

New York City Council
Committee on Education Hearing on FY 2015 Executive Budget
Council Member Daniel Dromm, Chairperson

March 25, 2015

Public Testimony, Barbara Harris

RE: ELIMINATION OF THE APPROXIMATELY \$1.5 MILLION TAX LEVY ALLOCATED FOR JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICER TRAINING CORPS PROGRAMS FROM THE MAYOR'S EDUCATION EXPENSE BUDGET FY 2015

Council Member Daniel Dromm and Distinguished Council Members,

I am here today to respond to then funding allocation in the Mayor's Expense Budget FY 2015 for Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) and urge the council members to vote to eliminate the approximately \$1.5 million tax levy allocation for the program in 18 public high schools.

Along with 22 supporting organizations, I ask the NYC Council to re-direct these funds to better serve current underfunded educational and cultural programs, as well as, reduced or eliminated afterschool programs. The Committee on Education and Department of Education can find far better uses for \$1.5 million of taxpayer dollars than supporting a military program that is developed by the Pentagon. With little transparency or oversight of curriculum or goals achieved, the military delivers the wrong message to our high school students.

For many reasons, JROTC should not be subsidized by NYC taxpayers.

Cost of the program: The Federal government is paying slightly less than half of the 40 military instructor's salary including all the fringe benefits of the JROTC programs. The instructors are not employees of the NYC Department of Education, but rather employees of the Federal government. This sets a troubling precedent of having individuals who do not possess the requisite qualifications to be a teacher in the NYC school system yet are engaged in teaching high school students.

City funds are used to cover the remaining costs of JROTC instructor salaries and all normal employment taxes and benefits that also cover regular teachers. In FY 2014, the cost was approximately \$1.5 million. Each school with a JROTC program hires two instructors for their unit, which means that unlike most other subjects, two teachers are managing every JROTC class. These instructors are not required to have the same training and credentials as mandated for most NYC teachers. Some senior instructors may have a BA, but assistant teachers can be assigned with the minimum requirement of 60 college credits. Yet they are generally paid the same salaries and benefits as regular accredited teachers.

Instructor questions:

Where is the teacher examination process or is the process for NYC Department of Education certification bypassed? Are JROTC instructors observed during class hours? Are they supervised and do they receive a review from a high school administrator?

The Program is described as developing leadership, citizenship, and discipline, but little data, records, or reports of outcomes are presented. The curriculum focuses on military values and hierarchy, the idea of soldiering, following commands, fitness, and drills. It is military training, not critical thinking; it is a military approach to social and political change. The curriculum is developed by the military and presents a partisan pro-military view of historical, political and moral issues. Curriculum content is decided by the military, and the Department of Education does not control or oversee what is taught and appears to be out of the loop.

JROTC Teaching Approach promulgates a highly authoritarian approach to information that discourages criticism and glorifies the unbroken chain-of-command; the programs heavy emphasis on drill signifies this approach. This curriculum does not belong in public schools. It is not consistent with the teachings of democratic values, conflict resolution, collaboration and the principles of civilian leadership. It conflicts with the educational goal of encouraging students to learn through developmental thinking, examining and questioning historical and current events. The teaching of American history, civics, and communications – inspiring students to find their own path, develop character raise self-esteem and prevent drop-outs and address drug abuse belongs to those teachers trained and certified to do that work.

REJECTING or DISENROLLING STUDENTS

The JROTC standards for rejecting or disenrolling a student who does not meet minimum academic and behavioral requirements are in various Department of Defense and military branch regulations and instructions. Physical fitness or ability may become a reason to disenroll a student. (DoD instruction handbook 1205.13)

Can a certified teacher reject or disenroll a student?

Has the Council asked questions about success or failure rates? It is difficult to get information on drop-out rates, transfers, number of college applications and college acceptance.

Does the program meet its hype?

WEAPONS: JROTC students are given uniforms and facsimile rifles, which are used for drills, parades, and assembly programs. Each member of the JROTC marches into assemblies in uniform carrying rifles. Is this not hypocritical of the current school regulation of zero tolerance for guns or weapons of any sort in schools? JROTC sends the wrong message about weapons. Students cannot bring weapons into school, but they can read and learn about handling them in JROTC textbooks.

ANTI-VIOLENCE: In the FY 2015 City Council Allocation Funding document, \$550,000 has been allocated to programs to teach anti-violence, anti-weapon, and conflict resolution strategies. How confused can a student be? JROTC kids carry rifles, guns are fun and macho, war is a game. So, what's going on in the public high schools?

The overwhelming majority of New Yorkers have no idea that as taxpayers they are funding JROTC, and our experience speaking with people in the streets, has informed us of this fact. They oppose funding for JROTC.

The budgetary process allows the Council to make changes in the Mayor's budget, and the undersigned organizations urge the council to eliminate this tax levy item in its response to the

Mayor's budget. The \$1.5 million allocation should be transferred to an area of educational service being cut or reduced and better serve the needs of our students and teachers. From art, music, sports, environmental initiatives -- to hiring more, the much needed high school career guidance counselors.

This subsidy for a military training program should have no place in the Mayor's FY 2015 Education Budget, and we ask that the council act to eliminate and re-direct these funds for far more important educational priorities.

Citizenship, leadership, and discipline can and is successfully taught by trained NYC certified teachers. We look forward to the Council's leadership on this significant educational issue.

Respectfully,
Barbara Harris
For the Granny Peace Brigade and all listed supporters.

Supporting Organizations:

New York Coalition to Protect Student Privacy, Barbara Harris, Director
Granny Peace Brigade- NYC, Eva-Lee Baird, Coordinator
Institute for Immigrant Concerns, Donna Kelsch, Director
Veterans For Peace-NYC Chapter 34, William Gilson, President
New York Coalition of Radical Educators, Edwin Mayorga, Contact Member
Pax Christi Metro New York, Rosemarie Pace
Code Pink NYC Women for Peace, Nancy Kricorian, Coordinator
Grandmothers Against the War, Joan Wile - Founder/Director
Peace Action New York State, Jim Anderson, President
Peace Action Staten Island, Eileen Bardel, Coordinator
Military Families Speak Out Metro Chapter, Lionelle Hamanaka
Gray Panthers NYC Network, Jack Kupferman, Convener
Brooklyn For Peace, Molly Nolan and David Tykulsker
Friends of Brook Park – Bronx, Harry J. Bubbins, Director
Abolition 2000, New York Metro, Alice Slater, Chair
The Social Action Committee of Brooklyn Ethical Society, Abby Scher, Chair
Peace Action Manhattan, Florindo Troncelliti, Coordinator
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, NY Metro, Molly Klopot, Chair
New York City Chapter of the War Resisters League, Jim Moschella
Social Action Committee Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture, Abby Scher, Chair
Washington Heights Counter Recruitment Group, Peg Rapp, Coordinator
Peace Action Bay Ridge Interfaith, Vicki McFadyen