundation that our schools, businesses, and homes are built on. Housing can never be affordable if transportation from that house is not affordable. Fully funding DPW and their paving program will pay dividends in so many ways. If we don't invest in our roads, sidewalks, and transportation planning, we will save a few bucks now, but will set ourselves up for long term failure.

David Todisco, Ward 11: I changed what I was going to say a lot over the course of this evening because a lot of really great people said a lot of things that I was planning to say already. So, I'll keep it to the point, which is that I believe that we need to focus on what needs to be done today, which is to increase the tax cap and pay for our schools and fund our city. We live in a world where things are more expensive now, and that's just how it is, and it's the way it's going to be. We have to pay for things to have them, and we live in a city where we are working with less and less every year. Our kids need teachers and 30 kids in a classroom does not equate to an education. I don't know if you've seen a

classroom with that many kids in it, but it doesn't work. Please focus on passing a budget that more than adequately teaches our kids.

Drew Nichols, 86 Plymouth Street: I'm a landlord to a family with children in our schools, and I'm a volunteer serving and advocating for a child in the Manchester School District. I'm here tonight in support of a well-funded school budget and strong city services. I recognize this is a complex budget. You're balancing schools alongside infrastructure, public safety, long term financial constraints. Those tradeoffs are real. But I want to emphasize something that should guide these decisions. Education is not just another line item. It's a system that everything else depends on. Through my work, I've had a front row seat to what happens when students receive the support they need, and when they don't. The student I serve came into this year struggling with foundational math skills, significantly behind, but with the targeted support that she's received this year and consistent intervention, she's likely to end the year on the honor roll. It's not theoretical. This is what investment looks like in real life. But that kind of progress requires resources, time, staff, and attention. And what I'm hearing from educators in our community is concerning. The impacts of Covid are still very present in the classroom and the social lives of our students. They need more support right now, not less. At the same time, we're talking about classrooms of 30 students or more. And for many students, especially those who are already behind, that's simply not a workable environment for success. I want to speak directly to residents who may not have children in the school system. This still affects you. The quality of our schools shapes the health care and workers that we rely on, the local workforce, and our businesses, the stability of our neighborhoods and the long-term value of our homes. Strong schools are not separate from a strong city. They are the core driver of it. When we under-invest in education, the consequences don't always show up immediately, but over time they appear in higher costs elsewhere. Whether that's workforce shortages, increased service needs, or lost economic opportunity. So, this is not just a school funding decision. This is a long term economic and community stability decision. I understand the need for fiscal responsibility, but I would urge you to think carefully about where restraint does the least harm and where it does the most. Reducing investment in education at a time when students need more support is a decision that carries lasting consequences. Manchester has great potential

as a city, but we will not reach it if we weaken the system responsible for preparing the next generation. I urge you to support a budget that provides substantial, sustained investment in our schools and the services that support them.

Andrew Redland, 44 Kenberma Street: I am an educator at Hillside Middle School. I want to start tonight by thanking everyone on the board who has taken the time to speak with me, has come to visit Hillside or to the 4 or 5 of you who have come to even visit my classroom. I hope you all have gotten a chance to see things in our schools that you are very proud of. I hope you have also gotten a chance to see some of the challenges that we face on a day-to-day basis. Mayor, last month you unveiled your proposed tax cap budget for FY 27. In your address, you spoke of families talking at the dinner table making Manchester a welcoming, family focused city. And you said when a child grows up with stability instead of uncertainty, the trajectory of the entire family changes. You said all these things and then presented a tax cap budget that was \$16.5 million, under what the schools need to continue operating as is. This budget puts nearly 12,000 students into a place of uncertainty. In order to operate under this budget, class sizes will increase, transportation will be reduced, or families will be charged. School sports will be eliminated or families will be charged. Bell schedules will change and 40 to 100 teachers will be laid off. The impacts of these cuts will be greatest amongst our most vulnerable students. Students in poverty, the homeless, multilingual learners, special ed, those who have experienced adverse childhood experiences. Bear in mind all of those students are found in nearly every classroom in this city. All of this will be done in the name of the taxpayer, but it will also be done at the cost of families, students, our city's futures, and our property values. In order to meet the baseline budget for schools, taxes will need to be raised using the high-end number that was presented at a meeting in February. My tax bill would go up by still less than \$50 a month. That's not nothing. I am a newer educator. Times are tough. I get that, I really do. And yet I think it's necessary. And I'm here tonight asking you to raise my taxes. If we don't, these costs will be shifted disproportionately to families. Charges for buses, sports, childcare with shifted bell schedules, tutoring if they aren't receiving the adequate attention because there are too many children in their class. It all adds up quickly, especially for families that have more than one student. This cost will be more than \$50 a month for our families. Ultimately, yes, we are talking about a budget

and numbers on a sheet, but we are also talking about kids' lives and the trajectory of entire families. Our students deserve personalized attention, teachers who love and care about them, opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom, and a city that supports them. I urge the aldermen here tonight to reject this budget and to support our schools.

