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BALTIMORE CITY IS NOT FOR SALE:
CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES TO OPPOSE DEVASTATING BALLOT MEASURES
Coalition effort to preserve essential services, schools, representative democracy
New research details destructive financial fallout of ill-considered property tax proposal

BALTIMORE CITY – Baltimore City elected officials, public sector workers, and residents today announced the launch of Baltimore City Not for Sale, a grassroots campaign coalition to stop ruinous ballot questions that may appear on the November 2024 ballot. Big money interests from inside and outside Baltimore City are using the ballot question process to attempt to reshape the city to benefit big businesses, developers, and the wealthiest residents.

The so-called “Renew Baltimore” ballot effort, funded by developers, landlords, real estate interests, and rich homeowners, proposes to cut the city’s property tax rate by 44% over six years, costing the city hundreds of millions in lost revenue once fully phased in. The coalition is also opposing a ballot proposal that would reduce the number of Baltimore City Council districts from 14 to eight seats, denying residents fair representation, creating larger districts, and making it easier to influence and control, including privatization of public services (schools, water systems, etc) and brokering unethical “sweetheart” real estate development deals.

[New research from the Maryland Center on Economic Policy](#) unveiled at the launch highlighted the alarming consequences of the property tax proposals. It echoes an [analysis](#) by the city’s nonpartisan Bureau of the Budget and Management Research (BBMR) that determined that cutting more than \$600 million per year from the city’s budget could cause Baltimore City to lay off about 400 firefighters and 125 EMS workers, close multiple fire stations, eliminate street and alley cleaning, end all pre- and post-natal maternal health and Healthy Homes lead exposure visits, and discontinue business district cleaning, among other cuts. BBMR [tested proponents’ claim](#) that the tax cuts would pay for themselves through faster growth. They found that the city would have to gain 325,000 residents and more than 8,000 new businesses just to make up for the lost revenue – a 57% population increase in just seven years.

“Cutting nearly half a billion dollars from the budget would devastate our department, leaving it gutted from day one,” said **Matthew Coster, President of the Baltimore Firefighters IAFF Local 734**. “Our resources are stretched very thin, and the volume of calls continues to rise along with the responsibilities asked of our members. This city relies heavily on its fire department; we are on the frontlines of every emergency, from fires and medical emergencies to car accidents, bridge collapses, pandemics, gas explosions, and train derailments.”

“These two ballot measures would have profoundly negative consequences for residents,” said **Baltimore City Councilman Zeke Cohen**. “Increasing our districts to nearly twice their current size would mean drastically diminished support for constituents. Renew Baltimore’s tax cuts would decimate city revenues, crippling essential city services.”

“These groups claim that these initiatives are powered by residents seeking to solve the issues facing Baltimore City, but we know these ballot questions are bought and paid for by moneyed interests who care only about themselves and their bank accounts, not the people of our city,” said **Courtney Jenkins, President, Metropolitan Baltimore Council Of AFL-CIO Unions**. “We know that this is all part of a larger corporate agenda to enrich the already wealthy while gutting and privatizing public services, suppressing living wages and benefits that empower working people, attacking our labor unions, and rolling back the progress our city is making.”

[An analysis conducted by Baltimore City Not For Sale](#) determined that a majority of donations to the Renew Baltimore effort – 98 percent, or \$238,801 – come from people, private companies and Political Action Committees that each donated at least \$1,000. Contributions from real estate businesses accounted for 64 percent, or \$157,200, of donations. More than one-third of the donations came from people, companies or Political Action Committees located outside the city – 36 percent, or \$87,600.

“Forcing deep service cuts will mean Baltimore’s lowest-income residents, who rely on the essential services provided by the city, will be hit the hardest,” said **Christopher Meyer, Research Analyst with the Maryland Center on Economic Policy**. “The plan would exacerbate racial injustice as a majority of Baltimore’s low-income residents are Black and people of color.”

Anna Humoso, Baltimore Organizer for Progressive Maryland, detailed the coalition’s planned work, including a field operation that will focus on canvassing Baltimore city neighborhoods and events, earned and paid media, social media engagement, and community mobilization.

“We are united in our belief that Baltimore deserves world class schools, youth programs, streets, parks, and emergency services,” said Humoso. “No one is asking for less funding for our schools, for our fire department, for sanitation. And when we’re organized, we can and will beat these ballot questions.”

“Moneyed interests benefit from a smaller City Council, opening opportunities for privatization of public services, including schools, public safety, water systems, waste collection and other basic necessities that Baltimore City residents need,” said **Joshua Harris, First Vice President of the NAACP Baltimore City Branch**. “It also makes it easier for developers and investors to land sweetheart real estate development deals. To be blunt, it’s easier to buy a council of eight than a council of 14.”

Amanda Allen, a Roland Park homeowner and parent of public school students, said “ We pay a lot in property taxes but I don’t want that to change. Why? Because our property taxes go toward paying for basic services that everyone in this city uses and relies on. From schooling to public safety to parks and playgrounds, we all benefit from investing in these public services.”

The Baltimore City Not For Sale Coalition includes: 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, AFSCME Maryland Council 3, AFT Maryland, Baltimore Teachers Union, the City Union Of Baltimore, the International Association Of Fire Fighters Local 734 & Local 934, Jews United for Justice, Maryland Center on Economic Policy, NAACP Baltimore City Branch, Progressive Maryland, UNITE HERE Local 7 and the over 100 affiliated labor unions of Metro Baltimore AFL-CIO Unions.