

ALLEGHENY COUNTY COUNCIL

REGULAR MEETING

- - -

BEFORE:

Patrick Catena	-	President, District 4
Robert J. Macey	-	Vice-President, District 9
Samuel DeMarco, III	-	Council-at-Large
Bethany Hallam	-	Council-at-Large
Jack Betkowski		District 1
Suzanne Filiaggi	-	District 2
Anita Prizio	-	District 3
Daniel Gryzbek	-	District 5
John F. Palmiere	-	District 6
Nicholas Futules	-	District 7
Michelle Naccarati-Chapkis	-	District 8
DeWitt Walton	-	District 10
Paul Klein	-	District 11
Robert Palmosina	-	District 12
David Bonaroti	-	District 13

Allegheny County Courthouse
Fourth Floor, Gold Room
436 Grant Street
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15219

February 20, 2024, 5:04 p.m.

SARGENT'S COURT REPORTING SERVICE, INC.
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Pittsburgh, PA 15219
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IN ATTENDANCE:

Jared Barker - Director, Legislative Services

PRESIDENT CATENA: Good evening, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of Allegheny County Council to order. Please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance.

(Pledge of Allegiance.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Please remain standing for a moment of silent reflection.

(Silent prayer or reflection.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Please be seated. Jared, please take roll.

MR. BARKER:	Mr. Betkowski?
MR. BETKOWSKI:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Bonaroti?
MR. BONAROTI:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. DeMarco?
MR. DEMARCO:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Ms. Filiaggi?
MS. FILIAGGI:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Futules?
MR. FUTULES:	I'm here.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Grzybek?
MR. GRZYBEK:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Ms. Hallam?
MS. HALLAM:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Klein?
MR. KLEIN:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Macey?
MR. MACEY:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Ms. Naccarati-Chapkis?
MS. NACCARATI-CHAPKIS:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Palmiere?
MR. PALMIERE:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Palmosina?
MR. PALMOSINA:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Ms. Prizio?
MS. PRIZIO:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Walton?
MR. WALTON:	Here.
MR. BARKER:	President Catena?
PRESIDENT CATENA:	Here.

MR. BARKER: All 15 members are present.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Proclamations and Certificates. All the Proclamations and Certificates will be read into the record this evening. 12942-24.

MR. BARKER: A Proclamation recognizing Chief James Etherington for his 30 years of dedicated service to law enforcement. Sponsored by Council Member Prizio.

PRESIDENT CATENA: 12943-24.

MR. BARKER: Certificates of Recognition presented to the 2023 Highland Volunteer Fire Department. Sponsored by Council Member Filiaggi.

PRESIDENT CATENA: 12944-24.

MR. BARKER: Certificates of Recognition presented to the 2024 Mount Lebanon Residence Academy Participants. Sponsored by Council Member Grzybek.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Okay.

We'll now go into Public Comment on Agenda Items.

MR. BARKER: We have only two. First up is Merle Pusey.

MR. PUSEY: Greetings, Council. My name is Merle Bud Pusey. I'm the Assistant Fire Chief at Westmoreland Volunteer Fire Department at North Versailles. I'm here to show support of the fire tax incentive you guys are proposing tonight. Recruitment and retention has been a big issue in a volunteer fire service for many years. I've been assistant chief and a chief officer for the past ten years. I've been in a volunteer fire service for 16. I --- even over them past 16 years, we had a drastic drop in volunteers.

We don't have the mills and the Westinghouse round anymore to give us our staffing, not to mention the level of recruitment or level of training that's required to be a firefighter. In the way the world is, when people are working two jobs, it's hard to get firefighters. So I'd really like you guys --- I'd really support this for you guys to pass it.

I'm going to be short tonight because I know you guys got a lot of speakers, but please, if you can do the volunteer fire service a favor and help us out and also make a precedence across the State of Pennsylvania, because every county is hurting for firefighters. But Allegheny County being one of the biggest in the state, I think you guys are going to really put a shockwave in the volunteer fire service and let people take another look about helping them out.

I had a bunch of people in the past month come to me and say, how can I help? I know this incentive it's worth me getting out of bed for. How can I help you guys?

Administration, fire department-wise? So what you guys are proposing is already working. I could already see the fruit of your labor already coming through.

So, please, if you could pass that, I'd be greatly appreciated.

MS. HALLAM: Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Next?

MR. BARKER: Next up is John Silvestri.

MR. SILVESTRI: Good evening. I'm here to speak on the three bills that will be before you tonight for the improvement of the Allegheny County Board of Assessment Appeals and Review. And the most important message that I can give you is today I opened up my mail and my Allegheny County Tax Bill was in it. And I would write the check with a smile on my face if you would pass this legislation.

So the reason I'm here is I have a foot in the old school and a foot in the new school. The old school is I was the solicitor for the Board of Assessment from 1978 to 1998. In the last century, the Board Members, seven of them, heard 8,000 appeals. They did it before Thanksgiving, and they got the decisions out in 30 days. The foot that I have in the new school is I started fiddling with computers instead of under the hood of the car. I was in the generation where I was on the edge, and my fiddling with computers tells me, because I know the system like crazy, even though I'm on county retirement, I'm enjoying practicing in the area of tax assessment, and I do cases and help families out and businesses out, especially small businesses, all of the time. And I know the system inside out and I am sure that if a little bit of technology was applied, instead of 60 days, they'd get them out in 30 days.

I'll end this by saying that the legislation on the chief assessment officer is very important because those of us who are licensed --- I did mention that I was an attorney, although I said I was a solicitor. We have a Code of Ethics, and if my boss tells me to do something against the Code of Ethics, I have to follow the Code of Ethics and say no to my boss. We now have a chief assessment officer who's a licensed professional. He has a Code of Ethics. If someone asks him to do something wrong, he answers to the higher calling. It is very important that all three bills be passed. I didn't mention education, but that board needs education on

uniform standards of appraisal practice. It's not taught in any education that they've had for years. Thank you for your time.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Approval of Minutes. 12945-24.

MR. BARKER: A motion to approve the minutes of the February 6, 2024 Regular Meeting of Council.

MR. MACEY: Make a motion to approve.

MR. PALMIERE: Second.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Motion has been made in second. Is there any discussion?

(No response.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Hearing no discussion, all those in favor signify by saying aye.

(Chorus of ayes.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: All those opposed?

(No response).

PRESIDENT CATENA: Motion carries. Presentation of Appointments? None. Unfinished Business. Committee on Assessment Practices for the Second Reading. 12915-24.

MR. BARKER: An Ordinance to the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, amending Article 209 of the Administrative Code of Allegheny County entitled, Office of Property Assessments, Section 5-209.5, entitled chief Assessment officer, Duties and Responsibilities, in order to establish a mechanism for ensuring continuity in the chief assessment officer position. Sponsored by Council Member Catena.

PRESIDENT CATENA: That is my Bill, so I'm actually going to hold it 'til (sic) the following meeting, the March 5th meeting. 12917-24.

MR. BARKER: An Ordinance the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, amending and supplementing the Administrative Code of Allegheny County, Article 207 entitled, New Board of Property Assessment Appeals and Review. Section 5-207.03 entitled, Qualifications of Board Members, Appointment Terms, Organization of Appeals Board and Section 5-207.04, entitled, Compliance with County Procedures in order to establish uniform training requirements for members of the Board and any hearing officers retained by the Board. Sponsored by Council Members Filiaggi, Catena and Macey.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Council Member Filiaggi?

MS. FILIAGGI: Thank you, President Catena and Members of Council. The Assessment Practices Committee met on February 7th to introduce this bill, and after a quality discussion, the Committee voted to move the bill to full Council with an affirmative recommendation. Therefore, I make a motion to approve.

MR. MACEY: Second.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Motion has been made and second. Is there any discussion?

MS. NACCARATI-CHAPKIS: President Catena may be added as a co-sponsor to that Bill?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Yes. Anyone else? Councilman Klein, Councilman Palmosina, Councilman Palmiere, basically everyone, it looks like. Is there anyone doesn't want to be included?

MR. WALTON: Yes.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Councilman Walton doesn't want to be included.

Okay.

The motion has been made and second. Is there any discussion at this point in time? Any further discussion?

(No response.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Hearing none, Jared, please take a roll call vote.

MR. BARKER: On the motion to approve;

MR. BARKER: Mr. Betkowski?

MS. BETKOWSKI: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. Bonaroti?

MR. BONAROTI: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. DeMarco?

MR. DEMARCO: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Ms. Filiaggi?

MS. FILIAGGI: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. Futules?

MR. FUTULES: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. Grzybek?

MR. GRZYBEK: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Ms. Hallam?

MS. HALLAM: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. Klein?

MR. KLEIN: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. Macey?

MR. MACEY: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Ms. Naccarati-Chapkis?

MS. NACCARATI-CHAPKIS: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. Palmiere?
MR. PALMIERE: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Mr. Palmosina?
MR. PALMOSINA: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Ms. Prizio?
MS. PRIZIO: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Mr. Walton?
MR. WALTON: No.
MR. BARKER: President Catena?
PRESIDENT CATENA: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Ayes 14, noes 1, the Bill passes.
PRESIDENT CATENA: 12918-24.

MR. BARKER: An Ordinance of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania amending and supplementing the Administrative Code of Allegheny County, Article 207, entitled New Board of Property Assessment Appeals and Review Article, Section 5-207.06, entitled Rules and Regulations for Appeals in order to establish a uniform, expeditious process for rendering decisions regarding real property assessment appeals. Sponsored by Council Members Filiaggi, Catena and Macey.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Council Member Filiaggi?

MS. FILIAGGI: Thank you again, President Catena. And again, the Assessment Practices Committee met on February 7th to introduce the Bill. After discussion, the committee voted to move the bill to full Council with an affirmative recommendation. Therefore, I make a motion to approve.

MR. MACEY: Second.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Motion has been made and second. Any discussion?

(No response)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Does everyone wanted to be added to this one as well?

(Chorus of yeses)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Councilman Walton? No?

MR. WALTON: No.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Okay.

Everyone except Councilman Walton, please. Motion has been made and seconded. Any further discussion?

(No response.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Hearing none ---.

MR. WALTON: Oh, I have some. You know, I want to make sure that I understand specifically what this bill

--- the intent of this bill is, and I'd like to ask. I will do that with all due respect to you, Nick, but in all seriousness, I really want to understand what the intent of this Ordinance, Member Filiaggi, is intended to do. Is it intended to improve the skills, the process, the timing of the PAAR Board?

MS. FILIAGGI: Thank you ---.

MR. WALTON: And the mechanics that will go into --- that are utilized as part of that process.

MS. FILIAGGI: Yes, sir. And if I may respond? This specifically, the Bill 12918 is intended to improve the timing and the process? Yes. Taking the appeals process down from something five months and greater down to 60 days, decisions need to be made and distributed to property owners and taxing bodies within 60 days. So this is a great improvement from what we have right now. The other Bill that is 12917 works on the training elements that we are going for with property assessment hearing officers, as well as Board Members. So we do feel that this is going to streamline the appeals process, as well as further education, which I know you are a fan of, the education element, not only for Council, but all of the people who work within the Allegheny County system. So both of these Bills improve that, and in that, our intent is to give the property owners and taxing bodies a better result in a timely manner so that they can work on their budgets, specifically school boards will be able to have these decisions made so they can budget within the school board budget, and our individual taxpayers and property owners can budget their personal budgets.

MR. WALTON: So I have a series of questions. What training suspects exactly are Board Members supposed to receive? Is it three hours on exemptions? Is it all the nine hours? Is it only if they want to do hearings? I may have had those answers if I were part of a committee, but, you know, our President has chosen to not appoint me to any committee. So I'm out on an island by myself. So would you answer that for me, please?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Well, I can speak to that.

MR. WALTON: I didn't ask you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: I can speak to that.

MR. WALTON: I didn't ask you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: I'm still the President so I can speak.

MR. WALTON: Okay, but I didn't ask you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: I'm still the President so I may speak. Please yield. Thank you.

I appointed Members to the Committees that I felt appropriate, and actually, any member of this Council can go to a Committee and ask any questions.

MR. WALTON: A dog hit by a ---.

PRESIDENT CATENA: The Committee was ---.

The Committee can be --- the Committee meeting was held and you weren't there, were you?

MR. WALTON: A dog that was hit by a stone, barks.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Were you there?

MR. WALTON: Did you --- am I a part of a committee?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Were you there?

MR. WALTON: Am I part of a committee?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Did you come and ask any questions?

MR. WALTON: Am I part of a committee?

PRESIDENT CATENA: I ---.

MR. WALTON: Am I a part of a committee?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Did you ask any questions?

MR. WALTON: Am I part of a committee?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Did you come ---?

MR. WALTON: Am I part of a committee?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Again, ---.

MR. WALTON: Am I part of a committee?

PRESIDENT CATENA: You're out of order.

MR. WALTON: You're out of order. You chose not to appointment me. Now, Member Filiaggi, would you answer my questions, please?

MS. FILIAGGI: I am able to answer the questions if that's ---

PRESIDENT CATENA: Yeah.

MS. FILIAGGI: --- permitted?

I would say that 12917, which is the Bill we already voted on to approve, is the training aspect that you're referring to, but that training is nine hours, yes. There's three on tax exemptions that everyone should have, because everyone needs to be educated on what the implications are that they're passing judgment on, okay? And the decisions that they make. But I understand what you're saying, and it's nine hours every two years is the training element to the Bill that we've already approved, which is 12917-24.

MR. WALTON: Do Board Members get trained every two years?

MS. FILIAGGI: Yes, sir.

MR. WALTON: Okay.

What is it? How will they get paid for their time?
How will they be compensated?

MS. FILIAGGI: Board Members?

MR. WALTON: Yes.

MS. FILIAGGI: Because hearing officers, that will be part of --- they get paid on --- it's an hourly-type basis. Board Members, however, are actually paid in a similar way to Council and their duties are their duties.

MR. FUTULES: They receive a stipend.

MS. FILIAGGI: They receive a stipend.

MR. WALTON: So if a hearing officer went through that training, they submit a regular voucher and get compensated for their time?

MS. FILIAGGI: Yes, sir.

MR. WALTON: Okay.

Thank you.

Okay.

That's good for that one. Thank you.

MS. FILIAGGI: Thank you, sir.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Councilman Macey? I believe you wanted to ask something?

MR. MACEY: Yes. I believe out of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania, only two counties don't subscribe to the Assessors Association of Pennsylvania and provide training and certificates for those people who finish their training. So Allegheny County and Philadelphia County does not subscribe to those processes. We just want to get together and bring our county and our assessments into the full of what the rest of Pennsylvania is doing. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Any other comment this evening? Go ahead.

MR. GRZYBEK:: One thing I do want to point out that I thought was a very good change in the bill was. Initially, I had a bit of concern in regards to just kind of arbitrarily decreasing from five months just down to 60 days. Right. Given that, there is a bit of a concern that our workers may not be able to meet those timelines. But I think the change that you made in terms of the number of people who have to actually review these appeals, only making it one person who does the appeal and then one person who reviews it, I think is a very good change that is really going to help expedite that process.

And like you said, make our taxing bodies be able to plan in a much more efficient manner. And also, you know, we received a confirmation from administration that only having two folks review these is an appropriate number and is more consistent with practiced nationally.

MS. FILIAGGI: Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Anyone else this evening?

(No response)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Hearing no one else, just to point out a clarifying factor, Councilman Walton would rather you believe that members can't participate in meetings, and any member is welcome to any of our committee meetings. They're publicly advertised and anyone can ask any questions. The committee chair always opens it up to each and every member and then every member, basically, that attends the meeting, as Council Member Filiaggi did at this meeting, as I recall. So anyone could have, anywhere, asked any questions that they wanted to.

MR. WALTON: Point of order, Mr. President?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Now, roll call vote, please.

MR. WALTON: Point of order, Mr. President?

MR. BARKER: On the motion to approve ---.

MR. WALTON: Point of order, please?

Am I a part of any committee ---?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Roll call has been called.

MR. WALTON: Am I part of any Committee?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Please yield. Please yield.

MR. WALTON: Am I a part of any committee?

PRESIDENT CATENA: You're out of order. You're out of order.

MR. BARKER: On the motion to approve.

MR. BARKER: Mr. Betkowski?

MS. BETKOWSKI: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. Bonaroti?

MR. BONAROTI: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. DeMarco?

MR. DEMARCO: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Ms. Filiaggi?

MS. FILIAGGI: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. Futules?

MR. FUTULES: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Mr. Grzybek?

MR. GRZYBEK: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Ms. Hallam?
MS. HALLAM: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Mr. Klein?
MR. KLEIN: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Mr. Macey?
MR. MACEY: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Ms. Naccarati-Chapkis?
MS. NACCARATI-CHAPKIS: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Mr. Palmiere?
MR. PALMIERE: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Mr. Pالموسينا?
MR. PALMOSINA: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Ms. Prizio?
MS. PRIZIO: Yes
MR. BARKER: Mr. Walton?
MR. WALTON: It is the privilege of the

President to appoint all committees. He's chosen not to appoint me to any and my vote is no.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Mr. Walton --- Mr. Walton abstains. Moving on.

MR. WALTON: No. You don't vote for me. I vote for my.

PRESIDENT CATENA: You're not voting.

MR. WALTON: You don't represent my district.

PRESIDENT CATENA: You're not voting. Go ahead.

Yes.

MR. BARKER: President Catena?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Ayes 14, noes zero, with one abstention. The Bill passes.

MR. WALTON: Oh, I challenge the decision of the Chair.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Committee on Budget and Finance, for the second reading.

MR. WALTON: I challenge the decision of the Chair on how my vote is recorded. My vote is no.

PRESIDENT CATENA: There you go. Thank you. Moving on.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Committee on Budget and Finance for the Second Reading, 12916-24.

MR. BARKER: An Ordinance of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, amending and supplementing the Allegheny County Code of Ordinances, Chapter 475, entitled Taxation by the creation of a new Article 12 entitled Volunteer Service Tax Credit program in order to

establish a uniform program of Allegheny County Real Property Tax Incentives for certain volunteer service providers. Sponsored by Council Members Catena and Palmosina.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Council Member Palmosina?

MR. PALMOSINA: Thank you, President Catena. The Budget and Finance Committee met on February 7 and affirmatively recommended this Ordinance. I move for approval.

MR. PALMIERE: Second.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Motion has been made in second. Is there anyone that wants to be added to this?

(Chorus of yeses)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Is there anyone that doesn't want to be added to this?

MR. GRZYBEK: I do not, because I will be abstaining. I'm a volunteer firefighter, I could potentially benefit.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Councilman Macey, you're going to be abstaining as well because you're a volunteer firefighter as well?

MR. MACEY: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Okay.

Any other discussion?

(No response.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Hearing none, please take roll call vote.

MR. BARKER: On the motion to approve, Mr. Betkowski?

