



Mayor Jorge O. Elorza

FY18 ONE PROVIDENCE BUDGET ADDRESS

President, members of the City Council, employees, residents and community leaders who care deeply about this city –

Thank you for being here tonight. If I have learned one thing over the past 2.5 years, it is that when we come together, and when we work together, big things happen. We get stuff done and together we create the City we want to be a part of.

Over the past year, we have come together to solve some of the biggest challenges we face as a City. From shaping the future of one of our major highways, the 6/10 connector, to re-envisioning Kennedy Plaza, to developing a vision for Upper Broad Street, and to participating in the “All In” Education Summit; each time, hundreds of residents – many of you in this room – have stepped up and invested in our incredible city. And perhaps most inspiring, thousands of people have come out to march and stand up for women’s rights, refugees, immigrants, and others.

So at a time when it seems that the forces pulling us apart are as strong as they’ve ever been, we are here to talk about what we will do together. It is in the spirit of coming together – to support our kids and families, to help our most vulnerable, and to boost economic prosperity - that I present my proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2018.

There is nothing more important than to support the education of our children. Our responsibility to our children’s education begins long before they enter kindergarten and extends far after they leave high school.

I believe that Providence can, and will, have the top urban education system in the entire country, but achieving that goal will require renewed investments in our kids and families. Building off of what we heard from participants at the “All In” Education Summit and what I hear directly from students on my weekly school visits, I am proposing the first increase in education funding in seven years, and an overall increase to youth programs and to our school department of over \$7 million for the upcoming fiscal year.

We recognize that in order to close the achievement gap, we need to support our students from cradle to career. The truth is that many of our students start kindergarten and they're already behind. Low-income students throughout the country start kindergarten having heard 30 million fewer words, but here in Providence, we have the only program at scale in the nation specifically designed to address it. The Providence Talks program has shown amazing results, because it builds off of the power of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. This is world-class innovation happening right here in Providence and cities throughout the country are looking at us to replicate our program. This budget invests half a million dollars in this early intervention so that families continue to benefit, so that our parents feel empowered, and our kids are ready to learn.

While many students start kindergarten already behind, the achievement gap only grows wider during the summer when many of our students simply can't afford summer learning programs. It is wrong that a child's growth is so dependent on their family's income and because of this, I propose a half a million dollar expansion of our "Summer of Learning" initiative, so that our students are never limited by their parents' means and can go wherever their persistence and potential takes them.

But there's so much more to it than simply increasing students' learning time. Our students have the capacity to conquer the world, but unfortunately, many of them don't know it yet. It is hard for students to see themselves as lawyers, doctors, and business leaders if they've never seen lawyers, doctors and business leaders that look like them. And while they're in school, students have personally told me that they don't feel as though they're pushed hard enough. Students are asking to be challenged and they're asking to be inspired to reach higher.

Because of this, I am proposing a three-quarter of a million dollar investment in our "Reach Higher" program. Part of Providence's "My Brother's Keeper" commitment, this investment will equip all of our middle schools with additional resources to ensure that we have a culture of even higher expectations and constant inspiration inside of our schools.

We have inspirational figures in our community and I want our students to hear their stories; we have amazing leaders and mentors, I want our students to meet them and learn what they have to share. We have great and committed teachers, but you never know who will make the difference in a child's life. Let's leverage all the great talent we have in our community and let's make sure we're inspiring our kids to dream high and never sell themselves short.

You see, when our students are equipped with the right tools, I know they will outcompete and outperform students anywhere. Last year, we invested \$500,000 in Chromebooks to give them the tools they need to excel in today's world. Because of the school department's creativity, we were able to leverage that investment and purchase 8,000 new computers for our kids; one-third of all students. That was a great leap forward, but our work won't be done until we reach the magic 1:1 ratio. Every single child should be a "digital native" and every single one should have access to a computer. This year, we are happy to announce another half a million dollar investment in Chromebooks so that our kids are leading the pack in this technology-based society.

