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Budget Cuts Harm Disabled Angelenos & the Process Is Inaccessible (CF 23-0600)

1 message

Sara Johnson <sarajohnsonpm@gmail.com>

Sat, Apr 19, 2025 at 1:26 PM

To: Clerk.BudgetFinanceandInnovation@lacity.org

Cc: DOD.Contact@lacity.org, Clerk.CPS@lacity.org, katy.yaroslavsky@lacity.org, clerk.interpretation@lacity.org

Dear Budget and Finance Committee and City Clerk,

My name is Sara Johnson], and I am submitting public comment on Council File 23-0600 with urgent concern that the structure of the City's budget process and proposed cuts will severely harm disabled, chronically ill, unhoused, and immunocompromised Angelenos. There's been no transparency that the existing equity guidance has been applied, and the public comment process itself excludes those directly impacted and most affected from participating, which is a violation of the Brown Act, ADA, and CA State Constitution.

These proposed budget cuts will harm vulnerable communities. Particularly, disabled people, unhoused residents, older adults, and people living with HIV will risk service losses to critical programs including:

- In-home caregiving and personal attendant services
- Paratransit and other accessible transportation
- Housing retention and disability-specific tenancy support
- HIV care coordination and outreach
- Public health services and disability accommodations

The budget proposal threatens the stability and lives of people who are already navigating severe medical, structural, and economic barriers including millions of Angelenos with Long COVID, ME/CFS, neuroimmune conditions, and complex chronic illness. These critical survival needs aren't luxuries.

We can prevent the predictable harm these cuts will cause because we've already seen the consequences of similar decisions:

- A dialysis patient died after paratransit dropped him off and failed to walk him to his door. He collapsed outside and was found dead. The agency was ordered to pay \$17.5 million in damages [1]
- Disabled tenants were pushed closer to eviction and homelessness when LA County eliminated \$5 million in landlord coordination and housing support services [2]
- Loss of in-home caregiving has led directly to ER visits, health collapse, and institutionalization when safer, more appropriate care was available [3]

The City has tools to prevent harm to our communities during budget decisions. The Equity in Budgeting Rubric and the MADE index [4] are designed to ensure vulnerable populations are protected yet the City hasn't demonstrated if or how these tools were applied to the current proposed cuts.

The Civil + Human Rights and Equity Department, whose mission is "to reduce bias and injustices while leveling the playing field through community engagement, equity initiatives, and upward mobility programming", was created to prevent this kind of harm. [5] If life-sustaining programs are cut without public review, equity safeguards, or basic access to speak out, the City betrays that mission.

The budget hearing process on April 25 and 28 excludes the very people it affects most. There are no remote options despite the City offering that access to other meetings. Disabled, chronically ill, and immunocompromised Angelenos cannot safely or feasibly attend in person due to infection risk, mobility limitations, transportation access, and disabling symptoms. The structure of the process itself creates a severe and real barrier. By only accepting public comment in person, those most affected are prevented from participating.

This exclusion is a structural failure that silences those are most at stake and likely violates:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Title II, 28 C.F.R. § 35.130, which prohibits policies with the effect of excluding disabled people
- The Ralph M. Brown Act, Government Code § 54953, which requires meetings to be open and accessible and prohibits procedures that result in functional exclusion when alternatives exist
- The California Constitution, Article I, Section 3(b), which protects the public's right to meaningful participation in local government

Remote participation is not a luxurious convenience. It's an expected essential to equitable governance. Denying it during decisions that impact life-sustaining services creates structural harm and silences those most at risk. As Chair of the Budget and Finance Committee, Councilmember Katy Yaroslavsky is responsible for ensuring that impacted communities can take part in decisions affecting their safety, housing, and care. Geoffrey Straniere, as ADA Compliance Officer and Director of the City's Disability Access Division, is responsible for ensuring compliance with federal access law. Disability justice holds that access is a shared obligation, not an individual burden, and we expect this reflected in public engagement.

[Optional Personal Statement Section — Please customize to describe how these cuts or the inaccessible hearing process will affect you or someone you know. Example: I have no way to speak at the hearing without remote access since I have Long COVID and ME/CFS. I can't attend in person due to COVID infection risk and post-exertional crashes. If in-home care is cut, I will lose access to critical care.]

Requested Actions:

1. Protect and fully fund all programs serving disabled, chronically ill, unhoused, aging, and immunocompromised residents
2. Immediately implement remote public comment options (phone, video, or real-time written access) for all budget hearings, including April 25 and April 28
3. Release the equity scores or rubric evaluations for any proposed cuts to programs that serve high-need communities
4. Ensure this comment is included in the public record for Council File 23-0600
5. Provide written confirmation of how the City will address these ADA, Brown Act, and constitutional access violations

This also serves as my ADA accommodation request, if this must be formally recognized as such. I therefore request written acknowledgment and a timely response explaining how access will be addressed before April 25.

Sincerely,
Sara Johnson

Silver Lake, Los Angeles

REFERENCES:

1. Noah Goldberg, "Disabled Rider's Death to Cost L.A. County Agency \$17.5 Million, Jury Rules," Los Angeles Times, December 15, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-12-15/death-of-disabled-rider-will-cost-l-a-county-agency-17-5-million-jury-rules>
2. Aaron Schrank, "LA County Supervisors Approve More Cuts to Homelessness Programs," LAist, April 16, 2025, <https://laist.com/news/housing-homelessness/la-county-supervisors-approve-more-cuts-to-homelessness-programs>
3. "Training In-Home Caregivers Cuts down on Elderly ER Visits, Hospitalizations," Healthcare Finance News, 2018, <https://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/news/training-home-caregivers-cuts-down-elderly-er-visits-hospitalizations>
4. "OFFICE of the CITY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER," accessed April 19, 2025, https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2023/23-0354_rpt_CAO_03-28-24.pdf
5. "Our Story and Mission | Civil + Human Rights and Equity Department," Lacity.gov, 2020, <https://civilandhumanrights.lacity.gov/about/mission>.