MS. BETKOWSKI:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Bonaroti?
MR. BONAROTI:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. DeMarco?
MR. DEMARCO:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Ms. Filiaggi?
MS. FILIAGGI:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Futules?
MR. FUTULES:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Grzybek?
MR. GRZYBEK:	Abstain.
MR. BARKER:	Ms. Hallam?
MS. HALLAM:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Klein?
MR. KLEIN:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Macey?
MR. MACEY:	Abstain.

MR. BARKER: Ms. Naccarati-Chapkis?
MS. NACCARATI-CHAPKIS: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Mr. Palmiere?
MR. PALMIERE: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Mr. Palmosina?
MR. PALMOSINA: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Ms. Prizio?
MS. PRIZIO: Yes.
MR. BARKER: Mr. Walton?
MR. WALTON: Yes.
MR. BARKER: President Catena?
PRESIDENT CATENA: Yes.

MR. BARKER: Ayes 13, noes zero with two abstentions.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Okay. Committee on Economic Development and Job Creation for the Second Reading, 12939-24.

MR. BARKER: A resolution providing for a program of temporary exemption from county real property taxes for improvements, including repairs, construction or reconstruction made on industrial, commercial or business property in a deteriorated area in the City of Pittsburgh. County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, pursuant to the Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act. Sponsored by the Chief Executive.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Council Member Betkowski?

MR. BETKOWSKI: The Committee on Economic Development and Job Creation met on February 7 and affirmatively recommended this resolution to Council, and I make that motion.

MR. MACEY: Second.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Motion has been made and seconded. Any discussion? Councilman Betkowski, did you want to add something first?

MR. BETKOWSKI: Yes, I did. I just wanted to thank the County Executive and her team for their leadership on this resolution. I don't think any of us believe that it is going to be a silver bullet that addresses all of the challenges that our downtown business district is facing, but it is a good first step. And again, I applaud the Executive and her team's leadership on this.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Anyone else? Council Member Hallam?

MS. HALLAM: Yes. So I haven't really made it a secret that I am not a big fan of this bill. LERTAs in general are just a band aid, and this is a blanket LERTA

for all of downtown, which is the biggest band aid. It's not actually solving what the problem is. You know, I support the affordable housing components of LERTA as a concept. I'm very suspicious of the job creation loophole in this specific bill. I want to remind my colleagues that since April of 2009, this County has been in violation of state law by not doing a reassessment, by having to go to court just to determine what the actual common level ratio is. And we saw last year that this Council had to take action to give what ended up being an extraordinary loss of revenue to the municipalities, to the school districts by taking tax revenue that they were receiving that was not theirs because the county has been out of compliance for so long.

We need to do a reassessment. I know nobody wants to talk about it. I know it's always the elephant in the room. I would be open to those conversations. I'm glad to see that we're starting the process of moving towards putting the mechanisms in place to make that work. But I really want to implore that as we go down this path to look towards doing a land value tax instead of doing the system how we're doing it right now. Doing it the way that it's been done is going to put us in this position over and over again, where every new county executive, every new council is going to have to vote to do the one thing they don't want to have to do, even though it's the right thing to do, which is doing a reassessment.

A land value tax is actually the solution. It allows us to develop underutilized land, such as empty parking lots and abandoned buildings, while making sure that we're not only incentivizing developers who can now come in with almost no scrutiny whatsoever, instead of applying for the process, as has always been the case, on a case-by-case basis. So I am not just a no, I am a hard no on this bill, and that's all I got to say.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Anyone else this evening? Go ahead.

MR. GRYZBEK: So I do share some of Councilwoman Hallam's concerns. I think that there is the real possibility that corporations can come in and simply maximize their profits by taking advantage of a LERTA to do some sort of modifications to a building that they may choose to do otherwise and may already be profitable for them. I also acknowledge that we're going to be locking in our current tax rate where it is, and I think a way

that we can potentially fix that is, like Councilwoman said, doing a reassessment. That reassessment would have to happen this year because after these corporations take advantage of the LERTA and get their tax rates locked in, that is going to stay in perpetuity over the ten years of the LERTA.

Now, that kind of negative aside, I do think that action is needed downtown. We are in a housing crisis nationally. We're fortunate enough that in Allegheny county, in Pittsburgh, housing prices aren't as bad as they are in many other medium to large-sized cities. However, they are increasing over time and they're getting less and less affordable. So I do think this LERTA has the ability to accomplish the goal of increasing the total housing stock that we have in Allegheny county, which housing research has shown over and over again has decreased homelessness, decreased rental costs, decreased purchase for new homes, and also kind of serves as a supply factor to drive down the overall prices on existing housing. Right? So I think for that reason, there is a large benefit this, and furthermore, having more people living downtown is going to increase business for those small businesses that are currently downtown and are struggling due to just the lack of people coming downtown for their day-to-day job. So for that reason, I'm a yes.

MR. WALTON: If I may?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Go ahead.

MR. WALTON: While I don't believe this LERTA will decrease homelessness, one iota, I do believe that this is needed, and I do believe that the practices that have been put in place by the leadership at the economic development department over the past few years and revising how LERTAs are developed and implemented, and specifically in terms of, as opposed to looking at it singularly, at a ten-year run for a LERTA, as more of a building is utilized, it terminates the LERTA in an expedited manner. And so I would encourage the Economic Development Department to continue to look and explore those avenues in terms of addressing those shifts in that more rapid return to that initial level of taxing. So I support this. I think that we have to move forward. I think we need to take the difficult steps and have the difficult conversations about equity, about opportunity, and how we revitalize our central business core. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Council Member Hallam?

MS. HALLAM: I just have one final thing before we take a vote. I just want to remind folks that if inevitably in the future, this county or your local taxing body votes to raise your tax rate, remember that the people who voted yes tonight did so for developers and not for increased services in this County for all of you.

(Applause)

MR. DEMARCO: Mr. President?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Yes, go ahead.

MR. DEMARCO: I just wanted to add here on this thing today in the news, they broke that K&L Gates Center is now going to enter foreclosure or potentially foreclosure proceedings. The assessed value on that was cut in half from \$44 million to \$22 million. Many of you folks who've paid attention to the news here recently has seen PNC Tower, 3 Gateway, USX Tower. Those were reduced considerably. The County, as well as the City, as well as school districts, are going to owe refunds to these folks because they've been overcharged in paying more taxes than they should have the last couple of years.

In addition, the lowering of that assessed value is going to mean that we're going to receive less money in tax revenue here in 2024 and going forward because of the reduced assessed value. And one of the things about Pittsburgh, we have like the fourth-most office space, but yet, we're ranked like 28th when it comes to the actual need for it.

Okay?

So is this particular bill the be-all or end-all? Absolutely not, but this particular bill is what the Administration has come to us with. It's with the Allegheny Conference, the Pittsburgh Chamber, the Downtown Partners Alliance and everybody else that are concerned about the future viability of our urban core. So while it may not be something that I like or love, what it does is it locks in the assessed value of the properties today and only gives them a break on any improvements that they make. And this is necessary to get developers to come in and try to convert some of this housing or some of these office towers to housing. And part of that housing would be some component of affordable housing. And the more housing we add to the city or the county stock, the more affordable housing overall should be.

So I am in support of this bill tonight, not because I think it's perfect, but because I think we're facing a

crisis here. We're coming to a reckoning in regards to tax revenue, and something needs to be done, and I would rather be sitting here doing something than being sitting here saying no. So thank you, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. At this point in time, I would just like to say that this Bill is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. There's lots of issues with it. There's lots of things I don't agree with. But honestly, Downtown Pittsburgh's real estate tax base is in serious trouble. I mean, we need to admit that. It's prolonged high office vacancies. I mean, remote work is here to stay. We have a high concentration office buildings and a large number of property tax assessment appeals that are reducing the downtown assessed property values. The trend threatens the fiscal health of the county, city and the school district by making a once reliable source of steady growing tax revenue less dynamic and more precarious. And the last thing the county wants to do is create a structure in which dramatically falling values within the city must be compensated by higher taxes countywide.

It's very conceivable that the assessed value of downtown's commercial use property will fall by 50 percent in the next few years as 55 downtown commercial office buildings pursue assessment appeals totaling \$1.5 billion. As of early 2024, three prominent downtown commercial properties successfully appealed their assessed values, resulting in an average assessment deduction of 43.7 percent. If other property owners achieved similar results, this could decrease downtown's tax base by as much as \$709,000,000. These successful appeals would provide a powerful incentive to other property owners and could initiate a vicious cycle of assessment declines and lost property tax revenue.

As the cycle continues, rental prices will drop and downtown will become more attractive to nuisance and less desirable retailers. In turn, these retailers will diminish downtown's character and vitality by making it less desirable for the investment needed to promote economic growth. We must invest in a new path forward for downtown to counter these effects. The downtown LERTA is just one component of a multifaceted strategy that will allow downtown to hopefully support a vibrant, diverse economy and transform it into a thriving 18-hour neighborhood.

I believe that the downtown LERTA can counter individual instances of decline and disinvestment. The downtown LERTA that Pittsburgh stakeholders are committed to reimagining and reinvesting in downtown with partners like County Executive Innamorato and Mayor Gainey, the commitment will act as leverage and local match to strengthen our request to the Governor's Office and to the state and federal officials for additional funding to move forwards. This LERTA is an investment in our future, and even though it might not be perfect, it's an investment that we need to make at this point in time, because if we don't, we're going to be in serious trouble later down the line. Thank you.

Jared, please take a roll call vote.

MR. BARKER: On the motion to approve, Mr. Betkowski?

MS. BETKOWSKI:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Bonaroti?
MR. BONAROTI:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. DeMarco?
MR. DEMARCO:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Ms. Filiaggi?
MS. FILIAGGI:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Futules?
MR. FUTULES:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Grzybek?
MR. GRZYBEK:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Ms. Hallam?
MS. HALLAM:	No.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Klein?
MR. KLEIN:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Macey?
MR. MACEY:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Ms. Naccarati-Chapkis?
MS. NACCARATI-CHAPKIS:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Palmiere?
MR. PALMIERE:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Palmosina?
MR. PALMOSINA:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Ms. Prizio?
MS. PRIZIO:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Mr. Walton?
MR. WALTON:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	President Catena?
PRESIDENT CATENA:	Yes.
MR. BARKER:	Ayes, 14, noes 1. The Bill passes.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Are there any Liaison Reports this evening?

(No response.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Hearing none, moving on to New Business, Ordinances and Resolutions. Anything?

MR. BARKER: Nothing.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Not new business motions, none. Notification of Contracts. 12946-24.

MR. BARKER: A communication summarizing approved executive actions for the month of January 2024.

MR. MACEY: Receive and file, please.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Motion has been made. Is there a second?

MR. PALMIERE: Second.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Motion has been made? And second, all those in favor signified by saying aye.

(Ayes respond)

PRESIDENT CATENA: All those opposed?

(No response)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Motion carries. We'll now have Public Comment on General Items, but before we begin, I'd like to say a few things. First and foremost, I want to thank everyone for presenting these comments to Council this evening, whether they were in-person or otherwise. We received a ton of emails, obviously, for all of this and ongoing. Public engagement obviously, is the best case scenario on local government, and we have certainly seen that in this instance, and I thank everyone for that.

I think everyone is aware that peace in the Middle East is difficult to maintain. But in the process of evaluating potential language for a sense of council motion, the full dimension of this difficulty rapidly became apparent. As part-time, locally-elected officials, we are in no means experts in geopolitics. Those matters are well beyond our purview. And of course, Middle Eastern relations have confounded a wide range of people from around the world who are experts for three quarters of a century, precisely because those relations are delicate and complex. Every member of this Council seated before you can agree that all human life is precious. We will bear this fundamental principle in mind as we evaluate paths forward from this evening.

Obviously, we have a large number of public commenters this evening. Assuming everyone who signed up speaks for their full three minutes, this Agenda item will

take over four and-a-half hours. My goal is to be as efficient and as fair as possible throughout. To that end, I will be applying the rules of Council governing public comment very strictly this evening. Again, I'm going to ask everyone to remain quiet and respectful at all times. Please don't applaud, boo, or heckle, or otherwise disrupt proceedings.

Again, we're talking about peace in the Middle East, and it's not a subject that I think deserves applause or heckling. I mean, it's a human crisis, and I think we need to be respectful of that matter. Obey the time limits for public comments. Speakers will receive a single beep and a yellow light on the podium when they have one minute left, and a red light and multiple beeps when there are three minutes have expired. Please do not speak past the three minutes under any circumstances.

If a speaker is not present when their name is called, they will forfeit their turn. Individuals who do not sign up at least 24 hours in advance of this meeting will not be permitted to speak. Speakers may not give all or part of their time to others, but if any group would like to appoint an individual to speak for three minutes on everyone's behalf, that is certainly permissible. Please don't obstruct the view of anyone else in the room, and don't attempt to impede the speakers as they make their way to the podium.

Again, don't attempt to engage Council Members or other speakers in discussion or debate. This is your time. This is your time for public comment. It's for you to make your opinion known to us. I absolutely do not wish to prevent anyone from speaking, but again, I have to stress that these proceedings must be as orderly as possible. So violation of any of these rules will result in removal from the room. The speaking order has been posted in the hallway and just inside the door. The list will give you a general idea of where your name likely is to be called. We're going to read basically five names at a time and line up those people so that you're in front of the podium so we can get through this as expeditiously as possible because, like I said, a lot of speakers have signed up and we want to hear from all of you.

So when you hear your name, please line up along the rail to my right or center in the order that you were called. When you begin speaking, say your name, address for the record. And then, like I said, you're not

required to take your full three minutes, we want to hear from each and every one of you, but if you can make your point in less than three minutes, we'd appreciate it, because like I said, it's going to be a long evening.

So with that, let's begin. Let's call the first group of five speakers, Jared.

MR. BARKER: First five are Roberta McDonald, Kate Daher, Jodi Hirsh, Felicia Thomas, and Karim Alshurafa.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Straight here, right? Straightforward. We're just right here. Roberta, Kate, Jodi, Felicia. Is that what you read, Jared? I'm sorry.

MR. BARKER: Correct. Roberta, Kate, Jodi, Felicia, and Karim.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Are you Kate?

MS. DAHER: I'm Kate.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Okay, Kate, you're on.

MS. DAHER: Thank you. My name is Kate Daher. I live at 618 Whitney Avenue in Wilkinsburg. So thank you for having us. I know it's going to be a long meeting.

In 2003, I traveled to Rafah, Gaza. I was deeply affected by the killing of American peace activist Rachel Corrie. Rachel's death came at the hands of an IDF soldier operating a caterpillar bulldozer, and it shook me to my core. At that time, I was serving as a teacher in Pittsburgh Public Schools. I needed to understand why the United States allocates so much money to Israel, while so many here, and I just heard the report you gave, so many of us go without housing, medical care and decent educational prospects. Rachel's murder was not isolated. It echoed the untold stories of countless Palestinians who had perished while defending their homes and livelihoods. And if we turn on the television today, we're seeing the same thing happen, multiplied by hundreds of thousands, all at the hands of all with the --- with taxpayer dollars, our money.

Now my connection to the Holy Land runs deep, instilled by my Syrian grandmother, who often talked about her frequent travels between Damascus, Beirut and Jerusalem, something that would be impossible today and is impossible for many people of the land, people who live there. I've been back twice. I organized delegations of teachers, artists, professors, students. I was so moved by what I saw, that I brought people from Carnegie Mellon, the University of Pittsburgh, students from the Pittsburgh

area to witness what is an illegal occupation and to come back and amplify the voices of the people who live there.

So today, the occupation is televised genocide, ethnic cleansing, the murder and maiming of over 100,000 predominantly women and children. There is rampant starvation, a profound lack of humanitarian assistance.

While the immediate resolution may seem distant, we urge you, as our representatives, to raise your voice and stand in solidarity with a million worldwide, including the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Teachers, and the black clergy, who are all calling for a ceasefire. We thought that would be on the agenda tonight, and some of the other speakers will explain to you why it's not been included on the agenda. We are sorry that it's not here tonight because we were planning to come and ask you to vote for this motion, but that obviously is not happening tonight. We want you to take the lead in our cities, in our state, be part of all the people in the world that are demanding a ceasefire. And thank you.

MS. HIRSH: Hello, members of County Council, and thanks for letting me speak. And hello to many of the Jews in the audience who I know very well. My name is --- told you my name. I'm a resident of Highland Park in the City. I am the Jewish grandchild of Holocaust survivors. My grandfather was in a camp. I became a bat mitzvah and was confirmed at Rodef Shalom congregation. If I learned anything from growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust, it was these two words; never again. I thought that lesson applied to all people. Since the tragedy of October 7, I have learned how wrong I was.

Two Wednesdays ago, a few of us sat around a table at Hillman Library and listened to Council Member Paul Klein express his resolute support for a motion on County Council calling for an immediate permanent ceasefire in Gaza. He said in no uncertain terms that what is happening in Gaza must stop surprising us all. He offered not just to support a ceasefire motion, but to sponsor it. Then came the phone calls, mind you, not from a majority of his constituents, but from the powerful few to whom too many politicians we elect listen to, instead. I hear my fellow Jews saying they cannot support a ceasefire because it will make Jews unsafe. Being fearful of an increase in antisemitism is valid, especially in this city. But people making this claim are wrong.

Blowing up hospitals, killing newborns, withholding fuel, water, electricity and food, bombing universities and ambulances, murdering journalists and healthcare workers, and slaughtering generations of families for the crimes of Hamas will not make Jews safe. Turning Gaza's 2.3 residents --- million residents into refugees will not stop antisemitism. Instead, as we've already seen, it will dramatically inflame antisemitic embers across the globe. And let me be clear, there is no hostage release without a ceasefire. I don't understand what anyone means when they say, what about the hostages? Or bring them home as a rejoinder to a ceasefire.

A ceasefire is the only path to rescuing the hostages, and the longer we wait, the less likely there are any hostages left to rescue. My ancestors did not die in Auschwitz for me to stand down while genocide, and yes, it's a genocide, rages in my name, never again is not just for us, it's for everyone. Thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Again, no applause. This is a human issue. I don't think it's appropriate that we're applauding loss of lives on ---.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: That's your opinion.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Go ahead.

MR. ALSHURAF: Dear Councilmen and women, my name is Karim Alshurafa. I am a Palestinian American. I lived in Pittsburgh now for 11 years. I'm from Ohio Township with my family, live out there, been in the steel industry now for 20 years and grown real fond of the city and wanted to call it our home forever.

Since October 7, my family has been impacted personally. We have lots of family members in Gaza because my parents are Gazin and I'm Gazin. My family members have endured quite a bit of trouble since October 7. And what I mean by trouble is everything from starvation, forced displacement, thirst, no medical supplies and indiscriminate bombing and where they reside and live, which have caused them to lose their lives.

In the first week, were informed that seven family members have died due to the bombings. The second week we lost another one person. And the third week I lost eight family members and every week we brace for more news. And up to now, the count in my family is 22 since the start of October 7. It pains me to continue to hear this news, especially since it's within our power to stop it. And

what I mean by that is, we've ultimately decided to continue supporting the war and continued indiscriminate bombing of complete neighborhoods without rhyme or reason, going after innocent civilians. And I say this because I know my family that's there and the neighbors that we have.

