

A win for people power: Supervisors and mayor restore millions of dollars in cut to services for cityâ??s most vulnerable

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A months-long campaign by advocates for seniors, the disabled and other vulnerable populations has convinced San Franciscoâ??s mayor and supervisors to restore millions of dollars in cuts to critical services.

In an agreement reached in late June, officials decided to restore more than $28.5 million in cuts over the two-year life of the new budget.

â??We turned around the worst budget year in decades. Imagine what weâ??ll do next,â?• said Anya Worley-Ziegmann, coordinator of the Peopleâ??s Budget Coalition, which organized a pressure campaign that saw hundreds of San Franciscans demonstrate at City Hall several times and write emails and sign petitions to city officials. â??Not every cut is won back, there are still some heartbroken friends among us, But you saved senior services, HIV services, prevented so many layoffs, immigrant services, and so many more.â?•

The restorations included more than $2 million in cuts from the budget of the Department of Aging and Disability Services that would have severely reduced programs for seniors and the the disabled.

â??When we began back in January, we kept hearing that there would be no negotiating with the mayor and very few add-backs. Instead, the board restored many of the services that seniors and people with disabilities depend on,â?• said Marie Jobling, co-chair of the San Francisco Dignity Fund and co-director of the Community Living Campaign, which advocates for seniors and people with disabilities and is a part of the Peopleâ??s Budget Coalition. They helped pass the Dignity Fund statute in 2016 to ensure and stabilize city funding for that population.

Behind the scenes, though, it also appeared that moderate voices on the board were looking to their political future, with at least two expected to run for higher office. Thereâ??s been speculation by local news outlets that Mayor Daniel Lurie wants to bolster his allies on the board by backing off on some of the more draconian cuts.

The mayorâ??s two-year budget had included roughly $9 million in cuts to services for seniors and people with disabilities, including $3 million from the Department of Disability and Aging Services. Services who had at least some funding restored included legal assistance, digital access, workforce assistance, home care advocacy, LGBTQ+ programs, and several of the cityâ??s popular â??Villageâ?• programs.

The news came earlier than expected after three protests over the last two weeks, dubbed â??All Roads Lead to City Hall, pulled out all the stops. Residents and representatives of the Peopleâ??s Budget Coalition, comprising dozens of nonprofit service providers, gathered at Civic Center Plaza, giving speeches in support of their programs and marched through City Hall led by seniors dressed as â??Wizard of Ozâ?• characters Dorothy, the Tin Woodman, the Scarecrow and the Cowardly Lion. They implored city officials to â??have a heart, a brain and some courage.â?•

Opponents of the cuts again packed City Hall on June 24, with hundreds of speakers lining up outside the Supervisorâ??s Chamber in a line that snaked through much of the second floor.

It was a multi-generational crowd, with seniors, Chinatown residents, the disabled, and students imploring the Budget and Appropriations Committee to restore cuts to services for some of the cityâ??s most vulnerable populations.

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Betty Traynor came to City Hall to fight cuts. (Photo by Bill Snyder)

Betty Traynor, 81, crowded into the office of Supervisor Jackie Felder to lobby against the cuts. The supervisor wasnâ??t there, but an aide listened and appeared sympathetic.â•There is money â?? millions â?? for public works to fill potholes, why canâ??t at least some of that go to seniors?â•• asked Traynor, a member of Senior and Disability Action.

The Oz characters were back, sitting near the chamberâ??s exit, cheering and thanking each speaker as they finished their testimony. â??Weâ??re not done fighting,â•• said Hene Kelly, dressed as Dorothy.



Kate Kuckro, co-executive director of the Community Living Campaign. (Photos by Robin Evans)

â??This has just been an amazing day,â?• said Kate Kuckro on June 18 when up to 150 people gathered for a second day of protest. â??Weâ??re cautiously optimistic.â?• Kuckro is co-executive director of the Community Living Campaign, which worked with the Dignity Fund Coalitionto help pass the Dignity Fund statute in 2016 to ensure and stabilize city funding for that population.

