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DC 37's Fight to Eliminate Massive Waste and Protect City Services

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Last Sunday, on May 31, I joined scores of municipal employees who belong to District Council 37 as we handed out leaflets informing our neighbors of the need to protect city services and the workers who provide them.

The leaflets showed the beaming face of Public Health Nurse Ponzella Johnson who, like hundreds of her co-workers, is a guardian of the health of one million New York City school children. It told of the difference between a Public Health Nurse's average pay -- \$38 an hour -- and the average pay of a nurse the city hires through a private agency -- \$57 to \$95 an hour. It also explained that the city could save \$10 million a year by replacing contract nurses with full-time city employees. "New York taxpayers can't afford to keep paying for more profits for City Hall's business friends, while our community gets less jobs, poorer health services and layoffs for hardworking people," the leaflet announced. Then, to stop thousands of impending layoffs, readers were urged to go to DC 37's website -- www.dc37.net -- to send a message to City Hall to "Cut private contracts, not public services."

On June 2, the Mayor announced a 90-day suspension of layoffs. That was a step in the right direction. But, I believe we need a more permanent solution to the problems that prompted the City to announce a budget laced with service cuts and thousands of layoffs in the first place. That is why we produced our report "Massive Waste at a Time of Need" that shows how the city can cut waste by reducing the \$9 billion a year it hands over to high-priced outside consultants and contractors like the ones that supply contract nurses to city schools.



Like all of our fellow New Yorkers, we at DC 37 know that serious measures are needed to close the city's budget gap. But, we don't believe layoffs are the answer. Not only will city employees lose jobs, income and benefits, but millions of vulnerable New Yorkers will lose vital safety-net services. And, communities of color are often the hardest hit.

That is why we are calling on our neighbors to help urge the Bloomberg administration to open its eyes and its heart and see the pain and suffering layoffs could cause. The School Health Nurses featured in last Sunday's flier offer just one example of the services that will suffer. There are others:

Community health clinics service millions of un- and under-insured. They could close causing many to flood hospital emergency rooms or forego treatment altogether.

Civilians in the NYPD are a critical part of our public safety net. What happens when we lose our front-line of defense against crime?

Social workers and others in the Administration for Children's Services who help prevent child abuse and neglect are already over-worked. What happens when their staffs shrink and their caseloads increase? How many of our children will fall through the cracks?

Why are our libraries and cultural institutions seen as fringe benefits when they provide vital educational resources? Where will immigrants go to learn English-as-a-Second Language? What happens to children for whom libraries are after-school sanctuaries and librarians much-needed homework helpers?

What responsible government cuts vital services and lays off workers who provide them when there is a better way?

Not only do the members of DC 37 help make this city run but we are your neighbors. We patronize businesses in our communities. Our loss of income impacts not only us and the people we serve but our neighbors, our neighborhoods and our city. We care too much to stand by and let that happen. That is why I and scores of DC 37 members were out distributing leaflets in our communities last Sunday but we need your help to make a difference. Join us. Go to www.dc37.net. Take a look at DC 37's recently released study "Massive Waste at a Time of Need!" Tell City Hall: "Cut private contractors, not public services!"