Currently, I'm going to speak to you about the Resolution that was passed. As of October 26th, the Resolution was passed by this Committee, by this Council. Bill Number 12839-23. In this Resolution, there were certain statements that were made and I believe they are in direct contradiction. And I also believe that this Council has tried to do their best to stand with human rights, even internationally where it stands, but things have changed since the time of October 7, knowing full well what's going on out there today.

There are certain statements in this Resolution that saying, the global community supports justice and safety for the Israeli and Palestinian people, and Israeli in its effort to defend itself, and Israel in its effort to defend itself, and other comments such as the ethical duty and stand firmly against acts of terrorism and violence. And then there's other comments about democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

PRESIDENT CATENA: I'm sorry, you need to wrap it up.

MR. ALSHURAF: I expect you guys to take --- I expect you guys to take action towards a ceasefire, especially how much contradiction is being labeled in this Resolution from October 6th, and I thank you for your time.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Please line up the next five.

MR. BARKER: The next five are Miracle Jones, Mel Packer, Rachel Greene, Kenneth Mostern and Melanie Redden.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Miracle Jones?

MS. JONES: Good evening, Members of Council. My name is Miracle Jones. I'm a resident of District 13. I am coming to you today to ask you to introduce and approve a ceasefire resolution. Like Kareem said, back in October, you approved a resolution on this very matter. And that is why we are here today. Over the past few months, we have seen the most horrendous and violent images coming out of Philistine. Worst for many of us is the knowledge that millions from this district goes

directly to support the horrendous atrocities that are happening abroad.

Thousands have been killed and injured and thousands more are under the rubble. As such, it is important that we reject these human rights violations. Pittsburgh deems itself as a human rights city and it's important that we send a message that we are not supporting these atrocities. Some of you have been shocked to find out that Palestinian people live in your district, and even some of you may not even taken a chance to meet the Palestinian people in your district, which is why we are here today.

Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib said, the cries of Palestinian and Israeli children sound no different to me. What I don't understand is why the cries of Palestinians sound different to you all. I have sat with people who have lost folks before, during and after October 7th. I have watched as my friends have grieved the loss of their loved ones in --- and the West Bank. I have watched as my Palestinian the Arab family has come under attack here in Oakland and Harrisburg with little condemnation from this body.

A ceasefire resolution brings the hostages home, and an actual permanent ceasefire resolution creates a political solution to this political problem. October 6 was deemed the deadliest year for Palestinian children, and since then, Palestinian American youth have been murdered, again with little condemnation from this body. And moreover, when Pennsylvania and Palestine and family was bombed trying to free Reza, again, there was little condemnation from this body.

We cannot say that we are advocating for a county for all of us. If we are ignoring people who are part of this county. We cannot pick and choose which communities we show up for and give resources to. This region was deemed the worst place for black women to live. This region has been deemed the worst place for disabled people to live. If we are fighting for Allegheny County, that works for all of us. We must do everything we can to make sure that death and destruction is not done in our name and is not part of our politics. As such, I do hope you reconsider and introduce and pass a ceasefire resolution. Thank you so very much.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MR. PACKER: Thank you. Mel Packer from Point Breeze, I bring to you the words of Lisa Suhar Majaj, a Palestinian poet writing about Gaza. It's called The Poem. The poem was found in the rubble of a six-story residential building in Khan Younis destroyed by a 2,000 pound bomb that sent fire to the sky and death to the burning earth. The poem was alive, but bloody beyond recognition, trapped between heavy chunks of concrete. The blast had severed its legs and arms. The poem could not move. It could not reach out to rescuers. It could not find its wounds.

The poem's face was unrecognizable. A deep gash across its forehead revealed the bone within. The poem's eyes were filled with blood. It could not see. The poem's mouth was a gaping wound. When it tried to scream, no sound came out. The rescuers knew it was important to save the poem. They dug frantically with bare hands of their debris, begging the poem to hold on. When they finally extracted it from the rubble, passing it hand to the wedding stretchers, watches erupted with joy. The poem was alive, was returned to the people. Later, in the hospital, the poem lie in the bloodied ground, listening to the screams of children undergoing amputations without anesthetic, to the whales of mothers clutching the bodies of their babies to their chests, refusing to allow them to be taken, to the refrigerated ice cream trucks pleading, it's too cold there, that they could not leave them alone, that the children would be frightened.

The poem tried to move its absent legs, its arms, to sense what was left. The poem's pain was beyond anything it had experienced before. It tried to imagine its mouth moving without pain, tried to imagine a voice emerging from the bloodied crevice of its jaw, wondering if it would ever speak again. The poem wanted it all to stop. The enormous pain, the cries of anguish, the echo of how it sounded when the bomb hit with its unimaginable fury, how it felt when walls crashed down like the hand of death.

Just then, aid workers brought in a wounded child, laying it on the floor nearby. The child was covered in blood, screaming for its mother. The poem lay there, listening. Slowly, it mustered every bit of strength it had and began to. It couldn't get a voice out. This was the best it could do. The child's whimper subsided a little. It turned its face toward the sound. The poem

realized that even without its arms and legs, even with its face practically torn off, it had a job to do. The poem searched inside itself for the body of light that stayed with it in the rubble. The body of light it could barely imagine. Exhausted but determined, the poem continued on. It was difficult, but better than staying silent. The poem thought to itself that later on, when it could manage, it would try to sing a lullaby, something to comfort the children whose light still shone in their bodies, who would need some kind of music to survive.

The person described said they could not stay silent after World War II, many grandchildren of Germans said, what did you do when the genocide happened, and they said, we were good Germans. There was a fascist regime in Israel right now, killing and exterminating Palestinians. It is our duty not to be those good Germans again. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Rachel's not here, Kenneth?

MR. MOSTERN: Yes. Hello, Council.

MR. BARKER: I'm sorry, before you line up the next five will be Morgan Faeder, Ahmed Arafat, Aaron Kuhn, Andrea Boykowycz, and Sam Schmidt.

MR. MOSTERN: Hello, Councilors. My name is Kenny Mostern and I'm a voter at 441 42nd Street in Lawrenceville. I'm a constituent of Council Member Bonaroti's. I'm a small business owner and I was raised in a Zionist congregation in Queens, New York in the '70s and '80s. I'm here tonight on behalf of Pittsburgh Jewish Voice for Peace.

Detroit, Atlanta, Seattle, Akron, Dayton, and Toledo, Chicago, Albany, State College, PA, the AFL-CIO the American Federation of Teachers, SEIU, that's just a small selection of the 61 municipalities and dozens of unions that have passed motions in favor of ceasefire to date.

On February 7, I was the fourth person at the table with Council Member Klein, along with Kate, Jody and Kareem, who you've already heard from. And at that time, Council Member Klein forcefully demonstrated that he had the key understanding required to pass a ceasefire motion, that we've done war over and over for decades and it has never brought peace. Apparently now he is concerned that passing such a motion will somehow create a risk for Jewish safety, though the clear language of our proposed motion condemns those who are a danger to Jewish people,

and he has not proposed alternative language that would be acceptable to him. Apparently, he has decided that war has been effective after all and is the best way to spend our resources. He is very wrong.

At my synagogue in the 1970s, the words never again were hammered into me and I believed them. Apparently, though I understood them incorrectly. At the time, I thought never again meant never again would there be a genocide of any people in the world. It turns out, however, that there was a Palestinian exception, or maybe somehow, by definition, Jews can't commit genocide because we're God's people or something. Of course, that's always what people who commit genocide say. There is no Jewish exception. If you want to fight anti-Semitism, you must fight racism and islamophobia. If you want to fight anti-Semitism, you need to understand that no piece of land in the world is exclusive to people of one racial, ethnic or religious background, not South Carolina, not South Africa, and not Israel or Palestine. If you want to fight antisemitism, we need a peace fire --- a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, and a single democratic state for all who live there.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you, Melanie. Morgan?

MR. FAEDER: Morgan Faeder. I'm a Jew. I live in Squirrel Hill. I'm a member and a lay leader at Temple Sinai in Squirrel Hill, and I'm speaking for myself and not on behalf of Temple Sinai. I also lived in Israel for two years, from 1999 to 2001. My daughter was born there. I love Israel. I have a strong connection to the land and to the people there. I was sickened when I heard of the October 7 Hamas attacks and hoped for an Israeli response that would bring the 258 hostages home quickly and safely. To date, 112 have been returned, with 105 released in a negotiated prisoner exchange, four released by Hamas unilaterally, and three rescued by the IDF, the Israeli Defense Forces.

Over 30,000 people have died, overwhelmingly noncombatant Palestinians in Gaza. The IDF operation is not freeing hostages. It is not making Israelis safer. It's led to an unconscionable number of civilian deaths without making anyone in the region more secure. The country that was on its founding in 1948 to be a light unto the nations is not fulfilling its promise. It is not making the world a better place right now and I have hope that at some time, Jews and Palestinians in the Middle

East in the land of Palestine, can take up that mantle once again and work together to be a light unto the nations.

Right now, a permanent ceasefire is necessary to protect Israelis, to protect Palestinians, to protect the residents of Gaza, and to retain some stance for a lasting peace in the region. Thank you for your attention.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Please state your name and address. Just a reminder for everybody when you come up.

MR. ARAFAT: My name is Ahmed Arafat. I am from Churchill. Ladies and gentlemen, I stand before you today not just as a concerned member of our community who have been here in Pittsburgh for almost 25 years, but as someone intimately affected by the devastating conflict in Gaza. My four sisters and their families, including 14 nieces and nephews, have lost everything. They are hungry, they are tired and they are not safe.

12,000 innocent children have already been killed in Gaza, including those close to my heart. My best friend, Mohammed, who was a UK-trained medical doctor who went back to Gaza to help those in need, who was killed with his son and his father while they were evacuating from the north to the south through the supposed safe route. In fact, BBC aired that.

The heartbreaking truth is that we cannot change the past, but we have the power to shape the future. As members of this Council, your decision holds weight beyond those walls. A vote for immediate ceasefire may not bring back the lives of the ones we have lost, but it can prevent further tragedy. When your children and grandchildren will ask you, what did you do to stop the genocide? Let your response be one of conviction. Vote for a ceasefire. Be a voice for those who cannot speak and be on the right side of history. This is not just a call for compassion. It's a belief for humanity. Let us be, as a community, take a stand against ongoing suffering. Your vote for a ceasefire is not just a political act. It's a legacy of empathy and a testament to your commitment to a future, free from the shackles of this devastating conflict. Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MS. BOYKOWYCZ: Hi, my name is Andrea Boykowycz. I'm a resident of Oakland. I'm a member of Mr. Walton's district and I'm speaking here as a private citizen. I did not prepare remarks, but I am speaking as somebody who

both lives and works in Oakland and works often with politically motivated young people, And I'm here to report to you that the kids are not okay and that the current devastation happening in Gaza is tremendously psychologically difficult, but also politically infuriating and demoralizing to a vast swath of people.

I myself am old enough to have lived through a number of atrocities, a number of betrayals by the parties that I have been a loyal member of and the candidates that I have vote for. I am accustomed to the fact that politicians are often calculating in what it is that they support and that these things are not always in careful alignment with basic human decency or coherent value systems. There has been an accumulation of these kinds of betrayals over the course of my entire lifetime and we are reaching a crisis point here where young people are going to completely lose faith in the integrity of the republic, in the integrity of the democratic system, in the integrity of the elected officials that are charged with responsibility for upholding the best that our country is supposed to stand FOR.

So this is --- it's true you are not in control of American Foreign Policy, you do not have any specific influence to bear as a body, but you represent a democratic institution where the young people who live here need to feel that you are invested in their membership and participation in public life. And your vote in favor of a ceasefire and a condemnation of the violence that is happening currently in Gaza would be a measure of respect towards the future of our country and the children that we are currently trying to educate about the future. Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MR. KUHN: My name is Aaron Kuhn. I'm a resident of Brighton Heights and Council District 13. I'm represented by Council Member David Bonaroti. I'm the proprietor of Kuhn Carpentry, LLC and I'm a general contractor. As a member of Pittsburgh's Jewish community, I've prepared some remarks about the ongoing genocide in Gaza. As a Jew and a human being, I've been sickened and horrified by the senseless slaughter of the past four and-a-half months, the death marches and the ethnic cleansing and the famine, which is beginning to grip the north of Gaza as we speak. All of which is motivated purely by revenge and hatred,

and not by justice for the victims of October 7 or to bring back the hostages taken on that day.

Our collective conscience as Jews demands that we stop this from continuing. Our collective conscience as human beings in the world demands that we stop this from continuing. I reject entirely the excuse that Israel uses to justify their indiscriminate bombing and slaughter of children and other innocents, saying that Hamas is using them as human shields and that they have to continue with this in order to free the hostages. This is nonsense, both from a Jewish point of view and from common sense. Their indiscriminate bombing in such tight quarters, which is an area smaller than Pittsburgh, with a population many times larger than Pittsburgh's, places the hostages at dire risk as well. The Torah and the teachings of our ancestral scholars expressly forbid both the killing of innocents and Israel's ridiculous excuse of human shields.

As Jews, we can look to the following lesson from the Talmud Yerushalmi. Humanity was created single in the world to teach that for anybody who destroys a single soul, it is counted as if he destroyed an entire world. And for anybody who preserves a single life, it is counted as if he preserved an entire world. We learn elsewhere, hundreds of years later from the Rambam, that it is better to acquit a thousand guilty persons than to kill even a single innocent person. This is a sentiment that was echoed by our famous Pennsylvanian Benjamin Franklin.

So it should be obvious to anyone that Israel's objective is not to target Hamas, but instead to slaughter Palestinians out of fear and hatred. The blood of the innocent cries out from the soil of Gaza. God himself is weeping. Israel bombed the north, and then there were unspeakable casualties and death of innocence. And Israel said, go south to the safe zones. Then they bombed the central region and Gaza City, and they said, go south to the safe zones. And then they bombed the south. And the Gazans can only go to Rafah, which is now being invaded and bombed, and the Gazans are being pushed out of Gaza into the Sinai Desert. This is a textbook case of death marches and ethnic cleansing of the Gaza Strip.

The explicit intentions of the Israeli leadership, as they have stated themselves, as well as the staggering death toll of innocence, also qualify it for the title of genocide. As Jews, we should know what this is --- only

those of us who blind themselves with fear and hatred can deny what this is.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Sam. Before you start, can we line up the next five, Jared, please?

MR. BARKER: The next five are Erin Breault, Emily De Farrari, Ali Asad, Walid Khoury and Benjamin Case.

MS. SCHMIDT: Hi, Members of Council, my name is Sam Schmidt. I'm a constituent of District 13. David Bonaroti, you are my Council Member. I'm going to keep this short and sweet because I think I want to give a lot of more space to my Jewish and Palestinian comrades in the audience who have more personal connections to this conflict. In summary, nearly 30,000 people have been killed in Palestine. If there is a genocide happening, if you feel like you are powerless in this situation, you're not. Like it's been mentioned, multiple cities across the country have passed and promoted ceasefire resolutions. It's clear that your constituents are calling for that, as 80 percent of democrats across the country are.

Yeah, I just want to say that what Israel is doing, as a Veteran, it's so horrific to see and witness the repeated war crimes and the United States continuing to fund that, and millions of dollars of that comes from our tax dollars here in Pittsburgh. We are funding that. So I feel not only is it possible for you to put forward a meaningful and lasting resolution, but also it's your responsibility to your constituents. So I'm going to make more space here, like I said, for my Jewish and Palestinian counterparts, but thank you so much for listening.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MS. BREault: To the members of Allegheny County Council. Good evening. My name is Erin Breault. I live at 5509 Raleigh Street in Pittsburgh and Paul Klein's my Council District 11 representative. I first became aware of the historic context of Palestinians struggling against U.S.-backed Israeli occupation and oppression 40 years ago when I met my husband's uncle, Samir Dursey, a Palestinian Christian Canadian. He was a refugee from 48 who was forced to flee with his entire family from Palestine, first to Egypt and then Toronto. He welcomed me to his extended Canadian Palestinian family with delicious grape leaves, mujadara and ful mudamas, his specialty dish. When I asked him how he prepared it, he replied that along

with the fava beans, the olive oil and sea salt, the secret ingredient was love.

So it was from Uncle Samir that I was introduced to the wider Palestinian diaspora, story of displacement, occupation and oppression, as well as their struggle to maintain their culture and joy in life, their fight for self-determination and dignity. Following my move to Pittsburgh, I have been active here since 2008 and helped in the effort to organize and educate more people about the Palestinian struggle, including writing curriculum for high school students about the issue. I'm a teacher at Pittsburgh Public Schools.

I'm speaking this evening to request that you support a motion calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. Time is of the essence, considering the horrific situation that has unfolded there in the past four months, continue, because it ---.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Please continue because it doesn't seem like that was right.

MS. BREault: Thank you. What is even more heartbreaking is the human toll. Israel is bombed, displaced and killed over 30,000 Palestinians, predominantly women and children, since October 7. In addition, 70 percent of the housing stock is destroyed or damaged. Civilians have been displaced multiple times, evacuating as Israel continues its ground offensive. There is literally no safe place, and all this destruction is sustained with the help of American taxpayer aid to Israel.

Furthermore, the need for humanitarian aid is dire, but only a trickle is reaching Gaza. A ceasefire is the first step to alleviating the suffering, the release of hostages and prisoners, and then to a more long term negotiated settlement. Please join a growing segment of civil society, including other cities, counties and unions such as my own, the American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO, in supporting a ceasefire motion, the end of ethnic cleansing and genocide and the priority of rushing humanitarian aid into Gaza. Let Allegheny county show our city, state and federal government officials that we stand for all people who are suffering in this brutal war, Palestinian and Israeli. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MS. DE FARRARI: Good evening and thank you for providing this opportunity for us to share with you. My

name is Emily De Farrari. I live at 623 Kirtland Street in District 11.

I was invited to participate in a midwifery project in the West Bank, which is, as you know, occupied Palestinian territory in 2010. I stayed there for three months, visiting midwives from all over the West Bank. Israel did not allow me to visit Gaza, so I was limited to meeting only midwives in the West Bank. I visited hospitals, homebirth midwives, medical centers and small women's clinics. I came home with many, many stories of how the Israeli occupation made life intolerable for Palestinian women, how the Israeli occupation made women feel that they had no choice but to leave their homes.

I'm going to share two of those stories with you today. The first is a story of a woman with preeclampsia, or toxemia, one of the most deadly complications of pregnancy, giving birth in a small community hospital in Salfit about 30 miles from Ramallah. She needed to be transferred to the tertiary care center in Ramallah, and I jumped up and down to try to get people to take her, but they wouldn't until somebody finally took me aside and explained that we could not transfer her because even though the route from southeast to Ramallah went through Palestinian territory, we were very likely to be encountered by a pop-up Israeli checkpoint. She would have been stopped at the side of the road and delivered there without any medical care. She did give birth in Salfit and was precariously recovering when it was time for me to leave.