The same group had toured offices of the mayor and supervisors on June 15, sharing their own lyrics to the tune of â??Somewhere Over the Rainbow:â?•

â??Somewhere in San Francisco, there are funds, to help those needing home care, food or a computer hub; Somehow in San Francisco, thereâ??s a way, to help disabled and seniors, stay in their homes and age. Somewhere, thereâ??s a way, to pass a real peopleâ??s budget, so we can stay.â?•



The â??Wizard of Ozâ?• foursome singing in front of City Hall Thursday. From left to right are: Erik Greenfrost of Senior and Disability Action, Art Persyko as the Tin Man, Glen Van Lehn as the Cowardly Lion, Hene Kelly as Dorothy and Michael Lyon as the Scarecrow. Below right, Michelle Magee, a volunteer with Indivisible SF and member of the Peopleâ??s Budget Coalition, claims the reduced budget will cut essential services to over 26,000 low-income, vulnerable San Franciscans and threaten the jobs of 1,000 nonprofit and city workers. â??Do not turn San Francisco into a billionaireâ??s playground,â?• she implored the mayor. (Photos by Robin Evans)

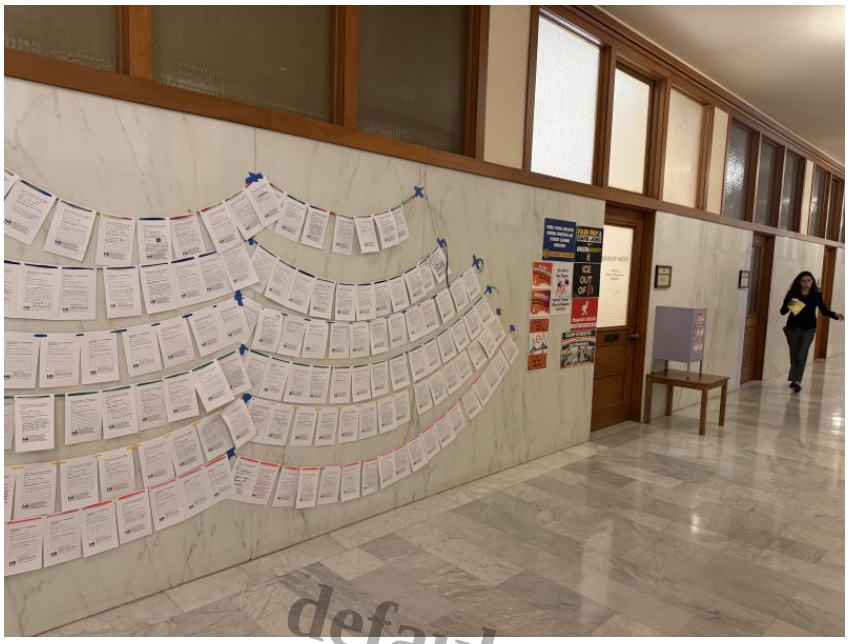


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On Thursday, the focus was strictly on the office of Mayor Daniel Lurie, who was not there. An aide at the door was unable to say why the mayor could not attend or what he was doing at the time. Neither were any other of the mayorâ??s representatives on hand or able to comment. Instead, the aides suggested sending an email to the city communications department.

â??After today, weâ??re continuing to do a lot of behind-the-scenes work,â?• said Kuckro. â??Weâ??re talking to supervisors and their staff and continuing to coordinate with our partners and coalitions.â?•

On June 25, the day after the public comment hearing, the supervisors were to negotiate with one another to reallocate any savings identified by the cityâ??s budget analyst to â??add-backsâ?• to restore cuts. Those recommendations, along with additional increases provided by the mayor, will be finalized on July 14 and voted on July 21.



