

Minneapolis City Council rejects Civil Rights Department cuts

Written by Lydia Schwartz, Contributing Writer
Thursday, 10 December 2009 16:12

Monday evening, December 7, the Minneapolis City Council voted 7-6 in a motion led by Council Member Robert Lilligren (Ward 6) to strike down a controversial amendment to the 2010 General Appropriation Resolution. The amendment would have reappropriated funding for the next two years from the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights Complaint Investigation Division.

The amendment was championed by Council Member Betsy Hodges (Ward 13) who argued that the Complaint Investigation Division's (CID) backlog is unacceptable and the city should forward new cases to the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR) "while we reevaluate how the City of Minneapolis should handle violations of the Minnesota Human Rights Act. The amendment also would have cut four full-time employee positions from the CID."

"The State of Minnesota has the resources to take these cases... The people of Minneapolis cannot wait two to three years for a decision on their cases. They deserve better results than that," said Hodges.

The funding that normally goes to the CID would have instead been transferred to the City Coordinator's Office to conduct studies on, and involve the community in, how to make the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights (MDCR) work better.

Council Member Scott Benson (Ward 11) disagreed, saying, "We all think that the MDCR needs to do a better job. But I am not confident that [City Coordinator Steven Bosacker] can do one iota to solve the backlog problem. I think we should hire more investigators...The MDCR seems more efficient because it dismisses more cases than the MDCR does. I don't want to advance a system like that."

Council Member Ralph Remington (Ward 10) added, "We need true visionary leadership in MDCR. It needs to be reengineered and once you take [funding] away, it's gone...Civil rights protect all of us."

Other amendments to the 2010 General Appropriation Resolution that passed include an amendment by Minority Leader Cam Gordon (Ward 2) to add \$20,000 to the Restorative Justice program and an amendment by Council President Barbara Johnson (Ward 4) to extend the 311 phone service hours to 7am-7pm. An amendment to temporarily stop funding for the Police Activities League (P.A.L.) also passed and the Mayor of Minneapolis R.T. Rybak plead to the City Council saying, "Please don't let the City lose this program completely." P.A.L. is a program sponsored by the Minneapolis Police Department in which employees participate in sports and recreational activities directly benefiting the city's youth.

In Minneapolis, the Mayor sends a proposed budget to the City Council Ways & Means committee and it is then presented to the entire council. The current budget includes the 2010 General Appropriation Resolution, the 2009 Tax Levy, 2010-2014 Five-Year Capital Programs, 2010 Capital Improvement Bonds, and Utility Rates. The entire Ways & Means Budget was passed by the City Council.

The next regular City Council meeting is Friday December 18, 2009. For more information, visit

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