The second story is a story of a young mother holding her newborn in the bed in which she had just given birth, crying because she could not visit her mother, dying of breast cancer in Gaza. Israel had made it very clear to this woman that if she traveled home to Gaza to be with her dying mother, she would not be able to return to the West Bank where she worked. She could not give up her job because she was the sole support of her family. She had to choose between supporting her families and sitting beside her mother who was dying.

These are with commuting distances of each other, Salfit and Gaza. They are not geographically far, but they are artificially worlds apart. And the current bombardment in Gaza is part of this displacement of the Palestinian people. The Gazans are being pushed to the Egyptian border. They're going to be forced to cross.

They're not going to be allowed to go home. We can see this.

As council, you may feel that this is not your issue, this is not your problem, but this is a problem that all Americans share because we are paying for it. So please do what is right. Please raise your voices with the rest of us and create this ceasefire resolution. Thank you very much.

MR. CASE: Good evening. Thanks for opening this discussion. My name is Benjamin Case. I live in Fineview, Northside. I'm a Jewish Pittsburgher. I'm descended from my Jewish family, fled problems and persecution in Romania. I have a young daughter. She turns two in a couple weeks. My daughter, Kazmira, is named for my great grandfather, actually, who was an immigrant coal miner in Natrona. Kazmira has a severe blood disorder. It's extremely rare. She's actually the fifth person worldwide to be diagnosed with it. The doctors aren't sure what to do with it, but she needs frequent transfusions, sometimes very rapidly, to save her life. We've had some extremely frightening moments trying to get her the care she needs, and this is in a city with a top children's hospital.

We go to UPMC Children's. And I think about what it would be like in some of those moments when we need urgent care to save our daughter's life if we had to navigate a war zone to get to the hospital? If we had to navigate the rubble and the destruction and the death to get to the hospital and we got to the hospital, if the hospital was too crowded to get her care or if it was out of fuel or machinery or anything else? And I imagine what that would feel like, how excruciating. It's a nightmare. It's a literal nightmare that I have. And the people in Gaza are living that nightmare every day right now.

To compound the nightmare that's being paid for by our tax dollars, yours and mine, to the tune of billions of dollars of military aid to Israel. Even right now, the United States Government's talking about sending more bombs and bullets to continue this violence. And I can tell you my professional opinion. I've gotten my Ph.D. here in Pittsburgh at the University of Pittsburgh in Sociology, studying social change, and I can tell you that your vote matters here. It matters. The United States government's aid to Israel means that the United States government can end this overnight by demanding a

ceasefire, and the more cities and the more counties, the more municipalities that demand a ceasefire, the more likely it is for the United States government to demand a ceasefire and that will end this.

That's why I urge you to consider a motion to demand a ceasefire and to approve it. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Next five?

MR. BARKER: Jules Lobel, Alan Hart, Julie Paris, Eyas Assuni, Juliet Phillips and Illyas Khan.

MR. HART: Good evening. My name is Alan Hart. I live in Stanton Heights in Council District 13. I'm a retired union rep for the United Electrical Workers Union and I'm here to speak tonight mostly about this from a labor perspective.

I was very proud in October that my union was one of the first national unions to call for a ceasefire in this horrible situation that's going on in Gaza. But were not the only union and we had a lot of company very quickly. A growing number of unions are demanding that our government move for a ceasefire in this conflict. 229 labor organizations to date, including local unions, regional unions, local city labor councils, et cetera, and ten national unions have called. Ten national unions that collectively represent 60 percent of the union members in this country have called for a ceasefire. It includes the flight attendants, the American Federation of Teachers, the Postal Workers Union, the Communications Workers of America, the Painters and Allied Trades, the NEA, the National Nurses Union, the SCIU, and the United Auto Workers, as well as my union.

I joined the union 50 years and four months ago when I was --- the day I was hired at the General Electric Plant in Erie. And what I learned from my union is that unions don't just represent the people who pay dues to them. Unions are supposed to represent all working people, and all downtrodden and oppressed people. And I'm very, very proud to see that the bulk of unions. Oh, by the way, I left out the AFL-CIO, but that's been mentioned before, which two weeks ago endorsed a ceasefire.

It makes me very proud to see American unions doing what they're supposed to do, standing up for all the oppressed people. American democracy is supposed to work that way, too, in my opinion. And that means that our elected officials on every level of government need to stand up against wrongs and need to stand up against evil.

I don't care who's in the White House, whether it's a democrat or a Republican. Wrong is wrong. And there is nothing more wrong than genocide. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Julie?

MS. PARIS: Hello, my name is Julie Paris. I am a resident of Squirrel Hill, and I'd like to thank the honorable members of the Allegheny County Council for being able to address you here today. I am also the Mid-Atlantic regional Director of Stand with US, an international, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that educates about Israel and fights antisemitism. I am addressing you today as a Jew, a mother, a daughter, an activist, and a concerned native Pittsburgher. I am appalled and, frankly, scared at the level of antisemitism that exists today and at the demonization, delegitimization and double standard that Israel has held to that has now carried over into our communities.

In both my professional and personal life, I have been following not only the atrocities that occurred in Israel on October 7th against innocent civilians, but also the backlash that has resulted in rampant antisemitism here in our own region. I have seen antisemitic graffiti cover our city. Jewish students on campus accosted and harassed, Stand with Israel signs defaced, stolen and burned, Jewish businesses vandalized, antisemitic flyers left on the doorsteps of Squirrel Hill families. And just yesterday, two Jewish teenagers were accosted, sworn at, and told that they themselves were killing Palestinian babies. I have been following the activities of the anti-Israel movements across the State of Pennsylvania, and their actions are nothing less than a double standard and demonization of Israel and the Jewish people. This spread of misinformation and propaganda, with lies such as genocide and ethnic cleansing are severely impacting our local community.

Ant-Israel activists have not mentioned that there was a permanent ceasefire in place on October 6, and that a ceasefire today means that Hamas, an internationally recognized terror organization, remains in power. They have not said that Hamas has promised to repeat October 7 over and over again. They have not mentioned the massacres, rapes and kidnapping that occurred on October 7. New footage shows the Kafir family, the Yarden, Shiri, Ariel and Kafir being held surrounded by Palestinian gunmen right after October 7. We have not heard from them

since. I ask you to please reject any ceasefire resolution if it should come up and stand here today and say that this is too divisive. This issue is affecting our community. It is putting the Jewish community at risk, is creating a hostile environment, and it will not affect U. S. Policy on the Middle East. There are no winners here. This is not Israel versus the Palestinians. This is a just and moral war against a genocidal terror group.

Let's focus on what brings us together, not what tears us apart. Let's make sure that Allegheny County is a safe, inclusive and welcoming place for all, including members of the Jewish community. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MR. AZZUNI: Council Members, my name is Yas Azzuni. I live in Brookline on North Crest Drive. I have not seen pictures of beheaded babies or got names of raped women. These are lies. Well, I have seen girls dying. I have seen boys dying because of the offensive Israel is doing in Gaza. There are two things happening in Gaza. There is the battle between Israel and Hamas, and then there is the genocide of Palestinian civilians. People will conflate that to give cover for the genocide. But nobody is talking about the battle here.

We are talking about the genocide against civilians. We want to cease fire to stop the genocide. The Israeli genocide includes the use of 2,000 pound bombs to destroy residential structures, controlled demolitions of hospitals and universities, bombing tents full of refugees, shooting fishermen, desperate for food. People argue that you need the genocide to happen in order to win the battle against Hamas. That is not true. Only two hostages have been rescued so far by the Israeli Army, and they were not rescued by bombing the building they were in. They were rescued by a precise military operation. That should be the operation that's being used to rescue these refugees if you're wearing the yellow ribbon, not bombing of buildings filled with civilians.

You are all politicians here. If you wanted to conduct a genocide in the 21st Century, how different would you do it compared to how Israel is doing it? How are you going to cover it? Are you going to kill the journalists like Israel did? Would you admit that you're committing genocide? Or would you say that you're just fighting the terrorists? Would you target civilians, then

claim them as legitimate military target? How would you conduct a genocide differently?

For the remaining time, I'm going to use it for a pause for the 15 children killed by Israel in the past hour and-a-half.

See my humanity. See Palestinian humanity. Vote for a ceasefire.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Juliet and Ilyas? Last call.

Okay.

Next five, please. Elizabeth Arafat, Alex Goldblum, Zane Agra, George Waksmunski and Wanda Guthrie.

PRESIDENT CATENA: So Elizabeth's up first. She here?

Okay. There she is.

MS. ARAFAT: Good evening, Council. Thank you for allowing us to speak tonight. It is greatly appreciated. My name is Elizabeth Arafat and I live in Churchill on Greensburg Pike. So this has been a very rough time since things have started in October. I have family members who are in Gaza. Majority of my nieces and nephews are there. They have been displaced multiple times. Most of them should be in schools and in colleges right now, but their schools and colleges have all been completely destroyed.

Here at home, it has been rough. I have had my five-year old daughter multiple times ask me when she'll even be able to talk to her cousins that are in Gaza because she hasn't even been able to talk to them when she has talked to them, typically multiple times a week since she's been born. And here in Pittsburgh, things have also been rough. People --- I have, myself, have been ran off the road, off of the highway because I had a Kufiya, or the scarf with the Palestinian design on it that was hanging out my window. Even though people are saying that --- people have said that they aren't safe because they're Jews, but just because we are Muslims and Palestinians, we are not safe either.

I would like to read a letter that one of my nephews has written. Give me one moment, please. I can get it. This nephew is Kareem, and he should be in his second year of pre-med right now. He says hello, I am one of the world's future doctors. This is my dream. Despite the ongoing war that making my ambitions and my dreams slowly fade. I was one of the top students at the Faculty of

medicine at LSA University, got an excellent grade in the first year and was a top student in secondary school.

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing conflict, my father's company was demolished by bombs. This was our only source of income. Additionally, university buildings were destroyed and hundreds of students dreams were shattered. Yet we still have hope in humanity even though we are currently living without safe shelter, in harsh conditions, with no useful food and no health care. I have always been a lover of life, and since my childhood, I have been trying to serve the whole world. Five years ago, I was an ambassador for the children of Palestine at the United Nations.

I defended our right to education as children and succeeded in helping raise \$40 million for UNARWA or the UNRWA, to complete the education of half-a-million refugee children. I am calling on the whole world today to help me complete my education, achieve my dreams of becoming a doctor, serve the whole world, make a difference in this world and provide what benefits them. I'm now hoping that my voice will be heard and that you will help me to continue my university studies outside of Gaza. This will be a step to achieve my dreams, to become a doctor, serve the world and support my family.

This is just one child's message to the world that he wants people to hear. I appreciate you giving this time to talk tonight and appreciate you listening to his letter. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MR. BARKER: Alex? Zane?

MR. AQRA: My name is Zane Aqra. I'm under District 7. I'm a first-generation Palestinian American, born and raised in Pittsburgh. I am 16 years old. I would like to thank the Council for this opportunity to speak and to urge for the approval of a ceasefire motion. Am I political? I don't mean the ideas I agree or disagree with. I don't mean the party I associate with or who I think should be in office. Am I political? My question should be, is my Palestinian identity just a political statement to the world as I am Palestinian --- am I, as a Palestinian, covered and shaded by what the world thinks is a touchy subject? Do my name, my curly hair, my love for my grandmother's grape leaves, who is still in Palestine today, get pushed aside when the word Palestine comes up, or when someone says, well, that's antisemitic?

Asking myself these questions, I feel ashamed. I feel ashamed because I know that my life and my family's identity are not just touchy subjects. The only thing that makes me feel more ashamed is that while I am the target of racist remarks or when I get questioned on why I wear a shirt that says philistine and how I shouldn't wear it because it is a political statement. I feel sad when my city, my state and my country cannot recognize that what Israel is doing is not political. It is a human rights and humanitarian issue. I urge you to realize this. Children are not terrorists and teachers are not operatives. And for my city, the city I was born and raised in, to say genocide is not political and that genocide is unacceptable makes me know that my identity as a Palestinian is not political and that we are accepted.

President Catana (sic), you have mentioned that this Council are no experts at Geopolitics, but this is not just a geopolitical problem. It is as local as it gets. Over 600 letters from across the county and 90 speakers tonight come here for the council to listen and to act on a proper ceasefire resolution.

Council Members, thank you for your time and we urge you to do the right thing. Vote yes to a ceasefire resolution. Remember that my identity is not political. It is Palestinian.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MR. WAKSMUNSKI: Good evening. My name is George Waksmunski, Polish Hill, 3034 Wiggins Street.

My grandparents came to Pittsburgh to Polish Hill around the year 1900. I live in the same house I was born in Polish Hill. I'm here as the UE Eastern Region President. That is the United Electrical Radio Machine Workers of America, UE Eastern Region. Our national union is headquartered here in Pittsburgh on Smithfield Street, and on behalf of tens of thousands of UE members who live and work and struggle for justice in communities all across this country, we are here because labor unions around the world are demanding a permanent ceasefire now.

I rise in support of any resolution to demand a ceasefire in Gaza. The corporate media and military industrial complex refer to this as a war. There's a lot of profit, a lot of death and a lot of greed, but there is no war. There's only genocide.

For months now, all we see in corporate media is bombing after bombing, day in, day out of Gaza. I don't

see any Hamas tanks. I don't see any Hamas aircraft. I don't see any Hamas soldiers being captured. Where is the war? It's just a genocide. Whole blocks in Gaza, obliterated, hour after hour, day after day. I don't see any damage.

In Israel, there is no war. There's only genocide. Of now 30,000 civilians, mostly women and children, Israel has bombed hospitals, schools, refugee camps, houses of worship, everything, everywhere. The denial of medical and food supplies is a war crime. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are starving as we watch, and the United States is complicit. Israel does this all with impunity and with our government's explicit support. The bombs killing civilians in Gaza are being paid for by the hard earned tax dollars of the U.S. working class. Every bomb that drops on a hospital or a school or a home in Gaza is paid for by money that could instead be going to hospitals, schools and housing here at home.

Israel makes no effort to avoid civilians casualties and makes only excuses for their murder and their genocide. These are blatant war crimes. They tell civilians to go south. Now they have all the civilians penned in down there in the south and now they're planning to bomb the south. It's going to be nothing but a bloodbath and has been nothing but a bloodbath.

The American people, by large majorities, want to cease fire. We want our government to work for peace, not pour fuel on the fire. We cannot bomb our way to peace. We cannot bomb our way to safety. We cannot bomb our way to liberation. It's shameful for the United States to be part of this. I call on this body to stand in full support of a resolution calling for a ceasefire. Pittsburgh does not stand with genocide. Pittsburgh does not stand with war crimes. What we stand for is peace. Peace on earth, goodwill toward all. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Let's line up the next ten, Jared.

MR. BARKER: The next ten?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Yeah.

MR. BARKER: After Wanda Guthrie would be Ashley Ramos, Amirah Alzahrani, Margaret Champion, Tracey Freeman, Jill Smyth, Nithin Ragunathan, Cory Roma, Gabriel Thomas, Olive Hays, Adona Iosif and Jay Walker.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Ashley? Not here, I don't think. Amirah?

MS. ALZHRANI: Hi everyone. My name is Amirah Alzarhani and I'm Scott Township resident. I'm an Arab Muslim American. I studied Psychology and I'm a trauma survivor. While I've not endured the level of trauma that Gazans are, I understand very well the effects of such violence, displacement and psychological warfare can have on the human mind, body and spirit. The most heinous crimes against humanity are being live streamed onto our phones. We have no excuse now to ignore it, nor to deny the blaring evidence right there at our fingertips. Every human rights organization has called this a genocide. We will never forget the mother screaming in the middle of the street that all her children were killed without eating. We will never forget the baby in the pink tracksuit with her intestines spilling out.

We will never forget the girl Sidra, hanging off the side of the destroyed building by her shirt with her legs blown off, flesh and blood dripping like a candle drips wax. We won't forget 11-year old crying that her entire family were killed and saying, why does the world see her differently than other children? We won't forget the young man pulled out from under the rubble with his head completely flattened like a deflated football. We won't forget 17-year old Ahed laying on the kitchen table at home getting her leg amputated and washed with dish soap without anesthesia by her uncle physician. We won't forget the silence of our friends. We won't forget the crimes of the Israeli occupation forces. We won't forget the accomplices within our government and abroad. We won't forget the state sponsored terror, and we won't forget all those who cosigned it or who had the power to make a difference yet didn't.

We definitely won't forget whether you decide to take a stand or not, and neither will history. So please, make it moral, sound and humane decision to work towards passing a motion to end the carnage. We'd like to remember something positive after all the horrifying things we have witnessed, our siblings in Gaza enduring these last four and a half months. We can't let their brutal deaths and insurmountable pain be in vain. A reminder that genocide is illegal, not just immoral. Make it clear that you do not stand with these horrific, illegal acts.

Change happens from the bottom up. It starts with individuals like us and local government like you. Please

use your voices and positions to oppose crimes against humanity and illegal military occupation. The time is now to pass a ceasefire motion and demand the allowance of unimpeded humanitarian aid into the entire Gaza Strip. Thank you so much for listening and considering.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Margaret? Tracey? Are you Margaret?

MS. CHAMPION: I'm Margaret.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Okay.

MS. CHAMPION: Good evening. My name is Margaret Champion. I'm a resident of Oakland in Pittsburgh. I've heard and understood your statement that we aren't experts on international politics. Neither am I. I'm a scientist. I'm a geneticist. I won't tell you my employer because their opinions are not mine, but I will say that I don't need to be an expert on politics. I only need to know that I value human life in the pursuit of knowledge. And I want to tell you that the intellectual, artistic and cultural knowledge of Palestine is part of the intellectual, artistic and cultural wealth of humanity. Because of Israel's assault on Gaza, we are losing the past, the present and the future of this cultural wealth.

Every university in Gaza has been reduced to rubble. 394 schools have been damaged. 142 have been completely destroyed. Children in Gaza are not able to attend school. Over 13 libraries in Gaza have been destroyed. Among them are the Omari mosque and library, which was built in the 7th Century. This is along with its collection of rare books which have been destroyed. The Al Isra University Library and National Museum has been destroyed along with over 3,000 artifacts. We've lost our collective past and we are losing our presence.

The Euromed Human rights Monitor describes an intentional targeting of academics. At least 94 university professors have been killed. Poets are killed. The physicists, Sophian Taya has been killed. Civil Engineer Omar Qadari has been killed along with half of his family. The poet Hiba Abu Nawaba has been killed along with 13 other poets. We're losing our future. We're losing our present and we've lost over 12,400 children to Israel's brutal assault on Palestinians in Gaza. Losing any person is incalculable here. We've lost a huge part of our future. We need an immediate and a

permanent ceasefire to prevent this loss. And we don't need to be experts to say that this needs to stop.

For that reason, I'm asking you to introduce and approve a ceasefire resolution, to join the country in doing so. Thank you for your time. Have a good evening.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Tracey? Jill? Nithin? Cory?