And as our students are using technology and learning how to code, Providence is in the midst of recapturing its brand as a Maker City with a future in advanced manufacturing. I want our young people to be at the very center of this; they are tinkerers, they are creative, and they are most in tune with the needs of the future. That is why I am proposing that we invest in our "Young Makers" program, in what I believe would be a first in the nation for a major city, to have every child in Providence live within walking distance of a free and accessible 3D printer. Working with partners such as schools, libraries, community centers, and private industry, we can do it. And as we do it, we'll be creating the strongest and most prepared workforce for the jobs of tomorrow.

Supporting our young people is the most impactful way to invest in our City's future. And while we have a number of strategic investments to build our students' hard skills, we also need to make sure that they're learning the essential skills that will allow them to step into any workplace and know they can succeed. That's why this budget includes an investment of \$1 million specifically designated to nearly double the number of jobs and internships our students have access to.

All our students need, is to get a foot in the door. With the help of many community partners, and I trust that of every Councilmembers as well, we will be reaching out to employers and asking them to crack that door open and to give our kids a shot. To all employers, I guarantee you'll be impressed when you see what our kids can do.

And I'll tell you why all of these investments in young people are so important. There is a young woman with us here today. She came to this country as an immigrant and was raised by her single mother. With the help of afterschool programs that the city funded, she excelled in our schools; she has participated in internships and they've inspired her to dream big. And now, Genesis Sanchez, the first in her family to go to college, is on track to enroll as a first-year student at Columbia Law School this Fall. Genesis, we're proud of you, please stand up.

Genesis is amazing, but I'm convinced that with these proposed investments in our youth, we will be lifting the dreams so many other Genesis's that are out there.

No discussion on our young people and schools today is complete without talking about school infrastructure. In conversations I've had with students, they see very clearly how the conditions of the schools contribute to low-morale. Deferred maintenance has built up over the years and has produced school buildings that frankly don't live up to our standards. During my time in office, we've committed \$25 million to school repairs and I am announcing today that we will be committing an additional \$15 million this coming year.

These collective investments in our children along with the continued involvement of our community partners are designed to make a statement. Providence is "All In" for youth and education. We are making progress, we are building momentum, and mark my words, by working together, we will indeed create the best urban education district in the country!

While our commitment to our families begins at childbirth, if we're serious about supporting our children from cradle to career, then we have to support their parents as well. That is why, I am proud to share that Providence will become the first city in the State of Rhode Island to offer Paid Parental Leave to our city employees. In the coming year, we will implement a policy that will offer new parents up to six weeks of paid parental leave to care for their newborn or adopted children. This benefit will begin for all non-union employees forthwith and we hope to extend it as union contracts are negotiated in the years to come. Providence will lead by example and ensure that our employees are able to care for their children and get them off to the right start in life. It's simply the right thing to do.

And once kids get a little older, we know the great cost burden that high-quality childcare can be, especially on single parents. The cost of day care easily rises to \$100 per week, sometimes more. That's why we are expanding our popular Summer Camp program so that more families can access childcare at a cost of only \$5 a week per child, and families can keep more money in their pockets. This is about supporting our families and it is about believing in income and gender-equity. Let's invest in our folks who need it the most.

And there are many people in our community that have perhaps the greatest need; folks who are homeless and who are panhandling on our streets. This is a major challenge for our city, just as it is for cities throughout the country. But here in Providence, I refuse to simply move the problem from one block to another or from one block to another neighborhood. Instead, we're going to adopt strategies that actually work and that get at the root of the problem. In addition to support for our Navigation Center, I call for an increased investment in Amos House's "A Hand Up" program that provides jobs for the homeless. This initiative has a triple bottom line: it provides folks the dignity of work, it gets them off the streets, and it connects them to rehab and services to help them put their lives back together. We're going to tackle the issue of homelessness and we're going to do it through innovation, with partnerships, and with compassion.

