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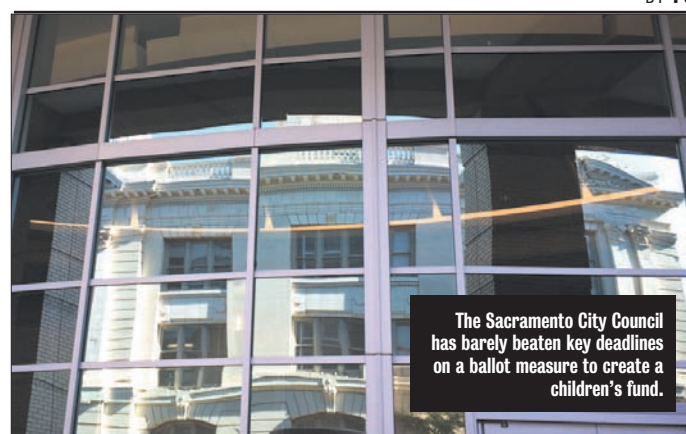
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VOICES

EDITOR'S NOTE

Under the wire

BY FOON RHEE / foonr@newsreview.com



The Sacramento City Council has barely beaten key deadlines on a ballot measure to create a children's fund.

PHOTO BY FOON RHEE

and develop a three-year plan and an evaluation strategy.

Councilmen Jay Schenirer, who made the motion for the March date, and Eric Guerra, who seconded the motion, said besides making sure there's enough time for implementation, they wanted to recognize the activism by youths.

More than 39,000 Sacramento voters signed petitions to put a cash-for-kids measure on the ballot, and it qualified in mid-June.

But the City Council didn't act until Nov. 12 to put the Sacramento Children's Fund Act on the March 3 ballot, barely beating the Dec. 6 deadline to ask the county registrar of voters.

And the council plans to just make it under the wire with its official ballot argument *against* the measure. On Nov. 19, it picked council members Jeff Harris and Larry Carr as the authors, who have until Dec. 2 to submit the argument to the city clerk.

No one on the council volunteered to write a "yes" argument, leaving the measure's proponents to author it.

The measure would amend the city charter to establish a children's fund that, starting in July 2021, would receive 2.5% of unrestricted city revenues—projected at \$10.1 million to \$12.6 million a year, on top of existing city spending for children and youth.

Opponents say that would make it much more difficult for the council to balance the budget in the next recession.

Supporters, however, say a dedicated funding source is needed because when the city's budget gets tight, these programs get cut while police and fire—backed by powerful unions—are shielded.

Sac Kids First, the coalition behind the measure, badly wanted the March date, but it took a lot of convincing and heartfelt testimonials over two council meetings. They warned that delaying to the November 2020 ballot would make the fund's roll-out messy—maybe too messy to succeed. If the measure passes, the grants to nonprofits would start in summer 2021, and it would take at least a year to set up the system. That includes appointing an oversight commission, which would do research

"That's the city that we want," said Schenirer, who championed a marijuana tax for children's programs that voters narrowly rejected in June 2016.

Harris, however, said such an amendment to the city charter should be decided by the biggest electorate, in November—the same argument made by Councilman Steve Hansen, who also said that by waiting until November, voters would know more about the impact of new union contracts and other financial challenges.

In the end, Mayor Darrell Steinberg supported the March date, saying that if the measure passes, it would give time for the council to adjust the 2020-21 budget and that the council should respect proponents' wishes.

If voters do approve the measure, the worst outcome would be for it to fail—to *not* change the lives of youths. So the March vote is probably the best choice.

But even supporters of the March date cautioned that the measure's backers have their work cut out because there's not as much time to convince voters and because voters in the primary tend to be more conservative.

"If this passes in March, they would have earned it," said Councilman Allen Warren.

Through Sept. 30 of this year, the coalition said in campaign finance reports that it had spent \$213,000. Jim Keddy of Youth Forward, part of the coalition, said it plans to start putting up yard signs in December and to go door-to-door in January. With a supporter list of about 1,150, the coalition expects to have 150 campaign volunteers and also has the money for mailers, he said.

But with the City Council officially telling Sacramento to vote "no," Sac Kids First may have an uphill fight. □