MR. ROMA: Good evening, council. My name is Corey Roma. I am a resident of Crafton Borough, District 12, and it is a pleasure to be speaking to you tonight. Although I will admit, off the mark, that this kind of stuff terrifies me, but sometimes it's important to stand up for what you believe in, regardless of your anxieties. I'm here to support the ceasefire resolution that was initially slated for tonight's agenda. And while it has been pushed, I would be remiss if I still didn't give my strong views on the issue. I will acknowledge what some of you have already been thinking and what many people have said, that what's this got to do with us? And I'll concede that you don't have any direct influence over foreign policy, but you are elected to represent the second largest county in our state, which happens to be a swing state in a presidential election year. And with that, you have considerable influence and you can use that influence to pass.

A ceasefire resolution would go a long way in helping to show our federal government to the ---. Sorry. It would go a long way towards showing our federal government that not all of us agree with their position and it would also help in a meaningful way to open up humanitarian aid to the region. I am heartbroken over the astronomical levels of casualties suffered during this war. I wholeheartedly condemn the initial attack, but the wanton destruction and slaughter of Palestinians and the destruction of Gaza is not a method to bring peace to the region, nor is it an appropriate way to honor those who have been lost in this conflict.

The people of Palestine, like the people of Israel and all peoples around the world, deserve the right to self-determination, to be free from violence, oppression, to have access to food, water and health care. And a ceasefire, while not solving the crisis, is the minimum we can do to save lives and get aid into Gaza and start honest negotiations to release the hostages, which I will remind, outside of the two people rescued by the Israeli

military, has been the only wave that most hostages have been released so know, look at the crowd that came out tonight to support this.

Your constituents want you to move on this. We're not just bust from out of state, we're constituents from all car parts of the county. And we're all saying in unison, even though you can't stop this, we want you to stand with us and listen to us and do something, anything, to stop this horrible situation that's been happening. I thank you and I encourage you strongly to vote on this resolution. Vote yes on this resolution when it comes to your table. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Hey, Cory, you did a good job. Don't ever let your anxiety hold you back.

MR. ROMA: Thank you.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT CATENA: He deserves the applause. Gabriel? Olive? Are you Olive? Adona?

MS. IOSIF: Good evening. My name is Adona Iosif and I am from Greenfield. I am here to read a statement by Israeli-based civil society and human rights organizations that call for a ceasefire. We, the undersigned Israel-based civil society and human rights organizations, call for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and demand the immediate release of hostages held in the Gaza Strip. An immediate ceasefire will prevent further loss of civilian lives and facilitate access to vital aid for Gaza to address the unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe there.

In more than 120 days of war in Gaza following Hamas's egregious attack on October 7, which killed some 1,200 Israelis and internationals, we have witnessed Israeli bombardment and siege policy causing unfathomable death and destruction in the Gaza Strip. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, some 27,000 people have been killed. Over 66,000 people have been injured and thousands more are still buried under rubble. The healthcare system has been almost totally decimated by military assaults, electricity blackouts, the enormous number of medical staff killed or displaced, and shortages of medication and medical equipment.

Only 14 out of 36 hospitals are partially operational and are on the verge of collapse due to extreme overload and lack of supplies. Food supply and clean drinking water are lacking throughout Gaza, with the entire

population at imminent risk of famine and dehydration. Some 1.7 million people, around 75 percent of the population, have been displaced. IDP shelters are overcrowded and lacking basic conditions, with extreme shortages of food, water and other necessities. Large areas in the strip are no longer habitable. Thousands of homes have been heavily damaged or destroyed by Israeli bombardments, while critical civil infrastructure, public buildings, cultural institutions, places of worship and heritage sites lie in ruins. This continues.

I won't have time to read the whole thing, but I would like to read the signatories. Akavot Institute for Israeli Palestinian Conflict Research Amnesty International Israel the Association for Civil Rights Israel Bimcom Planners for planning rights breaking the silence, Bet Salem the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories combatants for peace culture of solidarity Emek Chavez Jusha Legal Center for Freedom of Movement Green Olive Collective, Hamo Head Center for the Defense of the Individual IRA, Haifa Feminist Center, Israeli Palestinian Bereaved Families for Peace, Jordan Valley Activists looking the occupation in the eye, . Mahsom Watch, Mothers Against Violence Israel, Naj of Coexistence, Forums for Civil Equality, The movement to demilitarize Israeli society, Parents Against Child Detention, Peace Now, Physicians for Human Rights Israel. There is more and I won't be able to finish this. Thank you.

MR. BARKER: The next five are Lisa Valanti, Jennifer Roberts, Elyanna Sharbaji and Robin Clark.

MR. WALKER: My name is Jay Ting Walker. I live in District 11. I'm the Chair of the Green Party of Allegheny County. Our party is made up of 1,000 registered members from every corner of our County, and I speak on their behalf.

Every one of us is dedicated to our party's four pillars of peace, ecology, social justice and grassroots democracy. Many of our members have been local leaders in the Palestine solidarity community for many years and continue to be to this day. What's happening in Gaza is a genocide. Members of the Netanyahu Administration, including Prime Minister Netanyahu himself, have made it very clear that Israel's purpose is to remove Palestinians from Gaza. As of today, according to the PBS, more than 29,000 Palestinians have been murdered. This genocide has

been financed and facilitated by our federal government, including our President, Joe Biden, with support from both houses of Congress.

Utilizing our tax dollars, we here in this room and in this county are paying for the genocide of the Palestinian people. Just last week, both of our State's U.S. Senators, Casey and Fetterman, voted to send an additional \$14.1 billion in military aid to Israel. Yes, the money could be spent in many other places, but ignoring that, our tax dollars should not be financing an illegal occupation. They should not be financing the genocide of an entire people.

At a recent convention, the Green Party of Allegheny County members voted overwhelmingly to organize for a ceasefire in Gaza in solidarity with green parties around the world. This stance is directly in line with the Green Party's platform, which calls for an end to the occupation. As a result, here today, the Green Party of Allegheny County is calling for a ceasefire resolution and for the Allegheny County Council to pass to vote for such a resolution directed towards our full congressional delegation to demand that they support a ceasefire. We needed a ceasefire more than 100 days ago, having failed that, we need a ceasefire right now. Thank you.

MS. VALANTI: Hello. My name is Lisa Valanti. I'm from Upper St. Clair. Let's see, I'm here for me today. So it turns out I'm a step-Jew. I inherited a Jewish family when my mother remarried after my father died. And I had the good fortune to end up with a Jewish grandmother and grandfather and a whole mess of people that were wonderful and taught me the importance of not only never again, but never lose our humanity. And so many of you know me in a different capacity, but I'm here today To not ---. You hear all the statistics. Hopefully you watch Al Jazeera and occasionally you look at the pictures, because all of that is censored in the United States. Our American media doesn't actually have people embedded in Gaza, but I want to talk about the organizations like Oxfam. I want to talk about Doctors Without Borders. I want to talk about the United Nations. I want to talk about Amnesty International. I want to talk today that the entire United Nations met in the Security Council and the only one that said, you can keep killing people was the United States. And I want you to know, they do not speak for me and they don't speak for anybody.

This country and our people want an end to this. We love our country. We love the United States. We don't want to be branded as a country that supports genocide. We can't explain it to our children. You don't have to know the politics of it. You can look at every international law that is being violated. You can look at all of the people who are lawyers. Didn't South Africa do a magnificent job of making a case for genocide? We didn't have to do all of that. It's been done for us.

I'm here today as are all of these people. I'm sorry. I'm speaking for all of you because we elected you and we need you to be our voice. We need you to raise our voice. This is what democracy looks like. Please speak for me. Make my voice visible. Make the voice visible of all of the people who, no matter who they are, haven't lost their humanity yet. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Are you Jennifer? Ellyanna? I'm sorry. Am I saying that correct?

MS. SHARBAJI: My name is Ellyanna. I'm a resident of Oakland. I'm Syrian American. I was born in Syria, not here. I moved to the U.S. in 2016. I moved to Erie first, but then I came to school to Pittsburgh. I am here to speak today about ---. I wanted first to say that I'm proud Syrian, but I'm also American and I love America. I consider it my home now. It gave me a new life and I built a home here. So many of my friends have already spoken about what's happening in Gaza and how we can invest in a better life instead of investing in the distraction of other country. I'm here today to speak as someone who lived in a war zone.

I was 11-years old when the war in Syria started. I remember all the night (sic) I woke up on the sound of airstrike and bombs. I remember sitting next to my dad and mom every single night, terrified by every bomb dropped, knowing that I could be next, every night --- we would sleep at night --- all my family would sleep in the same room because we wanted to die together. That's something that every child in Gaza is experiencing today. They live every single night not knowing if they're going to live tomorrow or not. They lose their family members every single day. I've lost my family members and friends and I've lost my childhood in that war. And even though I've survived it, but I have so much traumatic experience that still affect my life up until now.

Why I'm mentioning all of this? I wanted to mention that roughly half the population in Gaza is children, our children's (sic). And there is at least 12,000 children who have been killed so far. I want all --- these kids deserve to live, to grow up and build a new life. They deserve to dream and go to school. None of them deserve to be killed or suffer just because they're Palestinians. I want you to think about all the trauma that they have experienced so far from this war. When you vote next time on a ceasefire, a resolution. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. At this point, we're going to take a 15-minute recess. We'll reconvene at 7:15.

(Short break taken.)

MR. BARKER: The next five speakers, Antony Gnaljian, Hasan Algannah, Theron Gilliland, Jr., Marjorie Manne, Rabbi Jeffrey Myers.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Go ahead.

MR. GNALIAN: All right. Hello. My name is Antony Gnaljian and this is my first County Council Meeting. I currently reside in Lawrenceville, which I believe is in District 13. I'm here today to ask County Council to pass a ceasefire resolution so that what remains of Gaza can live and that our voices can contribute to the end of genocide, ecocide and epistemicide. Despite the International Criminal Court ruling that Israel is plausibly committing genocide, It has not stopped who their sniper chooses as their next victim, where their tanks fire, why children continue to be starved, killed, maimed orphaned, how the bombs are dropped or detonated, and what lies and devices will be used by politicians and pundits to manufacture consent for further atrocity against Palestinians in Gaza.

It pains me to see that the unjustifiable has been justified at almost every point of this genocide since the Nakba in 1948, with our taxpayer dollars firmly in support of these crimes and under the guise of self-defense. Committing genocide cannot be a means to self-defense. And self-defense cannot be singularly reserved for one of the most powerful advanced occupational forces in the world that exports weapons, drones and surveillance systems that were tested against the people they subjugate under apartheid.

I think about a photo from the year 2000 of a 13-year old Palestinian boy, Ferris Uda (phonetic), facing down an

Israeli tank and throwing a stone with all his might towards it, despite knowing that he would be lucky if his stone could even put a dent into the 60-ton killing machine in front of him. He threw it anyways, in defiance of the occupation, who had previously killed his 17-year old cousin, Shadi Uda. Only several days after the photo was taken, Ferris was also killed by Israeli gunfire with a stone as his only weapon to fight back. May all of us, including the distinguished Council Members of Allegheny county, have even an iota of Ferris' courage and love to use our words and actions like stones to defy the status quo of militarism, colonization and apartheid in occupied Palestine.

Please be a good neighbor and pass a ceasefire resolution. Thank you.

MR. ALQENNAH: Hello. My name is Hasan Alqannah. I'm an Engineer and I live in Upper St. Clair. I haven't prepared my speech, so I hope it's not going to be boring. And I guarantee you it's going to be different, because I know that you heard so many things, so many stuff from everybody. We're not going to really prove anything. That's very obvious to each one of you. I think everyone knows what's right and what's wrong. The question is how you're going to make that decision, whether you're going to pass the motion or not.

So first, I want to start with the lady here that she was complaining about antisemitic since October 7, which I totally agree, and I want to help her. That antisemitic starts because of war. So let's stop it. Let's call for ceasefire. It's very obvious. It's not a --- it's really extremely obvious. The other thing the President started with that peace statement is very hard in the Middle east, but if I have to rephrase hard, is it really hard, or why is it so hard? If it's peace and it's good, why is it so hard?

I want to give you an example of South Africa. South Africa never had peace until they have their freedom. So peace is really always together. It goes with the freedom. The same thing with the IRA that was really recognized as terrorist group. Now the Irish people have their freedom and is very peace there. There's all kinds of peace in South Africa, as well as in Ireland. So to give you another example of what Corey said, and you applaud him for that here in the Allegheny County, which is one of the major county, the second biggest county in a

swing state, we really needed to pass that resolution to help our democratic party as well.

I know most of you are democrats, so if you want to really repair the reputation of the democratic party, you need to pass that resolution, because it's really hurting the party big time. I can guarantee you that.

So that's another reason for the committee to think about that. And the last thing is that you have to satisfy yourself as well. When you go to bed every night, you have to think about your decision. You have to think about the babies that might be killed or the woman's that might be killed.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Wrap it up. Thank you.

MR. ALQENNAH: So, thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MR. GILLILAND: Hello. Theron Gilliland, Jr. of 10 Allegheny Center in Pittsburgh's Northside.

The lie that was halfway around the world before the truth had a chance to put on its pants. In addition to the lie that there were 40 beheaded babies, which nobody seems to have seen, the lie is that history started on October 7, 2023. Before that, there was the Nakba. Before that, the Balfour Declaration. But even before that, Jewish communities flourished in the Hanafiyah Sunni Islamic Ottoman Empire. That is, until Europe decided to export the idea of nation states. What that brought was white supremacy, where people felt that Jews were okay as long as they're not here in our country and you don't even need to take my word for it. Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism, said in 1895, the anti-Semites will be our most dependable friends, the antisemitic countries, our allies. And it continued with the imperialistic Zionist founding of the state of Israel.

In 1938, David Ben-Guroion, the primary national founder and first prime minister of Israel said, let us not ignore the truth among ourselves. Politically, we are the aggressors, and they defend themselves. The country is theirs because they inhabit it, whereas, we want to come here and settle down. When people tell you who they are, you believe them. I am here. I am an active organizer in the Green Party and the Democratic Socialists of America and the Pittsburgh antiwar committee, but I am here because I am a human being and the people who are suffering are human. I'm waiting to see which of you have

enough humanity to support a ceasefire resolution. Thank you.

MR. BARKER: Marjorie?

MS. MANNE: Good evening. My name is Marjorie, and I live in Squirrel Hill. Thank you all for your time this evening. My grandparents, Alonna and Joseph Weiss, were Holocaust survivors. They met in a DP camp after the war and settled here in Pittsburgh. My grandfather didn't talk much about what happened to him, but my grandmother shared her stories, frequently, speaking in schools and with programs through our Holocaust Center here in Pittsburgh. She was just 19 when her entire family was sent to Auschwitz. There, her parents and four of her brothers were murdered. She and her two sisters and two other brothers managed to survive, two going to Israel and the rest coming to the United States. And I am not alone as a Holocaust descendant.

Allegheny County was at one point home to many, many survivors. As long as I can remember, I've had what people call Holocaust dreams. Dreams that I am running from the Nazis, that I'm trying to protect myself or now my young children from being captured. Dreams that I'm in a gas chamber and that I have to escape. October 7 was the worst mass murder of Jews since the Holocaust. It was a trauma that I felt deep in my soul. I had an inexplicable pain that I could not breathe and felt like I could not breathe for weeks.

The atrocities perpetrated by Hamas bore an unspeakable resemblance to the slaughter of Jews by the Nazi's. Jews hiding under their beds, hiding under dead bodies, being slaughtered in open fields, being raped, and being burned alive. Almost immediately after the Hamas attack, before Israel did anything, we saw people protesting, not the war in Israel, but Jews. We saw people, some in this room, celebrating Hamas. A neighborhood in Squirrel Hill was vandalized. Security has increased at all of our Jewish institutions and schools. People have been assaulted in public places. For the first time in a very long time, I have felt unsafe here.

I started having discussions with my friends. Do we take our Mezuzahs off of our doors? I shushed my six-year old when he told strangers that we celebrate Hanukkah and not Christmas because I don't want people to know that we're Jewish. I've considered where else we can go. What

if those dreams I have? What if they become a reality? Nobody wants this war. Nobody wants innocent people to die. My heart breaks when I hear these stories, when I see these photos of these children and these families in Gaza, but a vote calling for an unconditional ceasefire sends a message that Jewish lives don't matter, that Israel should stop fighting. Let Hamas rearm and repeat October 7th again and again, as they have promised to do. Let the hostages languish in captivity, some of them, many of them subject to sexual abuse and violence. And worst of all, it sends a message and makes our community of Jewish people here in Allegheny County feel that we are not safe. Thank you.

RABBI MYERS: Good evening, Council President. Council folks. For those who don't know me, my name is Jeffrey Myers. I'm the Rabbi of Tree of Life. I probably shouldn't be standing here today. I should be dead, But if not for Pittsburgh's finest, there would be 12 victims of October 27th. That was not only a day that will go down in infamy for Pittsburgh, but it's also a day where we saw Pittsburgh's finest in terms of its citizenry. People of all colors, of all religions, of all sexual orientations came forward. We stood as one community and said an attack upon Tree of Life, it was an attack upon Pittsburgh and all of us together will band together to support our Jewish brothers and sisters. And I think it was a day that all Pittsburghers, and indeed all residents of Allegheny County, could be proud of.

Fast forward to the events beginning on October 7th. You can hear in the room, the pain. It's palpable. What's happening there is horrific. Your resolution will not solve what is happening there. But let me share with you, as a Jew, what I'm seeing and experiencing through my own life and those of my congregants. People afraid to go to synagogue. This past Hanukkah, people were afraid to put their menorahs in their windows out of fear.

Swatting has become a regular feature at our institutions, as well as bomb threats, as well as a variety of other attacks upon Jewish institutions, Jewish-owned businesses. That's not what we should be about in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. If we pride ourselves on having 446 bridges, those are bridges of steel. We need the human bridges to be able to work together. We're not succeeding in doing that. Before you have any motions about what you think should happen in the Middle East,

let's focus on the welfare of the citizens here in Allegheny County. That's your primary job. A motion will not help the welfare of your citizenry. It will only make it worse. I call upon you to table that motion, and let's improve the quality of the life of all of the citizens in this room.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MS. GERHARDT: Thank you all. I'm Helen Gerhardt. I live in North Point Breeze. I served in Iraq in 2003, 2004 as part of an Army National Guard Unit, a transportation unit. So one of the best things about that particular job was that I got to travel throughout the country and actually talk with Iraqis and hear what they were going through. Many of my fellow soldiers went to Iraq because they thought that Iraq was responsible for 9/11. So they felt that they were protecting their country from further violence. Many of them went out of a sense of trauma, revenge, grief, those things that are so closely-bound together.