There is another important group that has unfortunately been overlooked and sometimes left behind. I've spent a great deal of time at senior centers visiting and listening to our seniors. I can tell you that they have so much energy and joy to share, but they consistently tell me that they feel disconnected from their community because of the lack of affordable transportation. Well, through a partnership with RIPTA and through funds from the city, we will dedicate two full-time buses that we will make available for senior transportation throughout the city. We will work with senior centers, schools, and community groups to make sure our seniors feel connected to Providence once again. They have served our community with dignity and we owe it to them to show our appreciation!

We want all of our residents to feel connected to their community. Unfortunately, over the years, we have not done a good enough job of integrating immigrant students and refugees that come into our schools. This changed recently as our school department opened Providence's first Welcoming Center for immigrant and refugee students. Many of these youths have escaped some of the most traumatic experiences imaginable; nevertheless, they've persevered. In these times where anxiety is at full tilt, we owe it to them to let them know that they're safe and that they're embraced by their new community.

This budget ensures the continued funding for our Welcoming Center so that we can continue to do just that.

We make these investments because we want to create a city that folks are proud to call home. People are more mobile than ever and they can choose to live anywhere. However, people are flocking to cities that value diversity and embody progressive values. It is in that same vein, that I propose that we join cities such as San Francisco, New York City, Los Angeles, Washington D.C. and many others and institute a municipal ID program where people have access to an ID card that tells them that they belong.

Whether you're an immigrant who's looking for a way to legally identify yourself, you're homeless and don't have the means, you're transgender and want to self-identify, you're a young person who wants your first bank account, or you're just a resident who wants to display your Providence pride, this helps bring us together. Municipal IDs have been endorsed by police departments, supported by immigration advocates, applauded by the LGBTQ community, and welcomed by homeless advocates. And Providence will be the next city to say that every resident matters.

Providence is proud to be a progressive pro-growth city and that's exactly what makes us so attractive to companies. Urban studies author Richard Florida has found that if you're looking to see which cities have the strongest knowledge economies, look for cities that value diversity and tolerance. Startups and tech companies want to be where the talent is; and the talent is flocking to cities like ours. We are perfectly positioned to take advantage of this.

As we sit here, we're already seeing a residential construction boom throughout the city; the Cambridge Innovation Center has been a game-changer in other cities and it will be so here as well. With the Governor's leadership, world-class brand-name employers are relocating to RI, and their calling our downtown home. We have five separate hotels going up, yet more proof that Providence is a place where people want to be. We're on the move and we need to keep it going. Let's take advantage of this moment and be the wind at the sails of this growth.

My administration and the RI Commerce Corporation have been strategizing on how to link our economy to that of Boston's. The Boston market is currently so hot that companies just can't stay in the city because of the rising rents. While those companies are searching for new homes, Providence should be the first thought on their mind. Instead, companies are leaving Boston and moving to Route 128 or Manchester, NH when Providence is the ideal location for them. This budget seeks to reverse that trend by making a strategic marketing and business development investment that will put us on their radar. And I am confident it'll be successful because when people and businesses discover our city, they tend to fall in love.

And as we're marketing our city to potential companies, it's important to continue to accentuate our vibrant city center. We are fortunate to have the world-renowned WaterFire and the emergent PVDfest here in our city, and I want to make sure we do more to activate our streets, provide more programming, and attract more visitors to support our hotels and local merchants. We already have a brand as America's Coolest City; this budget lets us capitalize and do even more to bring our streets to life.

We want businesses to know that there is no company too small, whether it is a staff of 3 or 300—we want you here in Providence. Our Business Concierge position has been a big success and we want to continue supporting our small and micro businesses with the creation of a Small Business Coordinator. This person will tend to the unique needs of small business owners, will be their advocate, and will allow them to spend more time building their business and less time stuck in either city or state bureaucracy.

And, whether you're a business or a resident, we all want the security of safe streets. Our police department is in my opinion the finest police force in the state and perhaps the most dedicated force in the country. Our police officers are committed to our community and go above and beyond every day. I see it when they're coaching basketball and football with middle schoolers, and I see it when they're attending countless community meetings with our partners in the neighborhoods. Because of their work, 2016 saw a dramatic decrease of 30% fewer shootings from the 5-year average, and it was the first time in anyone's memory that we didn't have a single gang-related homicide. That's amazing work and I ask us to stand and show our support to our brave men and women in the police department.

