

Levy-laden ballot crowds out Portland children's fund

Election - Supporters of the schools' levy persuade Commissioner Dan Saltzman to delay his

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KIMBERLY A.C. WILSON

Too many levies on November's ballot created an early casualty Thursday, when Portland Commissioner Dan Saltzman said he will wait another year before asking voters for more money for the Portland Children's Investment Fund.

The move came one week after Portland Public Schools Superintendent Vicki Phillips and the school board wrote to Saltzman asking for the postponement given the need for a school levy this fall.

"If you agree to forgo going to the ballot in November 2006, regardless of the outcome of the November 2006 election and any other challenges that may emerge in the intervening years, we will wholeheartedly support the CHIF being placed on the ballot in 2008," they said in the July 14 letter.

Saltzman was persuaded and said the five-year Portland Children's Investment Fund, which voters approved in 2002 to support programs in early childhood development, after-school mentoring and child abuse prevention, can weather an additional year.

"It's a crowded ballot, and it's critically important that the schools get their money, so while we think we could win in '06, the dynamics are such that it could damage both our successes," Saltzman said.

The fund can operate for a sixth year, through June 2009, thanks to about \$9.6 million from one-time only savings, unexpected higher tax revenues, interest and a 5 percent cap on administrative costs.

The bulk of the extra money is carryover from the fund's first year, when few grants were allocated. Also, it took two years before the fund was fully staffed, saving administrative costs, said spokeswoman Mary Gay Broderick.

"We are going to eke out that sixth year of funding, and we're hoping not to make any cuts to our grantees, but we may shave some hours off the staff, cutting here and cutting there so that the sixth year is as whole as possible."

When Multnomah County's Board of Commissioners slashed funding for Schools Uniting Neighborhoods programs, chairman-elect Ted Wheeler had hoped to persuade the Children's Investment Fund to share its bounty. But those unallocated funds were earmarked for Head Start model program expansion and child care quality improvements and child care subsidies.

"The practical implication is the millions we were looking to invest in Head Start programs is now going to go to fund a sixth year," he said.

The November ballot remains crowded with levies, including a \$227 million bond measure to allow Metro to buy 5,300 acres of privately owned wildlife habitat and levies for Portland schools and the Multnomah County library system.

Kimberly Wilson: 503-412-7017; kimberlywilson@news.oregonian.com