Ali Rosenblatt, 795 Elm Street: I'm not going to belabor the points; I do agree with a lot of what's been said about fully funding the schools and the city as well, and as well as increasing the tax cap. I'd like to provide some background and a little different perspective. I'm not connected to the schools. I don't work at the schools. I don't have any children. I don't have any children in the schools. And I think that's important to name that. There are people that support fully funding the schools that have no children, are not working in the schools, are not even on the school board. This can be and is supported by a lot of people in our community. For some more background, I am a transplant. I came here for work. I love what I do, I love my community, but I'm starting to think about the future. And it really is concerning when I keep seeing the city continuously defunding the schools, continuously not funding them up to par and continuing to not invest in our city and making it a fruitful place to live, making it a nice place to live for people and families. As I'm thinking about my future, where I want to live, if I do have children down the line where they would go to school, it is concerning to me. All that being said, I do also want to touch upon a point that was brought up a few speakers earlier about fully funding DPW, as well as for the paving program. I think it's very important to fully fund the paving program and DPW to fix our roads, fix our sidewalks, and keep them accessible for people walking, biking, driving to work, getting around town, getting to school. This affects everybody's parts of their lives. It was brought up at the beginning about how this affects senior citizens in particular. I think it's important to fully fund the DPW and again, fully fund the schools and increase the tax cap.

Catherine Flynn, 15 Trenton Street: I'm going to go a little off script. I want to say a shout out to Mr. Redland over there who worked a full day in a classroom. He coached my son's track meet and came here to speak to all of you tonight. I just wanted to show that as an example of what an amazing bunch of teachers we have in the city and how we should

support those teachers. I am a taxpayer. I am a parent and I am a member of the community who cares deeply about the future of Manchester's public schools. I'm concerned about the mayor's budget. We cannot hold school funding flat while everything is getting more expensive. The math just doesn't work. It's not fiscal responsibility. It's denial. The tax cap is forcing impossible choices, pitting classrooms against other essential services. As long as it remains in place, Manchester will continue to fall behind. The data shows we are already underinvesting. Manchester, a city with some of the highest student needs in the state, spends thousands less per student than the New Hampshire average. Now we are facing a \$16.5 million gap when we make cuts of this scale. We are not trimming excess. We are cutting into the core of what our schools provide. I have an 18-year-old son who's a recent graduate of Central High School. In his elementary school years, he faced class sizes of over 30. He struggled to pay attention. He struggled to learn. His middle school years were Covid. That was a wash. And when he got to high school, he had the benefit of smaller class sizes, a strengthening district, a district with better curriculum, and growing pride. He thrived. He took advantage of all that the district had to offer: advanced placement classes, athletics, band clubs. This gave him the education and the skills necessary to thrive in the finance program at Temple University. He's doing great. My ten-year-old at Hillside deserves the same opportunity. Every student in Manchester deserves the same opportunity. We cannot continue to cut. We need to think about what kind of city we are building. Let's make Manchester a place that people want to live, not a place that people feel they need to leave. Because the reality is, the families who can afford to leave will. And that only makes all of these problems harder. I urge you to act. Reject the mayor's default budget. Override the tax cap and fully fund our schools. If we truly value education, then our policies must reflect that. And right now, they do not. Please don't let Manchester move backwards.

Sue Hannan, 13 Sundown Drive, Derry: I am the president of MEA and I work in the district in professional learning and credentialing. I'm here for our educators, as they are my reason. All of this is actually less than flat funding if you really do the math. And that's not a very hard thing to do. I've heard it asked quite often why the school district budget keeps going up while the student population seemingly goes down. Some things you need to consider. We have over 11,000 students in the public schools, but we serve over

12,000 because of students in charters and religious schools that we still have to service. Have your bills gone up recently at your house? Filling your gas tank went from 40 to 50 bucks to fill your 15 to 20 gallon tank. Try filling a 60 to 100 gallon bus tank. Try 20 buses, 50. Try insurance on those, upkeep, those giant tires. Heating. Electricity. Water. Think about that at your house. Now expand it to buildings of this size that we still have to pay for. That's where our money is going. That's why the numbers go up, even though we have less students. Insurance for 2,000 staff members. Premiums are jumping up over 13%. We're self-insured. That's where money is going. Special ed costs are skyrocketing. It could cost us \$1 million just to have two students placed out of the district. We have to deal with security and cyber security. This day and age is very different from what it used to be in the 80s and 90s. I don't like hearing the manipulation of numbers to say, oh, but we funded the school district with an extra \$2 million or another \$3 million when the whole point of what the district was asking for was something that was really required to make the district actually work appropriately. So, saying you gave more when you actually gave a lot less, was really just manipulation of numbers. Did you even pay to use this room? We use a lot, right? We use a lot. It's constantly coming to us, the teachers, to ask for special things to reduce funding and find savings. Businesses don't do that. Doctors and lawyers don't do that. Banks don't do that. They don't come to their employees and go, can you give up something so we can save a little money? We're professionals with degrees just like them. We lose 20 to 30 people by attrition annually. The numbers are going down. I ask you, without fully funding the school district budget, I would ask that you, Mr. Mayor, and anyone else who votes against this, to come to the schools and look in the eyes of each teacher who loses their hard earned job, and you hand them that pink slip.

