

baltimoresun.com

Dixon says council should cut own budget

Baltimore mayor fires back over cuts to her fiscal plan

By Annie Linskey | annie.linskey@baltsun.com

June 13, 2009

Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon shot back Friday at the City Council that cut her budget this week, saying the legislative body should consider reductions to its spending because it was one of the few parts of government to receive more funding.

"It would be prudent if they would examine their own budget as aggressively as they have done to other city agencies," Dixon said in an e-mailed statement.

The rebuke came the day after the council cut \$1.1 million from Dixon's \$2.3 billion budget, the first time the legislative body has stood up to a mayor since the 1990s, when Kurt L. Schmoke ruled City Hall.

The City Council wants Dixon to use the money it trimmed to keep open recreation centers, Police Athletic League centers and pools that she had planned to close. Dixon had to cut \$65 million from the budget.

But Dixon said the City Council's cuts "drastically reduce funding for vital city agencies."

Ryan O'Doherty, a spokesman for City Council President Stephanie C. Rawlings-Blake, called the mayor's attack a distraction. The council budget is "a small price to pay for oversight and representative democracy," O'Doherty said. The mayor "should be thinking about children."

The \$4.9 million budget for the City Council will increase by \$102,843, or 2.1 percent over last year's. Those funds go mostly to pay salaries for council members' staff. Dixon cut her office's budget by 6.5 percent.

Dixon said she has grave concerns about some of the cuts made by the council, particularly the \$702,984 taken from an office that runs the city's cable access channel. The move could lead to layoffs, according to Scott Peterson, a Dixon spokesman. The mayor also wants funds restored to hire outside lawyers to fend off lawsuits in areas where the city attorneys do not have expertise.

O'Doherty stressed that the council's cuts merely bring the cable television station's budget down to the level of the current fiscal year. "It does not eliminate the office," he said. Also, the council's cuts to the legal department are equal to amounts it has returned unspent in past years.

Dixon and the council have been at odds since the mayor released her proposed spending plan for the fiscal year that begins July 31 and cut funding to some agencies, including recreation centers and pools, to close a \$65 million budget gap. Recently, Dixon has pledged to adjust the budget, including keeping open Engine 36 in West Baltimore, a decision that would increase the number of rotating closures of fire companies. She said she would reopen two pools, fund summer camps at four recreation centers and open a soccer pavilion. She has not said what she would cut to keep those programs open.

Meanwhile, City Hall attorneys were researching legal options Friday in case the mayor and City Council become locked in a budget showdown. "We are looking into all options," said Elena DiPietro, chief of the legal advice and opinions division.

In the past, Dixon has said she would apply money cut by the council toward a slight reduction in the property tax rate. In this case it would be about a third of a penny off the tax rate.

She could veto the budget, an option that Schmoke exercised when he was mayor and Dixon was in the City Council. The council does not appear to have the votes to override a veto. That could put the city in budget limbo if the council continues to refuse to approve Dixon's budget.

Copyright © 2009, [The Baltimore Sun](#)