It had been about nine months that we had been in Iraq when the news about Abu Ghraib broke. So many of us had actually been there thinking that were there to liberate Iraqis from Saddam Hussein, who tortured his people, and our own sense of grief, trauma, revenge, from the top, from the president on down to those who served in Abu Ghraib and many other detention camps around the country. It wasn't just Abu Ghraib. They ended up becoming the terror that they --- that we said that were warring against. Terrorism cannot be stopped. The cycle of violence, of trauma, of revenge, it cannot be stopped by aiming our weapons, by destroying and by killing the innocent people who have had nothing to do, who did not commit the atrocities that happened on October 7th.

I so honor the Rabbi who spoke from Tree of Life. Robert Bowers said that he was motivated to attack because of HIAS. HIAS is a Jewish organization that has stood up for refugees, helped people escape violence. We need to come together as a community to stop the cycle of violence. I was ordered by my commanding officer to aim my weapon directly at the head of three civilians on their knees with zip ties. I told him no, because that would be like aiming my weapon at you. It would be like me throwing a bomb at the trucks in our convoy.

PRESIDENT CATENA: If you could wrap it up, please?

MS. GERHARDT: It would lead to further motivation for revenge. He knew that I spoke out of concern for him. We need to speak out of concern for both Palestinians and for the Jewish people. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Let's line up the next ten.

MR. BARKER: Lauren Caddy, Rosanne Levine, MaryAnn Steiner, Beverly Block, Kipp Dawson, Sara Haj-Hassan, Justin Laing, Tanisha Long and Audrey Glickman.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Lauren Caddy? Roseann? MaryAnn? Beverly?

MS. BLOCK: Ladies and gentlemen of the Council, my name is Beverly Block. I'm a resident of squirrel Hill. I am Jewish. My religion teaches me love, and peace and mourning for suffering everywhere. Like Marjorie, I was born to a long line of Jewish ancestry as far back as my ancestry can take me. My relatives have been Jewish. Like Marjorie, my grandparents also survived countless horrific atrocities in the Holocaust. And unlike many in this room and many in this world, I do not have great aunts and uncles. I do not have distant cousins because all of my grandparents family were tortured and killed in camps in the Holocaust or they died in ghettos of starvation and disease.

When my grandparents were liberated from the camps, they were willing to go anywhere just to survive. After spending 18 months in an internment camp in Cyprus, the only place in the entire world that would take my grandparents was Israel. They were turned away from the United States. They were turned away from Canada. They were turned away from Mexico due to immigration quotas. My grandparents were not Zionists. They had no interest in displacing anyone. They were frail, alone and homeless. I am not telling you someone else's story like so many in this room are doing. I am not telling you things that I've heard or read on social media without facts. I am telling you about what happened to my family. I am telling you about actual events that form the human that I am, that narrate my life as a Jew, as a mother, as a wife, as a business owner in Allegheny County. Our generation would be different, I promised my grandparents. We could live freely as Jews. We could openly support Israel, and the only place that accepted my grandparents as citizens.

On the morning of October 27, 2018, is a morning that I can truly say that I'm glad my grandparents were not alive to see. I began receiving text messages and hearing the helicopters above my head. I cuddled my children in our basement, just blocks away from Tree of Life. I was shattered when my three young children returned to their Jewish day school on October 29 to face armed guards, FBI agents and police officers who would have to be in their recessed yard just so that they could play outside in the months after October 27th. This is not 1945. This is 2018. And just six years later, in Gaza, Hamas prays for our death, Lebanon Kazbullah chants for our destruction. This is not isolated to the Middle east. Here in Squirrel Hill, we tried to get into an Uber, and the Uber driver turned us away because he doesn't drive Jews. My son was told in his biology class at Allderdice that Jewish people drink the blood of Muslims. My husband received a text message from a, quote, social justice warrior, telling him that he is a capitalist and the people that Martin Luther King warned her about. I ask you humbly, passing a ceasefire will not help us in Allegheny County. Help your Allegheny County citizens feel safe. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Kipp? Sara?

MS. HAJ-HASSAN: Good evening. I will also be sharing a personal story. My name is Sarah Haj-Hassan. I'm a resident of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Manchester, I think that's District 6. As a Muslim Arab American who spent her formative years in Amman, Jordan, my normal was growing up around Arabs and Muslims, experiencing their hospitality and warmth, and witnessing their generosity towards each other and towards the influxes of refugees arriving from Palestine, Iraq and Syria. The genocide currently being perpetrated by Israel in Gaza is personal for me on several levels. The last few months have been filled with grief, anxiety and frustration at my complicity as an American taxpayer.

My childhood friends are Palestinian. My American colleagues are Gazan in origin and have lost over 50 members of their family and counting. To claim that a ceasefire decreases the actual or feelings of safety of a community makes no sense when what we actually see is the rise of hate crime since the aggression has become, as everybody on both sides has said, the harmful rhetoric in the media and shared by our politicians around the danger that Muslims and Arabs pose, painting us as a violent,

barbaric savages, has been hurtful, harmful and puts our communities at risk.

Three Arab American students wearing Kufiyahs just like this, were shot by a stranger. Wadir, a six-year old Palestinian American, was stabbed to death and his landlord --- by his landlord and the list goes on. My father, who still lives in Jordan, actually told me to take down my signs against a ceasefire down from my window because he was scared for my safety. Speaking out for a ceasefire should not be controversial. It is not a statement of hate. It is a statement for peace and justice.

In Gaza itself, over 27,000 people have been killed, the majority of whom are women and children. And men matter, too. Every respected humanitarian organization has warned of this manmade humanitarian crisis and has advocated for a ceasefire. Hamas itself has agreed to release all hostages in exchange for a permanent ceasefire. If we're not about advocating for the safety of our communities at home, nor the Palestinians, nor the Israeli hostages, then who are we trying to protect? Please, I beg you, vote for a ceasefire. Thank you.

(Applause)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Justin? Tanisha's not here.

MR. BARKER: Audrey Glickman, Honey Rosenbloom, Brian Nuckols, Rachel Reed, Ross Marshal, Abigail Hunter, Rona Kitchen, Sabrina Maines, Natalie Brown, Reese Gawronski and Nicole Cmar.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Justin?

MR. LAING: Good evening. My name is Justin Laing.

I live in Brookline in District 12. So, a ceasefire resolution presents you a modest proposal. It's the bare minimum. It is not demanded that you support one state, nonaparte state, that there is a full exchange of political prisoners, that all Palestinians have the right of return, that the tens of billions of aid going right now to Israel be ended, or that the 1948 boundaries be used as the two-state solution as Hamas offered in their 2017 Charter that the U.S. and the UN pay reparations for the initial Nakba. It's none of those things.

Instead, it's simply asked for there to be an end to the war on both sides. An end to sniping children by Israel, by bombing coordinated by artificial intelligence, sometimes providing the human observer less than 20 seconds to make a decision to what is a clear plan, with

refugee centers being built in Egypt now for the removal of Palestinians, but also the stopping of the war of the Palestinian resistance. It's a call for a ceasefire.

So what would make someone else vote against a ceasefire? Could only be that one wants this to continue, but that this itself would need a reason. Maybe you'll be told that October 7th by the Palestinian resistance justifies this massive bombing., but besides the fact that this is largely atrocity propaganda and the vast majority of it false, and for this, please go to electronic intifada to read it for yourself, but even this false claim, if were true, it is clear the bombing campaigns are simply trying to target the monsters at the gate that self-erases depiction as a black man, as a father of black children, I recognize this depiction of a monster at the gate.

I understand the purpose of turning people into monsters, but to eliminate the Palestinian people and remove them from their land, maybe because of the natural gas and oil at its shores. Clearly Israel with us support, the purpose is genocide. So the choice is simple. A vote for a ceasefire against genocide, or a vote against the ceasefire to continue it. So the ceasefire is a modest proposal. Again, it is already a compromise. So your support of it does not abandon Israel. And it is still very important. Please vote for a ceasefire. Help to weaken the U.S. support for genocide and Western PA's political silence that is shaming all of us.

The risk is that you prove theory that the politics that we have are actually not controlled by the people. They're controlled by someplace else. As you can see, the vast majority of here making their claim to you. Thank you. And again, please ask for a ceasefire on your next vote.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Audrey?

MS. GLICKMAN: Audrey Glickman, Beechwood Boulevard in Greenfield. Honorable Councilpersons, I don't know anything about waging war. I do know that calling for a ceasefire and aiming it primarily at the victim of the instigating attack is unlikely to produce a universally positive result. Who should stop firing? If Israel stops firing, Hamas is likely to continue attacking, just as they have been doing before and after October 7. And there's no guarantee that they won't decide that it would

be a good time to kill the remaining hostages. Hamas is terrorists. Israel is continually shot at from various directions. That's why they have iron dome protecting them. That's why they have military active all the time. Gaza has received zillions of dollars from other countries and organizations over the years, and what have they done with it? They've purchased munitions and built tunnels into Israel. They've taught their children that Jews are temporary and must be helped off the land, pushed into the sea so that they can take it back. Never mind that the Jews were there first, before the Christians, before the Muslims. Never mind that Jews around the world have been donating work and money toward building up the land, especially since the 1800's. Never mind that Chaim Weizmann bought the land with his sultpeer (phonetic) formula that helped the allies win World War I.

This is not colonialism as the current propaganda suggests. It is certainly not lighter-skinned people subordinating darker-skinned people. Folks in that region don't divide themselves by race that way. And the prisoners that they want Israel to release are not hostages ripped from their homes. They're legitimate prisoners and they exchange them unevenly. I'm not giving into propaganda slurping from any side of the political spectrum, and neither should you.

I would rather see you figuring out why Westmoreland County is so much better at recycling than we are, rather than getting involved international politics. Nevertheless, where was County Council when Hamas was spending all that money waging war rather than building infrastructure? Where are you on calling out Russia demanding a ceasefire in Ukraine? When people here in America shoot at us for being Jewish, we need to know that there's a country that will take us in if we need it. When our congresspersons refuse to listen to heads of state from Israel and still vote that Israel is wrong, it scares us as Americans.

Antisemitism is on the rise and the propaganda feeding it is coming from all sides. We need peace everywhere, but calling for an undefined ceasefire is not the way. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Honey? Brian? Are you Honey? Okay.

MS. ROSENBLUM: Hello. My name is Honey Rosenbloom. I'm a resident of Wilkinsburg in Council District 10,

under Mr. Walton. I'm also a Jewish member of the Pittsburgh community, and my family has suffered many losses in the realms of Eastern Europe and the Holocaust. You may have been receiving emails from local Zionist organizations, many of them claiming as many people have today to not have a ceasefire motion. And I'm just here to talk about some of the points they've been making.

Number one, they've been claiming that such a motion is outside the purview of this Allegheny County Council. Currently, 61 localities in the U.S. have passed resolutions for a ceasefire. So clearly, there's a precedent. And I also seem to remember that on October 26th, the Council passed Bill 128329-23 which was a resolution condemning the actions of Hamas. What I don't remember, though, is that these same organizations saying that passing a resolution was outside the purview of Allegheny County Council.

Why is it that when 1000 Israelis are massacred, the council has the expertise to rush out a statement, but somehow, when 28,000 Palestinians are massacred, when the children and mothers are attacked in the last hospitals they have access to, when an entire population has been packed into a corner and bombed mercilessly, this is something on which you don't have expertise to answer. Please, I would love a response, because the only reason I can see from this standpoint is racism. Prove me wrong. Surely Allegheny County Council knows what it needs to do.

Point number two, they say the motion will spread misinformation about the Middle East. This is actually a very simple argument to debunk. A ceasefire resolution won't spread misinformation. We can prove all the information you need. Because despite the over 88 media workers that have been killed in Gaza since October 7, despite the United States not having media correspondence in Gaza, and despite the continual communications blackouts Israel has put over Gaza, we've been listening and watching. We cannot take our eyes off of the horrors that are unfolding and you have yet to even acknowledge are happening. Let's stop the real misinformation, tell the truth and call for a ceasefire.

Point number three, they claim that passing a ceasefire resolution will endanger Jewish people in Pittsburgh. Well, I'm a Jewish person in Pittsburgh, and I assure you that unchecked genocidal actions of the State of Israel against the Palestinian people, along with the

denial of those actions by people claiming to speak for Jews, breeds far more hate and resentment towards the Jewish people than calling for peace between Israelis and Palestinians ever could. Yes, the ADL does claim that there is antisemitic behavior on rise. Over 2,000 antisemitic incidents have happened since October 7, but even though the ADL counts speaking against Israel as antisemitic, I don't think that denying the atrocities of a state whose soldiers have gleefully posted videos of themselves online while leveling entire blocks of Gaza ---

PRESIDENT CATENA: If you could wrap it up, please.

MS. ROSENBLOOM: --- is antisemitism.

Certainly calling for an end to violence is the way that healing starts. And I hope that the City Council can start with a resolution.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. County Council.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: We're not --- yeah, we're not getting into cheering and applause because this is a human issue. Stop the clicking.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And we're human.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Stop it. We're adults. This is a very serious discussion.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We are adults and we're having the discussion.

PRESIDENT CATENA: But we don't want to be applauding when we're trying to have a discourse --- or we're trying to encourage a discourse about a very difficult subject. And we need to be respectful of one another, because if we can't be respectful of one another here, we're not going to be respectful one of another anywhere. So please be respectful of one another.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's not difficult. This is genocide.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Okay? Please be respectful of one another. Again, we're not going to tolerate any of that. It's getting late in the evening and we need to be respectful of one another. I'm not going to say it again. So the next --- I mean, if we're going to have outbursts, you're going to be removed. I said it at the very beginning, so please be respectful of one another. Next?

Brian? Rachel? Ross? Abigail? Abigail? We have a winner. Okay.

MS. HUNTER: Yes. We do apparently have a winner. So I actually had some remarks prepared, but I think a lot

of my colleagues in the Green Party, as well as other people who are involved in social justice here in Pittsburgh and oppose this genocide, have already said a lot of what I had to say. So I'm just going to go a little bit extemporaneous here and address some of the things that others have said. First of all, I want to say that one of the previous speakers described this as a just and moral war. I put it to you that there is no such thing as a just and moral war. That it is not possible to wage war in a way that is moral because it necessarily involves violence and it involves, as we've seen in Gaza, leveling entire blocks. It involves civilian casualties.

I also agree that antisemitism is a real problem. I was living in Chicago when, at a Pride event, a member of the LGBT community and the Jewish community was ejected from a march for carrying a rainbow flag with the Star of David because it resembled the flag of Israel. I disagree with that and I still disagree with it. I don't think it's okay. And I think that antisemitism is a real problem. However, none of the speakers who have addressed antisemitism so far have told you how opposing a ceasefire resolution is going to solve any of that.

There is a huge problem with antisemitism both in this country and in other countries. I've lived in France. I've lived in the United Kingdom. I know that there's a problem with antisemitism there as well. But I don't see how it's possible that opposing this ceasefire resolution is at all going to help resolve that. What is going to help resolve that is an increased dialogue between people who are of Palestinian as well as Israeli descent, an increased dialogue between people who have been radicalized by far-right organizations. That's what's going to help solve the antisemitism problem in this country and what's going to help solve antisemitism around the world. It is not going to help solve antisemitism to oppose this ceasefire.

I would also like to acknowledge my friend, Theron, who said that Europe exported the idea of nation states. I do agree with this. I agree that we have exported, or European civilization has exported this idea. That land belongs to a certain group of people. The Palestinian land, also described as Israel, also called Israel. It can also be called Israel, is a piece of land that doesn't belong to any one people. It belongs to the people who live there. And the people who live there were

Palestinians who were forcibly removed at the time of the Nakba. I have very complex feelings on Israel. As a Jewish person. I was raised in the reformed Jewish community. We learned a lot about genocide when I was in Hebrew school. And we learned never again. We learned that never again does not just apply to the Jewish people, it applies to everybody. And so I encourage you by echoing what my friend Helen said, which is that this cycle cannot be stopped by killing. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Rona? Sabrina?

MS. MAINES: Thank you, Council for your time. My name is Sabrina. I live in Brookline and I'm the granddaughter of Lebanese immigrants and I am Muslim. And I respectfully request that you sign a ceasefire resolution. There's a young female journalist from Gaza named Bissan (phonetic) and every day she makes videos from Gaza and the videos start like this. Hi, guys. This is Bissan from Gaza and I'm still alive. Every day for 137 days I say, thank God. What would I do one day if I didn't hear Bissan say she was alive? Take a second to imagine that's someone from your family's home country. Maybe Italy, maybe Ireland.

At any moment, Palestinians could be bombed or sniped or kidnapped, raped or tortured. Palestinians have lived in fear under Israel's racist apartheid for 76 years. For years, the wool has been pulled over the American people's eyes. But the veil has been lifted. The jig is up. The lid is blown off. The whistle has been blown. The world stands with Palestine. Slaughtering 14,000 children is not self-defense. The world will not condemn an occupied people's right to resist. Hamas and October 7 is an excuse to complete the Zionist project, to ethnically cleanse Palestinians and acquire Palestinian land and power over resources in the Middle East.

Steadfast support for Israel is steadfast support for racist apartheid, illegal occupation, mass incarceration and torture. The movement to free Palestine is here to stay, and it is growing by the day. The power of the people is in motion. Americans do not want to fund genocide while politicians and the corporate elite line their pockets. 153 countries call for a ceasefire. South Africa has successfully brought a plausible genocide case against Israel to the ICJ. The African Union has expelled Israel as an observer, from its meetings. Brazil expelled its ambassador from Israel and ended its diplomatic

relations. Spain and Italy have halted weapons to Israel. Netherlands courts halt fighter jet parts to Israel. Belgium is calling for Israel to stop illegally settling Palestinian land. Calls are growing in the European Union to stop sending arms to Israel.

Israel's apartheid regime is crumbling. America backing genocide must stop. How much longer before the set of lies Israel's foundation is built upon collapses? Occupation cannot be eternal. All colonizing empires fall. We cannot let it take America down with it. We cannot allow Pittsburgh to be the last of the nation's cities to demand a ceasefire. Let's proudly show our humanity and demand an end to this siege on Gaza. The safety of Israelis cannot be at the expense of the Palestinians. The majority of people in this world and American voters want a ceasefire. Americans do not want to fund genocide while politicians in the corporate elite line their pockets.

People often talk about how they want to be remembered. I think my children will remember that mom spoke the truth, that she was not silent and she fought hard to stop genocide.

PRESIDENT CATENA: If you could wrap it up, please?

MS. MAINES: I hope the family of everyone here fondly remembers them for their humanity in the darkest of times. I'll leave you with two questions. Will you be on the right side of history? And will your posterity proudly say, my ancestor demanded a ceasefire to genocide in 2024? Let Palestine live.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Natalie?

MS. BROWN: Hello. My name is Natalie Brown. I live in McKees rocks because Pittsburgh doesn't have enough affordable housing. So I want to start by saying I'm Christian and my king is a Jewish Palestinian. I don't think that's been said yet that Jesus was a Jewish Palestinian. So I want to stand here in solidarity with just the fact that two minority groups are being demonized in the U.S., and that shouldn't be happening.