Frank Staples, 332 Merrimack Street: I'm here for Nick Turenne. Justice for Nick, who is a young gentleman who was murdered by apparently three Manchester police officers. The death certificate says homicide. We're told that they're back on duty and somehow, it's still under investigation. So, they won't release the body cam footage. He was unarmed and he was black. Is that why? I don't know. We need to see the body cam footage. Why can't we see the body cam footage? I'll tell you why. Because this city and this state and this entire government is unaccountable. We're ruled by pedophile elites who protect

pedophiles. Manchester YDC. YDC. YDC. All I have to say is YDC, and I was there. You're not going to tell me what I can and can't say. We are ruled by two classes of people and I have it on video. Your parents, sir. Your parents were disorderly and disrupting us out there. And what happened? They went and told the police and then came yelling. What did the police do? They drove away out of sight and then came and started to verbally harass and attack us. And I called the police over. You know what they did? Nothing. Nothing. So, where's the accountability? Nowhere. I heard some people talk about on point with what we're here for, this budget. Why should we have a budget when we can't account for anything? Where is all this money going? Where is the standard? What are we getting for all this money? Let's raise the tax cap, for what, so we can have more uneducated people who can't read and do math? So, where is the funding going? Where's the accountability? It's from here to the Executive Council. There is a lot of fraud and waste and abuse. And we all know the Epstein file connections throughout the state, from Sununu to Dean Kamen to the Shaheens. So don't tell me it's not on point; it's all on point. The government is rogue and unaccountable. Look at President Trump right now, ready to obliterate another country. For what? To protect the pedophile elite class who finds it's okay to execute citizens. Execute citizens.

Mayor Ruais: Some civility, please.

F. Staples: Civility? Listen, your men executed a young gentleman who was unarmed. What are you going to do about it? What are you going to do about it? What are you going to do about it? What are you going to do about it, sir? Nothing? Of course not. You're going to yell at me for being upset about it? Not enough. My time is not up. My time is not up and I'm on point.

Mayor Ruais: I would encourage you, as the rules suggest, that we have to maintain civility.

F. Staples: What has been uncivil? What has been uncivil? Did I make any threats? Yelling? I have a loud voice. You know that already. You know I have a loud voice. I have a loud voice, naturally. You want to know why? Because I spent five years in solitary

confinement and the only way I could communicate with other people was to yell under the door.

Mayor Ruais: The three minutes has expired.

F. Staples: The three minutes has expired? I doubt it, but that's fine. Do something about these murderers. There should be a homicide investigation, and we want the body cam footage.

Mayor Ruais: The three minutes has expired. I would take one moment just to have the opportunity to say that the investigation that's been under discussion is still ongoing at the state with the Attorney General's office and with the state police. Chief Marr and I have been abundantly clear that we want a swift and responsible conclusion to this investigation. And that is something that, Ophelia, you and I had had the opportunity to speak about, that we want a swift and responsible conclusion to this investigation. Of course, we all want our answers to what occurred. I would say on a broader level, that we are very fortunate in the City of Manchester to have the exceptional and professional police department that we do have here, and we are very fortunate to have them protecting us each and every day in the city of Manchester. I thank everybody for coming today and having the opportunity to be here.

Mayor Ruais: Is there anybody else that is here that did not have the opportunity to speak?

Sarah Chadzynski: I'm not a Manchester resident, but I'm a participating member in the community and I want to clarify something. The incident that was referenced that occurred outside the building before this meeting was a misunderstanding. And instead of de-escalating the situation, an individual who was just up here speaking chose to escalate it. I chose to get in between and de-escalate it. In a time when emotions are high and political violence is real, I think we can all understand how that misunderstanding occurred. I appreciate you all sitting through all the speakers tonight. I was hugely impressed by the students vocalizing their needs and their perspective, and I hope you all take that to heart. And mayor, I know you will.

