



## Councilmember Janani Ramachandran

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### BUDGET MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** June 9, 2023

**TO:** City Council and Members of the Public

**FROM:** Councilmember Janani Ramachandran, District 4

**SUBJECT:** Councilmember Janani Ramachandran's Amendments to the FY 23-25 Budget

Dear City Council Colleagues and Members of the Public,

In a challenging budget year with a historic fiscal deficit, I recognize the urgent need to come together and make decisions that will guide how the city addresses our monumental challenges, as well as harness productive opportunities. As stated in my budget priorities memo published earlier this year, I am focused on passing a budget that helps re-build public trust in City Hall, funds basic city services, and builds safe neighborhoods where every resident can thrive.

The below-listed proposed amendments to the Mayor's proposed budget reflect these priorities as well as extensive feedback from community stakeholders in District 4 and across Oakland. In full transparency: these amendments are not nearly as comprehensive as I would have preferred, and do not reflect the range of policy initiatives and staff positions that I would have wanted to fund in a more ideal fiscal climate. However, they are pragmatic and narrow in scope to address one of the core challenges Oakland is facing: public safety. I also remain determined to work with my colleagues to obtain external funding for Oakland at the County, State, and Federal level to further address public safety and other areas listed in my budget priorities, including traffic safety, wildfire prevention, homelessness services, and more.

I look forward to collaborating with my Council colleagues to ensure that we can fund a budget that reflects our core values and our mandates as public servants to Oakland.

**Proposed Additions (General Purpose Fund):**

- **Community Safety Ambassadors for East Oakland Commercial Corridors:** Oakland's small business corridors are the heart of many of our East Oakland neighborhoods, and provides vibrancy, jobs and economic opportunity, culture, and community space. However, they are experiencing an uptick in crime, and we are sadly seeing legacy Oakland businesses leave us for safer suburban towns. One way in which East Oakland commercial corridors across Districts 4, 5, 6, and 7 can improve public safety is through a community safety ambassador program. These programs have had evidence-based success in reducing crime in other Oakland neighborhoods, including Chinatown and Downtown. Moreover, BIDs and merchant associations in the proposed districts previously received funding for a pilot safety ambassador program, "Shop Safe Grants," administered during the FY 22-23 holiday season, which experienced an

overwhelming positive response. While this proposed allocation for all four districts is relatively small, the intention is to use these funds as seed funding to build out a program that can then harness the power of external funding and build out a comprehensive model of community-driven safety.

- **OPD Grant Writer:** In this difficult fiscal climate and a heavily burdened General Purpose Fund, now more than ever we must recognize the urgency of Oakland needing to harness external funding opportunities to support our public safety infrastructure. A grant writer is a critical investment to obtain funding for better technology to assist with crime solving, medical and emergency equipment, personnel, as well as violence prevention initiatives. Unlike many other city departments, there is currently no dedicated grant writer within OPD (only a grants coordinator who manages existing grants). As a result, we have several missed opportunities in applying for grant funding for crime prevention and investigation, which is why this position is essential. In order to offset the costs of a grant writer, OPD has helped us identify a separate unsworn staff position that may be frozen within the department, due to similar positions that are not frozen being unfilled as a result of hiring challenges (which we hope will be addressed in this budget cycle by the proposed increased resources to our Human Resources Department).
- **Partial Restoration of Department of Violence Prevention Contracts and Cultural Affairs Grant Funds:** Oakland relies on the strength of its community-based organizations to perform the difficult work of violence prevention. This includes nonprofits who have an actual understanding of the needs and motivations of those who commit harm, and what is needed to change behaviors and life paths. Therefore, I strongly support restoring a sizeable portion of the contract funds administered through the Department of Violence Prevention that have been proposed to be cut. I also support restoration of Cultural Affairs grant funds that have also proposed to be cut for similar reasons. Most individuals and organizations who receive grants from Cultural Affairs are in essence performing violence prevention work at the community level through the power of art. These grants provide economic opportunity for Oaklanders, inspiration and after-school opportunities for vulnerable youth, and a sense of vibrancy and belonging to Oakland at a time we need it the most.

There are minor amendments that we are also proposing through other funds (Measure Q and Measure Z) through their available balances.

**Proposed Reductions (General Purpose Fund):**

Our proposed reductions in order to fund the above-listed priorities have been identified in consultation with different city departments to ascertain hiring realities, as well as to understand which positions and roles realistically will not be filled in a timely manner in FY 23-25. Positions that are “frozen” do not mean elimination; in future budget cycles, Council may choose to “unfreeze” and budget funding for these frozen positions.

**Forthcoming Amendments:**

My team will soon publish a second round of proposed amendments, after receiving some requested information from city departments, that reflect the following:

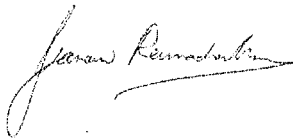
- **Opposition to the proposed merger of Housing & Community Development (HCD) with Homelessness Services:** As homelessness is one of the most complex challenges facing Oakland today, we deserve a standalone department that streamlines services and makes the most efficient use of our homelessness dollars. HCD performs tasks that focus on construction of

affordable housing, as well as administration of grants and other relevant functions. In contrast, Homelessness Services focuses on direct social services to our unhoused community. The proposed merger does not delineate clear nor substantial cost savings, and Council has not yet been presented with a developmental study that outlines specific changes and benefits of those changes.

- **Civilianization of certain professional staff in OPD's Internal Accountability team:** In line with the spirit of Re-Imagining Public Safety Taskforce, there lies much opportunity to civilianize certain roles within OPD into other departments. One such opportunity includes roles within OPD's Office of Internal Accountability team into the Office of the Inspector General. While transfer of the entire department is legally not permissible in FY 23-24, my team is exploring opportunities to begin this process.

While my amendments are primarily focused on public safety initiatives, I want to acknowledge the many initiatives in the Mayor's proposed budget that I support, including a historic investment in to affordable housing, traffic safety, Head Start, IT cybersecurity infrastructure, Human Resources, the proposed civilianization of OPD's Internal Affairs, and addition of staff positions that support our Neighborhood Services Division and similar programs. While there is increased funding that deliver core constituent services in departments such as Public Works and Department of Transportation, primarily funded by sources unrelated to our General Purpose Fund, I want to direct the public to our CIP budget that further addresses many of our specific infrastructure and traffic safety concerns in District 4 and rest of Oakland.

Sincerely,



Janani Ramachandran  
Oakland City Councilmember, District 4