

City Council should pay up

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In 1996, Oakland voters overwhelmingly approved Measure K, the Kids First! Initiative, which sets aside 2.5 percent of annual unrestricted general fund revenue for programs and services for children and youth.

Measure K created the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth and the Planning and Oversight Committee, which oversees it. For the past three years, the Planning and Oversight Committee has been engaged in a debate with the city about how to calculate Oakland Fund for Children and Youth's revenue.

It is time for the City Council to call the question and repay Oakland Fund for Children and Youth \$2.4 million owed because of past miscalculations of its revenue.

In 2003, the Planning and Oversight Committee questioned whether the city was properly calculating Oakland Fund for Children and Youth's revenue. The Planning and Oversight Committee asserted that the calculation should be based on the actual revenue that Oakland receives, the practice during its early years.

The city administration disagreed and claimed that Oakland Fund for Children and Youth revenue should be based instead on planned budgeted revenue. Why does it matter? Because according to the city auditor, using actual revenue as the basis would mean \$2.4 million more for our young people.

To help resolve the dispute, the city attorney issued a legal opinion in 2003 supporting the Planning and Oversight Committee's view. The city auditor issued reports in 2004 and 2005 affirming that opinion.

During these years, the city administration remained steadfast in its opposition when the Planning and Oversight Committee and the auditor brought this issue to the council's Life Enrichment Committee in 2004 and to the Finance and Management Committee 2005.

In October the administration threw a red herring into the discussion when it claimed that Measures Q, the library parcel tax, and Y, the violence-prevention measure, restricted \$279.6 million of the library, police and fire budgets - in effect reducing Oakland Fund for Children and Youth funding by 75 percent. Ridiculous.

Reason prevailed and in December, the City Council finally agreed with the Planning and Oversight Committee, city attorney and city auditor that the city's actual revenue should be the basis of Oakland Fund for Children and Youth's revenue. Now the question is whether the city will reimburse Oakland Fund for Children and Youth and by how much.

Again the city administration is in opposition. Its stance is that the city doesn't owe \$2.4 million as the auditor asserts, but only \$842,000. Why?

Because the auditor made a mistake. So we have another argument between bureaucrats, and our children are in the middle.

The Planning and Oversight Committee, a group of reasonable people without a team of lawyers and accountants, proposed that the city attorney review the issues and agreed to abide by that decision.

In a spirit of reconciliation, the Planning and Oversight Committee offered to take payment over a couple of years and without interest on the delinquent balance. The Finance and Administration Committee was scheduled to decide this issue Feb. 14 but delayed the decision yet again.

Reasonable people can disagree, but they should work together expeditiously and in good faith to resolve the issue. It has been three years.

It is way past time to reimburse Oakland Fund for Children and Youth these delinquent funds and to stop shortchanging Oakland youth.

The Oakland Fund for Children and Youth is an outstanding success. It has made Oakland a better place, and it has much more to contribute.

During the past eight years, Oakland Fund for Children and Youth has disbursed tens of millions of dollars to programs that have benefited tens of thousands of children and their families.

It's time for the City Council to reimburse it the \$2.4 million owed to our kids.

Edward Hannemann is the coordinator for the Oakland Community After School Alliance. He served on the Planning and Oversight Committee from 1998 through 2005.