

Q & A for Ballot Measures Proposing “Set-asides” of Existing Resources to Fund Children’s Services

1 This ballot box budgeting.

That is exactly what it is. When elected officials are unable to allocate money for high priority needs, it is only fair that the public be given a say in how its own money should be spent. Democracy is well served when the public has the opportunity to have the last word. Isn’t that why we live in a democracy? Too often decisions about how the public’s money should be spent are made behind closed doors. This is an opportunity for decisions to be made transparently – in public, by the public.

2 It will take away from existing needs.

Investing in a healthy, educated, law-abiding younger generation saves money. Current extensive spending on incarceration, hospitalization and public welfare is taking money away from other needs. Investing in youth will reverse this. And for only a small fraction of the City budget. Besides, it will be an incentive for greater efficiency in government. Set-asides have worked in San Francisco and Oakland, without any detrimental impact.

3 This ties the hands of city/county officials.

Yes, to some extent – and that is the point. If elected officials had been responsive to the needs of children, we would not need to tie their hands. But children often end up at the bottom losers in budget battles. Tying hands is the way for children to get what they need. And very often, it allows elected officials to do what they know is right – and stand up to other powerful political forces.

4 It is special interest politics.

Children and youth are the opposite of a special interest. They are everyone’s interest – our entire future depends on how well we nurture and support our children. They deserve a special place in the budget because they cannot lobby for themselves. They are short-changed because our budget process is so dominated by special interests. Without protections in the budget process, children’s interests will never be able to compete with the real special adult interests.

5 It sets a bad precedent.

This need not be a precedent. Children are a special case. They are uniquely vulnerable in the budget process because they are the only constituency that cannot vote. OR, (depending on circumstances) is standard procedure to set-aside public funds for specific agreed-upon needs. We do it for things like open space and public safety. Opponents of set-asides just oppose this one because they oppose children being a budget priority.

6 This is bad government.

Compared to what? Bad government is when our children are neglected, uneducated and unhealthy. A measure that reverses this is the heart of good government and why government exists.