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DOE Layoffs: The Fight Isn't Over

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Were our children pawns in a political game that targeted some of the Department of education's lowest paid workers and struggling schools and causes the most harm to communities of color? City Council member Robert Jackson said he believed that to be the case when he and Council member Domenic Recchia recently co-chaired a hearing into Mayor Bloomberg's decision to lay off close to 700 school aides, parent and community coordinators and health aides. I have to agree.

The city has insisted that the layoffs were necessary in order to plug a \$38 million dollar budget gap but I believe that these layoffs are not based on any financial necessity. If you added up the salaries of the workers who were laid off, the total "savings" would be far less than the \$600 million dollars the

city has added to this year's budget for outside contractors. The city has the money. That's why it is an outrage that the Mayor has chosen to put close to 700 predominantly Black and Latino workers on the street while his administration squanders billions of dollars through runaway waste, fraud and corruption by awarding multi-million dollar contracts to private consultants.

When Councilmember Recchia challenged Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott's rationale for the layoffs at the Oct. 11th hearing, he pointed out that the City Council was never informed that the DOE was looking at laying off School Aides and other support staff. In fact, Recchia said had they known, the City Council "would have done something about it." Walcott's response was full of holes.

When asked why he didn't accept the cost-savings proposal our union made in order to save our members jobs - an offer that meant workers making \$14,000-\$18,000 per year would work less hours and take a pay cut, Walcott said that would have been too disruptive. Isn't it more disruptive to layoff vital support staff and leave teachers and kids struggling without the necessary help? Even Walcott's claim that the layoffs were made not by

the DOE's central office but by the various school Principals did not go unchallenged. In fact, Ernest Logan, head of the union that represents DOE principals, said the Principals were never told about the union's proposals. In fact, Logan said that given the choice, the Principals would rather have the staff work less hours than lose them altogether.

This fight isn't over

If there was any doubt that the layoffs were not necessary, City Councilmember Letitia James pointed out that the DOE had posted over 100 job openings that sounded a lot like the very jobs of the workers who had been laid off.

Like many of the City Council members, I too, wanted to know why these layoffs had the most devastating impact on predominantly Black and Latino workers and children and schools in communities of color. Why did a large percentage of these layoffs fall in communities like Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and Far Rockaway while other areas were left completely untouched? Nothing the DOE said at the recent hearing answered this and other pressing questions about the disparate impact of these layoffs.

Of course, one layoff is one layoff too many. That is why, our union continues to fight these layoffs - because they are unjust, unfair and unnecessary.