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At Mondayâ??s protest, much to the delight of the crowd, Supervisor Connie Chan, who represents the Richmond District, popped out of her office and gave an impromptu speech, saying, â??We will stay in this fight until we get this done.â?• Chan chairs the supervisorâ??s Budget Committee and is running for the Congressional seat held by retiring Representative Nancy Pelosi.



Top, postcard comments about the budget cuts fill the wall to the left of District 10 Supervisor Shamonn Waltonâ??s office. Below, protesters display the cards as they visit supervisors offices on Monday. (Photos by Robin Evans and the Community Living Campaign)

A few offices down the hall, Supervisor Danny Sauter, who represents Chinatown and other areas on the cityâ??s north side, noted that his district has the highest number of seniors in the city, and he pledged to fight the cuts. After he spoke, the crowd chanted â??No place like homeâ?• and waved

lollipops, a reminder of the movieâ??s Lollypop Guild.

â??Tin Manâ?• Art Persyko, 75, said Mondayâ??s action reminded him of acting in school pageants in his youth, and said the protest was â??inspiring and we seem to be having an effect.â?•

Dressed as Dorothy, complete with a farm girlâ??s gingham dress and a toy dog in her basket, 84-year-old Hene Kelly of Noe Valley led the crowd around the second floor of City Hall. â??Iâ??m asking the mayor to have a heart and use his brain to do the right thing,â?• she said.



Richard Wood Massi complained about the trickle-down effect President Trumpâ??s â??One Big, Beautiful Billâ?• is having on local budgets. (Photo by Robin Evans)

Thursday was a combination protest rally and picnic. Crowds gathered on blankets on the plaza in front of City Hall as program after program affected by the cuts â?? from senior and disability advocates to HIV prevention groups to City College sexual violence prevention, homeless and housing support and more â?? made presentations or performed.

â??Iâ??m here because funds for so many socially constructive programs are being diminished, especially by the â??One Big, Beautiful Billâ??,â?• said Richard Wood Massi, 80. â??Itâ??s having ripple effects down to every local level. Iâ??ve been getting letters from my health insurance company

saying that several of my doctors are no longer on contract, that I canâ??t see them without paying.

And because San Francisco doesnâ??t seem to be willing to tax billionaires or the very wealthy, who could easily afford to help out â?¦ we need to protest, to stand up and unite with each other and forget about our differences.â?•



Maria Salcedo, 55, joined the Thursday protest at City Hall with her daughter. She is worried about losing her job. (Photo by Robin Evans)

For others, the cuts pose loss of services that help them navigate an increasingly digital world, fill income gaps or even preclude poverty with part-time jobs, stay agile through exercise activities, healthy through food and nutrition programs and avoid isolation â?? a documented accelerator of health decline â?? through home support and social engagement offered by programs such as the â??villages.â?•

Maria Salcedo, 55, stood outside the mayorâ??s office with her daughter, whose face is tattooed on her chest. An employee of Homey, a referral agency for community service work, she said, â??Iâ??m afraid Iâ??ll lose my job. We already lost half of the staff due to cuts.â?•

Kelly recognized the mayor is in a tight situation, although heâ??s giving an additional $75 million to public safety agencies: San Francisco Police, the Sheriffâ??s Department, the Probation Department, and the District Attorneyâ??s Office.



â??We donâ??t live in Oz,â?? Hene Kelly declared at City Hall, â??but we also donâ??t want to be forced to move to Kansas.â?• (Photo courtesy of the Community Living Campaign)

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â??We donâ??t live in Oz and we know that San Francisco budget situation is dire,â?• she said. â??Some hard decisions will need to be made. But we also donâ??t want to be forced to move to Kansas.

â??San Francisco is our home. It is where we worked, where our providers are, where our friends are, where our communities are. Without them, we will suffer greatly, and for many of us be â??forced to go without basic necessities and possibly be forced into a facility or to become homeless. You canâ??t let this happen.â?•

Category

1. Life in the Later Lane

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