Heather McGrail, Chamber of Commerce: I know fatigue must be setting in, so I'll be very brief, but I would be remiss not to at least state a voice on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce here in Greater Manchester. I do not envy the position that you're all in. In managing a non-profit, budgeting time is where I get all my gray hairs and want to just quit my job. It's so difficult. I know the downward pressure that you face and all of the decisions are tough. One thing that from the Chamber of Commerce's perspective, I'm not speaking as a parent with kids in the school district, speaking from a business standpoint and what we see nationwide, and you've heard me time and time again say, investment in education really does build our workforce, our future, and the economic success of the whole region. You can see this every time we talk to a business thinking about coming to Manchester and then googling what the school district is like, what education is like. So, it's not just about our workforce being developed here as our students. It's also about who decides to come here as business attractions. So, there's so many different elements. And as you look at the decisions before you, I just hope that you'll be able to take a long-term lens, not just looking at the acute of what you're dealing with to get through this budget, but the long term vitality of our whole region and being able to prioritize workforce and education, and certainly enlisting any business advice that we can provide through our Chamber of Commerce members, we would be happy to help in any way that that's possible. So, thank you so much for your time and for all that you do.

Bob Fuller, VP of MEA: I'm a social studies teacher here at Memorial High School. I was not originally going to speak tonight, but listening to the comments, I changed my mind. I'm going to give you my address, even though it may not be my home address as 1 Crusader Ave. Because again, this is where I spend a lot of my time. And one thing I changed my mind about was we've heard from so many different stakeholders tonight, but a question had been asked earlier and it's been asked repeatedly why? What is our why? Well, our why was earlier. I believe she's already left now. But Jenny Mugisha, she's a student here at school and she's one of my students. And I get the pleasure to teach her. That's my why we need to make our proper investment. And yes, I understand that you have varying different priorities and you need to balance between the city, you need

to balance between the schools, whether it's higher taxes, lower taxes. It's a lot to go through and I understand that. But I have now worked for the city now, and I was born here. I've worked for the city for 29 years. I spent 28 years in this building because I believe in what we do here. It is not for now. It is not for the past, but it is for the future. Too many times have I seen us go year by year and we don't actually think about our consequences. In 2012 we instituted a tax cap, 164 teachers were let go and all of a sudden resources were then diverted from the schools. And we've been trying to dig out of that hole ever since. You're now faced with a similar choice. I understand that it was not your bed, that you're lying in it, but that's the bed. You're lying in it. And that's also why you ran for office. It's a different board even last year than it is for this year. So even with all the negativity, I look at it as more of a positive trend. I have faith that this group will make the right decisions and will be able to balance those fiscal responsibilities with some creative thinking in terms of cost cutting and also proper funding. I have faith you will be able to do that. This is the school of the Crusaders. I'm a Crusader. I'm asking all of you tonight, who will join also in being Crusaders?

Jason Kauffman: I am a special educator at West High School. My address is 9 Notre Dame Ave. I'm speaking as a special educator working directly with students who rely on consistent, individualized support. When we talk about the tax cap, I think it's important to ground this conversation in reality. It's not about numbers. It's about students whose needs don't change based on budget constraints. We are legally required to provide services tailored to each student. That includes staffing, accommodations, and specialized instruction. These obligations don't decrease when funding is limited, and they can't simply be paused or reduced. What happens instead is the pressure is shifted onto the system. Our caseloads will increase for special education teachers and case managers, paraprofessional support becomes stretched too thin, students receive less individualized attention, and staff burnout leads to turnover, which disrupts consistency for students who depend on it. For many of my students, consistency and relationships are everything, when supports change or disappear, it's not just an inconvenience. It can set them back academically, behaviorally, or emotionally. We had a teacher leave at the end or right before February vacation, and my students are still looking for that teacher every single day. I understand that people are concerned about taxes. That's a valid

concern and things get more and more expensive. We can't just choose not to pay an electric bill because it got more expensive. But a fixed cap doesn't reflect the reality of rising costs in education, especially in special education, where needs are individualized and often very intensive. What the cap does is force difficult decisions and only the areas that remain flexible staffing and programming. When those are reduced, it directly impacts the student's ability to receive a free and appropriate public education. This isn't about asking for more than what's reasonable. It's about recognizing that we cannot limit resources in a way that makes it impossible to meet both our legal obligations and our moral responsibility to our students. At the end of the day, you cannot cap what students need and still expect them to succeed.

Mayor Ruais: Are there any additional speakers this evening? Seeing none, I want to thank you all again for coming out. This is an extraordinarily important part of the process as the budget moves forward. I look forward to working with my colleagues here on the Aldermanic Board, as well as the School Committee.

4. The Mayor 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 of the Board, no further business can be presented, and on motion of **Alderman Kaw-uh**, duly seconded by **Alderman Dexter**, it was voted to adjourn.*

A True Record. Attest.



City Clerk

Meeting Start Time: 6:00PM
Meeting End Time: 8:50PM
Minutes Prepared By: Michael Intranuovo