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Local

City Council questions nonprofit's spending after hunger strike



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BALTIMORE -

A nonprofit that demanded \$3 million in city funds by organizing a five-day student hunger strike came under scrutiny by [Baltimore City Council](#) members over its own spending, including several trips and a more than \$100,000 salary for the organization's director.

Baltimore City's Safe & Sound Campaign, which waged a concerted but unsuccessful campaign to secure money from the city's rainyday fund for student mentoring programs, should take a hard look at its own spending, council members said.

(Examiner file)

Hathaway Ferebee, director of the Safe & Sound Campaign, urged Baltimore City leaders to donate \$3 million from the city's rainy-day fund for student mentoring even though the group spent about \$1 million on travel, marketing and Ferebee's salary, according to 2006 tax records

The Examiner obtained Safe & Sound's 2006 tax records, which showed nearly \$1 million in overhead costs including:

- \$437,000 to consultants;
- \$341,000 for marketing;
- \$156,031 for travel including trips to [Seattle](#), [Savannah, Ga.](#), [Chicago](#) and [Boston](#);
- \$120,000 salary of the group's executive director, Hathaway Ferebee.

Tax returns for 2007 are not available.

Safe & Sound is "telling the city to find more money to fund [its] programs, but it seems to me there are places [the nonprofit] could find money too," said City Councilman Bernard "Jack" Young, chairman of the council's Budget and Appropriations Committee.

"If I meet with them, I plan to bring this up."

[City Councilman Robert Curran](#) said the organization's spending is "going to raise some eyebrows."

"I'm not saying the expenses are not legitimate, but I wasn't aware of it," he said.

Ferebee defended the organization's spending, saying that much of the group's funding comes from private foundations.

"The direct answer is not a nickel of the city's money gets spent," Ferebee said.

"We champion, applaud and advance what others in this city do to provide good opportunities to be successful. We spend money investing in people themselves to get engaged in the democratic process."

The group, which began in 1996, functions primarily as an advocate for programs, said Ferebee, justifying the spending on consulting and travel.

"Part of what we do is finding out what works in other communities and bringing it to [Baltimore](#)," she said.

"So we send a neighborhood activist, a business community person from the city government to study programs in other cities."

[Howard County Health Director Dr. Peter Beilenson](#), who is listed on the group's 2006 tax returns as a full-time employee earning \$59,000, defended the organization as an innovative resource for other nonprofits.

"I think they've done a very good job convening nonprofits on specific goals," Beilenson said.

"Without them, the city would not have some very effective after-school programs and juvenile intervention programs."

[Baltimore City Mayor Sheila Dixon](#) declined to comment on the group's finances.

But city officials said she met with the hunger-striking students from Peer-to-Peer Youth Enterprises, a coalition of more than 20 mentoring programs, for 45 minutes last week.

During the meeting, Dixon told the teens that the city could not afford to fund the youth employment program above the \$2.9 million already granted to the program, urging them to find corporate sponsors.

The group, however, said the \$2.9 million is used for other programs, not mentoring programs that are part of Peer-to-Peer.

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