I'm happy to share with you that our current police academy shattered all diversity records, and these 57 recruits will soon be hitting the streets and proudly joining the ranks. I am also happy to announce that this budget provides for yet another police academy that will soon add 40 additional officers that will allow us to continue our commitment to community-based policing.

There perhaps has never been a more difficult time to be a police officer. It is a time of great volatility and change. In fact, the Providence Police Department is on the verge of what I believe will be one of the great moments of change for the policing profession; the full deployment of body cameras will be a game-changer. And as the profession changes, so must our policies and procedures.

Here in Providence, we believe in our men and women in uniform. But, that doesn't mean that we can't do better; we can always do better. The city is close to passing the Community Safety Act, which is one of the most comprehensive pieces of police-community relations legislation in the country and it positions Providence as a model for the nation. Through this ordinance, we will collect valuable information on racial profiling and we will create closer ties with the community, all the while preserving the tools the police need to keep us safe. This budget invests in the training, technology and personnel needed to implement the CSA upon passage.

And it isn't only our police force that set the bar high in Providence. Our fire fighters truly go above and beyond every day. Please join me in showing our appreciation to our brave men and women in the fire department. In addition to the fire academy starting this June with 80 candidates, we are committing in this budget to an additional academy of 70 new fire fighters later this year to replenish our ranks.

Whether we're saving people's lives or whether we're answering calls in City Hall, we are all civil servants and we're held to a higher standard. We take ethics and transparency seriously and that's why my administration impaneled the first Providence Ethics Commission in the city's history. And while they are doing great work, they need additional support. This budget makes an additional investment in good government by funding a full-time Ethics Commission Coordinator that will help the committee do its work and help us make a strong statement about our commitment to ethical government.

Good government reaches far beyond ethics. It's about leading and budgeting responsibly with the long term in mind. Over the past two years, we have eliminated all one-time fixes from the budget, we ended last year with the biggest surplus in over 20 years, we're making 100% of our pension contributions, we had our bond rating increased by two notches, and we're on pace to finally have a rainy day fund once again. We've come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. And as we continue to build the foundation for the long-term, this budget does the responsible thing of setting aside 1% of our budget as a safety-net reserve.

When we look towards the long-term, it is not just about shoring up our finances; it is also about making critical investments in our core infrastructure. We need to invest in our city's future—and that's exactly what this budget does. That's why for the first time in many years, we have presented to the City Planning Commission and the City Council a comprehensive and prioritized Capital Improvement Plan.

We cannot wait for things to break before we fix them. We need to strategically plan how we spend every dollar in our streets, our parks and our neighborhoods. This plan provides us with a 5 year roadmap of improvements that we need to make in order to build strong neighborhoods and pave the way for new investments. I want the entire world to know that Providence is planning for the long-term.

While I feel as optimistic as ever about our city's future, I must admit that I am deeply concerned about the new administration in Washington. We have a President who has laid out an agenda that conflicts deeply with our principles and cuts support for the most vulnerable communities. If we are to preserve what we stand for, it is up to us to roll up our sleeves and get it done. This budget is exactly that: an expression of our values and a statement about who we are as a city. This is a pro-growth, forward-thinking budget that invests in our future. It is a progressive budget that supports our most vulnerable. It is an innovation-based budget that pushes us to do better. And most of all, it is a "One Providence" budget that invests in bringing communities together.

Providence is on the rise and we're uniquely positioned to be one of America's great cities. There's a lot of work left to do, but let's not forget what this city has already accomplished. We moved a river, train tracks and a highway. And, in the coming years, we will be building out our new economy, connecting 9 neighborhoods via CityWalk, converting Kennedy Plaza into a beautiful park, and we'll be building a new 6/10 connector. These are all major projects in this time of resurgence for the city.

Providence is taking a major step forward, and as we do so, this budget helps to ensure that we leave no one behind! God bless!