I don't look at the news. I don't have social media. I have perpetual anxiety, but I did live in Palestine for a year, so I would just like to talk about my experiences. I am here today to speak about my experiences living in Palestine, also known as the West Bank for nine months in 2012 to 2013. This time was supposedly a time of peace, but what I saw and what I witnessed was anything but

peace. I lived in Nablus, Palestine, a City in the north that also has Balata refugee camp beside it. I was an art and English teacher at the center in Balata, the refugee camp, and also at a university in Nablus. When I lived in Nablus, I saw the treatment and conditions of Palestinian people ---.

I saw the treatment and the conditions the Palestinian people were under by the Israeli occupation. Balata refugee camp, in my opinion, was an open air prison. There was a tower at the top of the mountain that the IDF could look down at any moment to watch. And there were holes for toilets in the shacks that I guess you would call houses, because I had to pee in that hole. I did not live in there, but I did visit families when I was there. And there were checkpoints between the cities. And there were also settlements, which I haven't heard much talk about, the settlements within the Palestinian territories. If we're trying to move towards a peaceful two state solution, why is there settlements being built on the land that has been identified as Palestinian territory? These are Israeli settlements.

I don't need the news to tell me this. This is what I witnessed with my own eyes. I am not asking this Council to be pro-Israel or to be pro-Palestinian. I am asking this council to be pro-human rights. The Palestinian people are being massacred. And I can't help but look at western societies and wonder, why is it that when people are brown and black, it's really hard to see that people are being killed en masse? There's always an excuse attached to it. As a black American, I know this because my own country does this to me and to my community.

I am asking for a ceasefire in order to restore peaceful negotiations and to come up with a two state solution for both Israel and Palestine.

PRESIDENT CATENA: If you could wrap it up, please.

MS. BROWN: I'm done.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

MS. BROWN: Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Reese? Are you Reese?

MR. GAWRONSKI: I am.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Okay.

MR. GAWRONSKI: Hello, I'm Reese. I live in East Liberty and I'm a member of Socialist Alternative here in Pittsburgh. Before I start, I wanted to thank everyone

who's already spoken on behalf of the Palestinian people, especially those who have family and friends, loved ones in Palestine. I can't imagine the strength and courage it took to get up here.

Over the past months, Israel has ramped up a mass slaughter and mass bombing campaign that has killed tens of thousands of innocent civilians, destroyed hospitals, schools and other infrastructure necessary to support life in Gaza. This destruction depends on funding by the U.S., despite 68 percent of Americans voicing their support for a ceasefire.

While ordinary people's taxes are being used to destroy vital infrastructure abroad, cities like Pittsburgh crumble due to lack of funding. As our government invests in a regime that's murdered thousands of children and poisons Palestinian land, our schools remain underfunded and our air and water remain polluted. Allegheny residents have joined millions of Americans and hundreds of thousands of protesters all over the world to call for an end to this murderous campaign.

This massive outpouring of support has largely been ignored by Democrats in Congress would rather work with Republicans in ensuring billions of dollars be spent to fuel this mass murder. My organization, Socialist Alternative, led the fight that made Seattle the first U.S. city to pass a ceasefire resolution in November. Leveraging our city council seat held by our member, the only elected Marxist in the United States, we stood alongside Palestinian and Jewish community members and mobilized the pressure of the Seattle working class movement. We should study the lessons and fight for a similar victory here and we should fight for more.

A ceasefire will not be enough. We must call for no more military aid to Israel. And to win that, the movement for a ceasefire must grow wider. The labor movement will be central. Our greatest leverage is in the workplace. We need workers in weapons manufacturing to halt production to factories. We need workers in logistics industries to shut down shipping to Israel. We need the entire labor movement and every workplace to take a stand. And that movement must pressure politicians at every level.

That's why I'm challenging every person who came here today in support of a ceasefire to bring friends on March 5th. Don't just post on social media. Invite people

directly. Reach out to friends and family who may not otherwise come.

Finally, I think that a ceasefire is the bare minimum. Both the republican and democratic parties have ignored working people's interests and demands for a ceasefire. We need to build a new party, independent of big business, that will fight for working people, not only in the U.S., not only in Palestine, but all over the world. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Nicole? Zia? Eliana? Eliana?

MS. BEIGEL: Yes.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Let's have the next group, starting with Eliana.

MR. BARKER: Eliana Beigel ---.

MS. FAEDER: Zia, I'm here.

MR. BARKER: Sorry. Zia Faeder.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Zia's here.

MR. BARKER: Then Eliana Beigel, Daniel Fellman, Daniel Dulaney, Jason Kunzman, Rebecca Elhassid, Meryl Ainsman, Danielle Kranjec and Aviva Lubowsky.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Nicole? Okay.

MS. CMAR: I didn't hear you call my name ---.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Okay.

MS. CMAR: Hello, members of the council, my name is Nicole Cmar. As I just said, thank you for the person who pronounced my name right. Nobody ever pronounces it right. I'm a resident of Shaler Township and I'm here today to encourage you to support the proposed ceasefire resolution. As someone who works in Pittsburgh's thriving arts and humanities community, we strive to educate people to become upstanders and humanitarians every day. With this in mind, I would be remiss if I didn't practice as we teach and take the chance to support this resolution publicly.

The ICJ has now found that the ongoing atrocities that Israel is committing in Gaza are plausible to be genocide, and I'm hoping that our neighborhood will not ignore this and stand together against such acts. According to the Ministry of Health as other people have said in this room, over 27,000 Gazans have been murdered so far, a number that unfortunately includes some of our fellow neighbors family members as you've seen today. Around 70 U.S. cities have already called for an end to this brutality, and it's past time for Allegheny County to

do the same. Our representatives continued inaction on this matter has been of great concern to me, and as I have called offices of Senator Casey, Senator Fetterman and Congressman Deluzio every day for a hundred-plus days in a row and I know I'm not alone in doing this based on this room. They continue to ignore our calls for a ceasefire, which brings me to you, Members of the Allegheny County Council, in the hopes that you will take action and hear us.

As we continue to witness these horrors from afar, a ceasefire resolution is the absolute bare minimum that we should expect from our elected leaders right now. I'd much rather live in a community that stands against the atrocities rather than remain so cruelly silent in the face of them. I ask the members of this council to please support the ceasefire resolution. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Zia?

ZIA FAEDER: Thank you. My name is Zia Faeder. I live in Shadyside. I'm a member of International Socialist Alternative and I stand in solidarity with the Pittsburgh Palestine Coalition and Jewish Voices for Peace. I've lived in Pittsburgh for 17 years. I grew up in Squirrel Hill and had my bat mitzvah at Temple Sinai. As a Jewish person, I refuse to stand idly by while a full-scale massacre is being perpetrated in my name.

Over 30,000 people have been killed since the attack on Gaza began, over half of them women and children. Biden and the political establishment have blood on their hands, sixty-eight (68) percent of arms sent to Israel come from the U.S. billions of dollars in aid have been sent to further the Israeli assault on Gaza while millions of working people in the U.S. suffer from a rising cost of living, lack of access to quality health care, and severely-defunded education, I find it despicable that the council has decided not to bring forward this resolution for a ceasefire at this meeting, while we speak, bombs continue to rain down on Rafah, a designated safe zone.

We do not have time to spare. Thousands of people across the globe have taken to the streets and demanded an end to the bloodshed, just as we have in Allegheny County. Working and young people, Jewish and Palestinian alike, are fighting tooth and nail to stop this war. It is due to this movement that the U.S. and Israeli warmongers were forced to a temporary ceasefire in November. A resolution is certainly not the end of our fight. In order to end

this bloodbath, we must call for an end to the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, as well as the end of U.S. aid to Israel. This can only be accomplished by a united movement of working people from around the world, with no illusions in the Israeli state or Hamas. To achieve victories, the movement in the U.S. must reach broader layers of working people. By not only opposing Israeli state terrorism, but also opposing the reactionary role of Hamas and the idea that the Israeli population is one reactionary mass.

Working people on both sides of the fence would benefit from an end to the occupation. The movement for ceasefire must link up with the labor movement to stop the never ending flow of bombs. The only way to the peace of the people, not the rulers, is when movements and protests of workers around the world make it impossible for the rulers to continue their wars and their oppression.

In Pittsburgh, we have a responsibility to build support. Whether or not this resolution passes, every person in this room that supports a ceasefire should commit to returning today on March 5. And I think each of us should bring one, three or even five new supporters with us to expand the struggle. We are stronger together. And finally, a question for Council Members. Which side are you on? With Biden and Netanyahu and all who profit off the war and occupation, or with the movement of working people calling for a ceasefire?

PRESIDENT CATENA: Eliana?

MS. BEIGEL: Hi, Eliana Beigel. I live in Friendship. I'm here tonight as a Jewish resident of Pittsburgh and a member of Jewish Voice for Peace. And I strongly encourage County Council to introduce and pass a ceasefire motion. I want to start by telling you that Israel is not a symbol or a concept or the embodiment of a mystical Jewish essence. It is a country. It is a collection of laws and policies, and it's run by politicians who make choices, like literally any other country anywhere in the world, and we can, and we should, call out unjust policies and racist politicians wherever we find them. So let's avoid the cheap, bad faith accusations of antisemitism and just talk about the facts.

As others have mentioned, South Africa brought Israel to the ICJ, and the ICJ found that South Africa has a solid case that Israel is committing genocide. It is plausibly committing genocide right now, today. And how

did Israel react to this ruling? Netanyahu went on Twitter and said, no one will stop us. Not the Hague, not the axis of evil and no one else. He openly announced his intention to ignore international humanitarian law. And true to his work, the killing has not stopped. Humanitarian aid has not increased. It is not antisemitic to insist that Israel comply with the same laws that every other country in the world is expected to follow. Don't tell me that you oppose a ceasefire out of respect for the local Jewish community like you haven't also heard from, I imagine, from emails, dozens of members of the local Jewish community who demand a ceasefire. You've heard from them tonight. You've heard from me. We exist, too. Okay.

You know, okay, this is what I wrote on the back of this just moments ago. All right. Quick note to those of you who have spoken against the ceasefire. You've said that such a motion doesn't actually help county residents and that county residents deserve to feel safe. I'll remind you that you heard tonight from Karim Alshurfa, who has lost more than 20 family members so far. You heard from a young man named Zane who is a teenager, who told you that he feels like his very existence is politicized and he feels unsafe. What about them?

Our pain as Jews is not more painful than their pain. Never again for anyone. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Daniel? Daniel Fellman? Daniel Dulaney? Jason?

MR. KUNZMAN: Members of County Council, my name is Jason Kunzman. I live at 2804 Beechwood Boulevard in the City of Pittsburgh. I'm the President and CEO of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh. I am here this evening to express my opposition to any proposed resolution in support of a ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza War. My opposition stems not from a lack of concern for peace and stability in the region, but rather from the inconsistency and selectivity of such a resolution.

While advocating for peace is undoubtedly a noble endeavor, I find it troubling that the County Council is considering to single out the Israel-Gaza War for resolution while remaining silent on the over 100 other armed conflicts around the world over the last several years. This discriminating focus not only undermines the credibility and the impartiality of the Council, but also

perpetuates a narrative that scrutinizes and condemns certain conflicts while ignoring others.

Having traveled to Israel last November to witness the horrors of the October 7 massacre committed by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, it was unimaginable to learn about Israeli communities located along the Gaza border who have lived for years knowing that when the air raid sirens go off, they have anywhere between 8 and 20 seconds to make it into a bomb shelter. When these residents cannot make it there in time, they are recommended to lie on their stomachs, flat on the ground, covering their heads in case pieces of shrapnel fall from the sky.

In fact, when I was in the town of Sderot, the sirens went off and my group and I were forced into a bomb shelter until the threat passed. A resolution that calls for a unilateral ceasefire sends a divisive message that unfairly targets only one party involved in the war. It will not be effective in bringing about any significant changes on the ground and is likely to only fuel increased antisemitism in our local communities.

I respectfully urge county council to vote against any proposed resolution and instead focus on the issues most relevant to the local constituents you have been elected and expected to represent. These are difficult times, and it has never been more important for this group to maintain a strong, principled approach in addressing the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for Allegheny County and its citizenry. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Rebecca?

MS. ELHASSID: Rebecca Elhassid. I'm from Pittsburgh. First, to the Arabic speakers in the room, my heart is with all of you in this terrible time. I grieve deeply for the loss of lives both in Israel and Gaza. Our loved ones have been killed and are in danger, and from afar, we're all grieving and reaching for answers. Like everyone in this room, I want this war to end. I want the hostages to return. I want both Israelis and Palestinians to be able to live side by side in peace. But as council has said, trying to hash out a solution to the Israeli - Palestinian conflict in this room is not a step towards peace. It brings us into this room, divided and afraid, and it widens the gulf between two people for whom history has not been kind.

I want to share my family's story with you to help shed light on the question that's been asked here many times about why the Jews right now, in this moment, are so afraid. My family is from Iraq. Iraq was an early adopter of the idea that you can somehow be antizionist without being antisemitic. And in the process of being antizionist, but not antisemitic, they attacked, looted and erased the entire Jewish population. Those Jews who tried to stand firmly against the Zionist were not saved. In June of 1941, seven years before the State of Israel was even established, the local population in Iraq accused the Jews of being colonialists, criminalized Zionism and attacked us in a pogrom called the Farhud, in which hundreds were killed and an uncounted number of women were brutally raped. The attack lasted for two full days before authorities intervened.

My grandparents spoke of this trauma, of their shock that their neighbors for generations had attacked them until their dying days. In the end, ancient Jewish community was completely erased from the country, all under the cover of antizionism. There are no Jews left in Iraq today. We're seeing the same thing happening here. People say they're protesting Israel, asking for a ceasefire, but they're coming after Jewish schools, homes, restaurants, hospitals and Holocaust memorials.

Here in Pittsburgh, using antizionism as a tool for anti-Jewishness. My 70-year old mother in law was kicked out of a cab at 11:30 at night by a driver who said he doesn't drive Israelis. My young children discovered that antizionism means hatred towards them when they arrived at their Jewish school to discover the American flags vandalized right beside the Holocaust memorial. Our whole neighborhood woke up in the middle of the night to discover smashed car windows and antisemitic graffiti painted on our streets.

We are watching our historical traumas replay in front of our eyes. We are no longer safe in this city. That institutionalization of that hate can start here, with our County Council bringing a resolution that would serve no purpose other than to fan the flames of hate that have rocked our community, or it can end here, with our County Council refusing to take part in the increasingly dangerous division, with our County Council taking steps instead to rebuild community bridges and unite our city.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Meryl? Danielle?

MS. KRANJEC: Hello. Thank you, Members of the Council for staying so late to hear all of us speak and giving us a chance. I'm here to address you directly. My name is Danielle Kranjec. I live on Ferree Street in Squirrel Hill. I've been a resident of Pittsburgh for the last nearly 13 years. I'm here to speak against the proposal of resolutions calling for a ceasefire by Israel, a unilateral ceasefire as Israel continues in their operation against Hamas terrorists and Gaza.

First and foremost, I do not believe it is within the purview of the County Council to pass a resolution on a conflict happening in a foreign country that would contradict the President and U.S. Secretary of State and would be widely understood as support of Hamas.

Additionally, to single out the defensive actions of the only Jewish state against an enemy, Hamas, who has repeatedly called for the destruction of all Jews and the State of Israel, is a blatant act of antisemitism. The only possible impact of a resolution calling for Israel to desist in their defensive actions to destroy Hamas is to inflict pain on us, an already-hurting Jewish community, who are experiencing a new wave of antisemitism both here in Pittsburgh and around the world.

A lot of people tonight have talked about their dreams and their nightmares. I, too, share the nightmares, living few blocks from the Tree of Life Synagogue building, or at least what's left of it as it's being rebuilt. My children also have these nightmares of exactly what Hamas has promised to do and what Hamas did on October 7 in Israel, to come to destroy us.

I implore this council, support the Jewish community here in Pittsburgh and listen to us, those Jewish citizens who are telling you how such a resolution has the potential to materially hurt us while doing absolutely nothing to further the case of peace between Israel and Palestinians. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Aviva? Tammy?

MS. LUBOWSKY: Hello, Council Members. My name is Aviva Lubowsky. I live on Beechwood Boulevard in District 11. Thank you for staying tonight. In the 1930s and '40s, there were antiwar protests throughout the United States opposing the U.S.'s involvement in World War II. The asking populace said, why not peace with the Nazis? These protesters, just like ones today, not only were willing to disregard the lives of Jews who they knew were

being exterminated by the millions in Europe, but also failed to understand the threat of Nazism and Japanese imperialism to us right here in the United States. Nazis wanted to cleanse the world of Jews and gay people and brown people and their political opposition, and they took that action by murdering, ultimately 12 million people.

Today, we look back on those antiwar protests with shame, but we are watching history repeat itself. The mufti of Jerusalem, the spiritual leader of the Arabs at that time, allied himself with the Nazis and adopted the policy of wanting the land to be cleansed of Jews from the river to the sea, like Germany. Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and the leadership of Iran carry on that shameful legacy, professing their desire to rid the world of Jews, gay people and political opposition, which includes Americans. Just like the axis powers of World War II. They are acting on that ideology now. Just as we did then, we have protesters who are willing to disregard the lives of Jews, who are the first in the line of fire. Now, like then, we have protesters who fail to recognize that the threat these organizations posed to us right here in the United States is present. All you have to do is listen to the leaders of these organizations calling openly for death to the Jews and death to Americans.

Peace will come when people understand that the call for the river to the sea is just a modern iteration of the Nazis final solution. A genuine call for peace would reject this as strongly as we reject Nazism. A genuine call for peace would work toward an independent Palestinian state not predicated on the elimination of Jews or any other group. The fact that these voices carrying on the Nazi legacy have an audience in 2024 is horrifying. I ask our County Council to reject the demands coming from these voices. I ask our County Council to consider the enormous increase in antisemitism we are experiencing and look for ways to make the situation better rather than fan the flames of bigotry. I ask our county council to think about what we can do right here at home to rebuild the community bridges that are being broken by these divisive voices that are trying to force us all to choose a side to the detriment of all of us. Thank you so much.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Tammy? Before you begin, let's line up the last group.

MR. BARKER: Tammy Hepps, Michaela Barry, Clara Weibel, Jeremy Kazzaz, Chaim Genack, Kelly Kuzemchak, Susane Slavick, Julia Richards, Jeffrey Finkelstein, Jacob Poole, Anna Hale, Yigit Menguc, Joshua Lewis and we have two individuals who were not here when their names were originally called.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Okay.
Go ahead, Tammy.

MS. HEPPS: Hi, my name is Tammy Hepps. I'm a resident of Squirrel Hill and a fifth generation Jewish Pittsburgher whose ancestors came to Allegheny County starting in the 1880s. The descendants of their siblings who remained in Eastern Europe were murdered in the Holocaust. My ancestors in the county lived for decades in multicultural neighborhoods like the hill and lower homestead and had friendships with people quite unlike themselves. I speak here today as a person who's been shaped by their legacy, having been a leader in Ben the Ark Jewish Action Pittsburgh, the local chapter of a National Jewish progressive organization, I speak as someone with deep familiarity with progressive spaces and progressive causes. I speak as someone who has tried my best to open my ears to the stories of frontline communities in our county. Today I am here to speak up about the experiences of my frontline community.

I know there are a lot of well-meaning people here today who believe that this is just another cut-and-dry situation of standing up for oppressed people, of putting ourselves on the record, on the side of progressive values, on the side of our shared liberation. But calls for ceasefire, both here and all over the country, have borne obvious marks of anti-Jewishness, accompanied by open calls for the annihilation of Israel from the river to the sea and to globalize the intifada, with protests taking place at Jewish restaurants, houses of worship, hospitals, businesses and homes, demonstrating over and over again that these are not voices for peace, but rather voices against the Jewish people.

We know because we have seen this before. Let's not dilute ourselves. A County Council resolution is not actually about making any real contributions to resolving the Israeli Palestinian conflict. While this is not the form to lay out a robust argument about the naivete of calling for a ceasefire, there was a ceasefire on October 6, 2023. There was repeatedly ceasefires since 2007 that

had been repeatedly violated by Hamas, as they continually went after the mission stated in their charter to destroy Israel and murder Jews wherever they are. Your ceasefire will permit Hamas to regroup once again.

The mandate of this group is to improve life in Allegheny County. A foreign policy debate that goes against the official policy of the United States, instead deliberately tears at the already-fragile multicultural fabric of our community. It won't quell violence overseas. It incites violence at home. By conflating your ability as leaders of a county to be leaders international affairs, you encourage conflation of your Jewish neighbors with citizens of Israel, and in so doing, you make your Jewish constituents less safe.

The only thing a resolution will accomplish is the long standing goals of anti-Semites to push their Jewish neighbors outside of community. What if this body were committed to modeling how a multicultural community behaves when one of its frontline communities is under attack? What if this group were to say the obvious, that the Israeli Palestinian conflict is unrelated to its business? That all residents in Allegheny County deserve safety despite whatever feelings their neighbors might have about overseas events? I speak as somebody who still wants to believe that our liberation is a shared liberation. What's happening in this room today, this is not what our shared liberation looks like.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Michaela? Clara?

MS. WEIBEL: Hi, everyone. My name is Clara Weibel, and I live in Squirrel Hill, District 11, and I am asking the council to bring a resolution to the table that supports a ceasefire in Palestine.

Genocide is a moral and political issue. It is time for our political systems to catch up to us and represent how we feel and take the bold actions that are necessary to do so. The majority of the United States population agrees that the mass death of any population is obviously unacceptable, whether it be through bombs, weapons, chemical warfare or slower violence means of depriving populations of food, water, fuel and medical supplies. We as constituents have limited ways to engage in our political system. Although it may feel that this is not your issue at the county level, that this assault is happening over there and that this isn't something Allegheny county should have to consider under its

purview, please consider how other levels of government are failing us and that resolutions on the local level can reinforce our morals here, while pressuring other levels of government to act.

Calling for a ceasefire in Palestine is worth it to prevent more pain, suffering and death. Use this as an opportunity to urge Congress and the United Nations Security Council to call for a ceasefire to allow aid and the right for the displaced to return and allow families to sleep at night and be reunited with their loved ones. Also to allow children the chance to grow up. I am not calling for death. I am here calling for life. Standing on the right side of history is never cut and dry. Sometimes it is intentionally convoluted. It isn't too late, and we must reckon with our failure to act sooner by doing what we must now.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Jeremy?

MR. KAZZAZ: Good evening, Council. My name is Jeremy Kazzaz. I reside in Squirrel Hill on Beechwood Boulevard. Two weeks ago, I addressed this Council with a sincere hope that you would all work to restore the Council's integrity pursuant to your Ethics Code so that this council can maintain the confidence of the public. That Ethics Code requires all members to serve the best interests of the public at all times. Two weeks have passed and I want to ask what work has been done to restore the integrity to this body? Why is this Council being encouraged to turn your focus away from the best interests of the public here and onto foreign policy instead?

The Home Rule Charter that governs this body mentions property taxes, labor unions, businesses and civic organizations, but it doesn't mention foreign policy for obvious reasons. Setting foreign policy is the sole domain of our federal government. True, on October 24th, this Council adopted a resolution regarding the tragic events of October 7. You did so with a language that mirrored the resolutions agreed to overwhelmingly in Congress and also by this Commonwealth's legislature. It's one thing for this Council touch on a matter on foreign policy in order to echo the sentiment of the federal government. It is a very different matter if this Council decides to send a message to the federal government that you dissent from this nation's foreign policy.

I urge you to focus your finite time on matters that you do have jurisdiction over. I also reiterate my standing request that you follow and enforce your own Ethics Codes to serve the best interests of the people in this county, and paraphrasing the Home Rule Charter, that you hold each other to high standards of conduct and behavior to enhance the public trust in county government. Thank you for your time.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. I'm sorry. I'm going to massacre this, Chaim?

MR. GENACK: Chaim (changes pronunciation).

PRESIDENT CATENA: Sorry. I apologize.

MR. GENACK: It's okay. Not the right word for tonight's discussion.

My name is Chaim Genack, but I --- it's okay. Actually, when I call people on the phone, I just pronounce it Chaim, it's just easier. My name is Chaim Genack. I'm the Rabbi of Shari Torah Congregation in Squirrel Hill. I represent about 500 people in that congregation, and I stand before you today to express my concern regarding the proposed resolution currently under consideration.

Firstly, it's important to recognize that this motion falls outside the purview of the County Council. Furthermore, the divisive nature of this specific motion cannot be ignored. It is, by definition, biased and has the potential to encourage anti-semitic acts within our community. I want to tell you about two things that happened on my block. My son is in 9th grade. My son has a friend who was walking home from school about six o'clock in the evening. He was accosted and attacked on the street, on the sidewalk near his home because he's a Jewish boy walking home from school. There's a storefront around the corner from my home, less than 45 seconds from my door that was vandalized because they had an Israeli flag in their window. This is not a joke.

Finally, and most importantly, the calls for ceasefire from Israel fail, and perhaps purposefully, to consider the larger context of this conflict. They offer a false and perverse equivalence between nihilistic terrorists of Hamas and the State of Israel responding to a genocidal attack on their territory. Just today, at the United Nations, today, U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield aptly stated in her remarks demanding an immediate unconditional ceasefire.

Without an agreement requiring Hamas to release the terrorists will not bring enduring peace. What we need is enduring peace. What we need is people to see the larger context. What we need is for people to see that it's not going to come from a body like this. I ask you because I care. I care about Jews. I care about Americans. I care about Israelis. I care about Palestinians. Let's stay focused on what we can do over here at home. Promote the peace over here, and let's work towards an international, ongoing, long-lasting peace so that Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Kelly?

MS. KUZEMCHAK: Hello, Council Members. My name is Kelly Kuzemchak. I live on Penn Avenue in Point Breeze in Pittsburgh, and I'm also the Secretary of the Green Party of Allegheny County. As our Chair, Jay, mentioned earlier, peace in Palestine was overwhelmingly voted as the top issue among our members at our February meeting. I'm here today to ask you to consider a resolution for a ceasefire in Gaza.

As you can see from the number of people in attendance today asking you to support the ceasefire, this resolution, which isn't even on the Council's Agenda, this issues of utmost importance to the people of Allegheny County, not just to the people of Palestine or the Palestinian American community. Your constituents are here today telling you what we want to see from this Council. Palestinians and Israelis, Muslims and Jews alike, have asked you to voice your support for a ceasefire.

On behalf of the Green Party of Allegheny County. I implore you as soon as possible to introduce and to vote yes on this resolution. On behalf of myself as an individual, I would like to say that I personally believe that even those few who have shown up today to speak against a ceasefire want the same thing as the rest of us. Peace. No one wants to live in fear. No one wants to be subjected to violence because of who they are. Not Jews, not Muslims, nor Palestinians, nor Israelis. Oppression is the root of violence. It is clear from all the testimonies you've heard today that the continuing war in Gaza will only perpetuate a culture of hate, both islamophobia and anti-semitism worldwide.

We're not asking you to be or to pretend to be experts in geopolitics. We are asking you to listen to your constituents. We are asking you to stand up for human rights and for the oppressed. I implore all of you on council and in the audience to listen to and uplift the voices of the oppressed. We all want peace. The only path to peace is a ceasefire in Gaza and an immediate stopping of the U.S.'s funding of the Israeli military. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Susanne? Julie? Jeffrey?

MR. FINKELSTEIN: Thank you, City --- County Council for everything you do. I'm Jeff Finkelstein. I live in Squirrel Hill. I am the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh and have been in that role for 19 years and a member of this community for 25 years. The federation represents the broad center of the Jewish community. I want to be clear. We represent the broad center of the Jewish community. There are other voices in our community, too, and you've heard some of them tonight, but the broad center is represented by our federation. And I would mention, and the way I would let you know about that is on October 27, when that shooting took place that took 11 members of our community, the next night, the gathering at Soldiers and Sailors Hall that brought 5,000 people, members of the Jewish community and our allies together was put together by our federation.

To begin, I can't believe I'm here to address County Council's consideration of a resolution on an issue where its voice does not have any direct impact. This is a divisive issue without community consensus, and you hear that tonight, there are over 100 armed conflicts around the world. Are you prepared to address all of them, or are you just wanting to take on the one that impacts the safety and security of the only Jewish country in the entire world? The International Holocaust Remembrance alliance, or IRA definition of antisemitism, now adopted by 35 of our 50 states and 43 countries around the world, includes this example of antisemitism, applying double standards by requiring of Israel, a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.

Israel is now responding to Hamas's breaking of the ceasefire on October 7, when approximately 1,300 people were slaughtered, including babies burned alive, women raped, and 240 individuals taken hostage, including American citizens. Every country is obligated to ensure

the safety and security of its own citizens. That is what Israel is doing right now. To secure the release of her citizens being held hostage, and to get rid of Hamas, a terrorist organization with the stated goal of eliminating the State of Israel. You would expect the United States to keep you safe, wouldn't you?

I can see I'm running out of time. What I want to state is that I visited Israel in November for 36 hours. I witnessed the impact of the barbarism of Hamas. I met with the families of hostages. I visited with some of the 200,000 internally-displaced Israelis. As the President said, this body does not have the expertise on geopolitical matters and I urge you not to get into this one.

I'll finish with this. I leave for Israel on Thursday. I will once again see a changed country, a country at war, to protect her diverse citizenry. I pray for peace someday, but for now, I want to know that my family there is safe. County Council should do nothing to undermine that safety.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Anna? Jacob, are you here? I didn't see him. Anna? Yiget? I'm sorry if I'm mispronouncing that, I apologize.

MR. MENGUC: Thank you, Council. My name is Yiget Menguch, the G is silent. It's probably the first time you saw it. I live on Carnegie Place in Point Breeze. Paul Klein is my Council Member. I also had prepared remarks and I just want to start by saying thank you for giving us space to vent. I feel like my body is at war, like, I feel it and it's also --- I switch between these moments of just intense anger and fear. I keep hearing that fear. And then on the other hand, I just want to go to sleep. Like this is my bedtime. My son is about four and-a-half. He actually attends the Jewish community center preschool. I am here to call for a ceasefire. And this is not anything else but a call for ceasefire. That's all I'm asking for.

I'm a practicing Quaker and one of the practices we have is to sit quietly because fear comes over us and we have these emotions. And if we speak from a place of fear, there is no safety because the fear is inside our own heart. And I hear when I look around here, especially when I was standing, waiting to speak, I see the fear is here right now, in all of us. I don't envy your task. I know all of you council people are good people. You're

doing this thankless job late to listen to all of us. And I don't know how you can make some action that will assuage all of our fears, but I know that I feel that the attack and fear is here now amongst us as Pittsburghers.

We're all calling for peace. And I hear how everybody is calling to feel like they are part of this community and that a decision, one way or another, automatically makes the other side not part of this community. But we're all in this room right now. We are all part of this community together. And if we're a family together, then no matter how hard it is to hear each other speak, we know we have to listen and move with love in our heart. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. Joshua.

MR. LEWIS: Hello, Council. I want to thank you for your time this evening. My name is Joshua Lewis. I reside in District 11. I share everyone's sorrow at the events unfolding in the Middle East and pray for peace and an end to hostilities. The matter before County Council this evening, however, does nothing to promote peace in the Middle East, but instead serves to divide and inflame our community. It is self-evident that this issue is not one to be debated and decided by a County Council. No one here was elected to conduct foreign policy or decide delicate matters of federal statesmanship.

This country has served as a haven for diverse religious beliefs since its founding and has represented a safe home for Jews and other religious minorities. Now I am deeply troubled and alarmed by the rampant spread of clearly antisemitic speech and actions taking place in our society.

I urge this Council to focus on uniting and serving the citizens of Allegheny County and not enabling those that seek to divide us. I say this with the utmost respect for this body and the good and necessary work it does and must do for our county. Do not allow this Council to be co-opted and instead focus on governing and serving those you have been elected to represent. I want to thank you for your time.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. We'll take the last two.

MR. BARKER: Correct, we have two individuals who were not here when their names were first called, Rachel Greene and then Jules Lobel.

MS. GREENE: They packed us into train cars like cattle. Worse than cattle. They fed us potato skins. They fed us nothing. Their boots entered our doorways at night. We have nightmares of showers we never returned from, babies held to their mother's breast so they would not inhale the gas. Babies exterminated and we said, never again will God's people, the Jews, be treated this way.

In Jerusalem, I saw boys and girls, children in uniform with rifles on their backs and slushies in their hands. I saw my grandma cling to the wailing wall like she might cling to a son just returned from war. In a museum, a timeline listed the points when blood had run in the streets of the city as it changed hands from one God's people to the next. The idea of this bloodshed in the place where I stood sickened me. And I thought, I do not love this land. This is a place of death without renewal, and God exists everywhere. So why would I choose to seek the sacred in this place of trauma? When I told my grandma I was organizing with radical Jews in support of Palestinian rights, she said almost nothing.

Zionists invaded Palestine. Palestine was invaded by Zionists. Palestine was invaded. Palestinians are refugees. Palestinians are terrorists. Palestinians are violent fanatics who thirst for the blood of Jewish babies. Or was it Jews who thirst for the blood of Christian babies? Or did anyone remember that neither Jews nor Muslims consume blood?

When my grandma finally decided to talk to me about the differences in our views, I told her about the girl who grew up in my community, graduated from my school, stood in front of a Palestinian home to prevent its demolition, was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer. My grandma said, that girl should not have been standing there. My grandma said, she must have been stupid. And when my grandma finally decided to talk to me, she did not decide to listen. Babi anxiety, Safta and Saba, grandmothers and grandfathers, teach us that our suffering was a gift from God. For only through that suffering could we truly understand the suffering of others. God chose us so that we might know what it is to be the other in our own homes. Babi, teach me that the appropriate response to Veltmurtz is Tukur Olam. That the best way to honor those who suffered and died because of other people's fear and hatred and confusion and prejudice is to

teach people not to act out of fear, hatred, confusion and prejudice, but out of love. Be sure I understand that the trauma of crystal Nacht and al Nakba is the same. Be sure I understand that there is no never again without never again for anyone.

I'm a resident of Pittsburgh. My name is Rachel Greene. I'm here to call for a ceasefire. This is not about the difference between choosing safety for Jews or Palestinians. It's about stopping cycles of violence. Stopping cycles of violence makes us all safer. Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you. I think it's for everybody. Jules? Okay.

MR. LOBEL: Hopefully last, but not least. My name is Jules Lobel and I live in Point Breeze and I speak today as a Jew who has taught international and constitutional law at the University of Pittsburgh for the last 40 years and who's been on human rights delegations to Israel and to Gaza, and also whose father was born in Jerusalem, whose grandparents were born in Jerusalem, whose great grandparents were born in Jerusalem, whose great-great grandparents were born in Jerusalem. In fact, my family goes back to Jerusalem to the 18th Century, and I have many cousins and relatives in Israel now.

The great lesson that the world learned after World War II with the Nuremberg trials, with the genocide Convention and the Geneva Conventions, was that we cannot remain silent in the face of great atrocities, particularly in the face of genocide. We have to learn from World War II that people throughout the world have to speak up and that involves citizens and that involves government officials and that involves councils like yourself when genocide is being committed. And I think it's clear the plain flags show that a genocide is being committed now in Gaza.

Now, I've heard a number of people say, well, there are hundreds of other conflicts around the world. Are we going to spend the next year investigating each of those conflicts? Two key things about this conflict. One, it's being funded by us. Our government is complicit in this, and we have a moral, ethical and legal obligation to speak out about it. And second, this is genocide, and that's different. Second, I've heard that, well, Hamas committed this great atrocity on October 7th, and there are many antisemitic actions and comments being made in Pittsburgh

today. I agree, and I condemned the Hamas attacks on October 7, but genocide is not justified by an attack, by a violation of international law, even by a war crime. Genocide is never justified, and that's one of the lessons of World War II.

And second, I also agree that we should combat antisemitism. As a Jew, I'm very opposed to antisemitism. I'm also opposed to the antimuslim activities and comments, the killing of Muslims in different cities, and we should speak out about that, but that also does not justify remaining silent on genocide. Now, is this genocide? I think there are two key factors in genocide. One is the mass slaughter of a people to substantially eliminate those people, the destruction of hospitals, of neighborhoods, it could be starving people.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Wrap it up, please.

MR. LOBEL: And the last part of it is that you look at what the Israeli officials have said, and I won't go through them, but it's clear that they've said, these are people, human animals, and we have to kill them. The plain facts are, this is genocide, and neither you nor I should blind our votes and our votes and our ---.

PRESIDENT CATENA: If you could wrap it up?

MR. LOBEL: --- silence in the face of genocide.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT CATENA: Thank you.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: So at this point, I just want to thank everyone for coming out tonight. You gave us a lot to, obviously, digest. For the most part, for a very difficult discussion, everyone was pretty much respectful, and I appreciate that. I hope that carries into whatever happens on March 5th. I'm going to leave you with one final thought tonight, and I'd like everyone to take this to heart, because sometimes I have to take it to heart sometimes, to be honest with you. We might not always agree with the other person's opinion, but you can always, at the end of the day, respect that person. And I encourage everyone to remember that at the end of the day, no matter what side of this you're on, no matter what side of this you come down, at the end of the day, you need to be respectful of one another, because when we lose that respect, we accomplish nothing.

So is there a motion to adjourn?

MR. MACEY: I make a motion to adjourn.

MR. PALMIERE: Second.

PRESIDENT CATENA: All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

(Chorus of ayes)

PRESIDENT CATENA: All those opposed?

(No response.)

PRESIDENT CATENA: Motion carries. Thank you.

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify, as the stenographic reporter, that the foregoing proceedings were taken stenographically by me, and thereafter reduced to typewriting by me or under my direction; and that this transcript is a true and accurate record to the best of my ability.

Dated the 13 day of March, 2024

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Deanna Heckel", is written over a horizontal line.

Deanna Heckel

Court Reporter