REMARKS FOR JOSEPH H. HOGSETT

*2022 Budget Introduction / State of the City*

August 9, 2021

Good Evening.

President Osili – Vice President Adamson – Leaders Lewis and Mowery, and to all of my colleagues on the City-County Council… I am grateful for the opportunity to speak with you tonight.

It is my privilege to present the City-County Enterprise operating budget for 2022. The proposed 2022 budget represents the fifth consecutive budget submitted to the Council where revenues exceed expenses. Since the balanced budget that the Council passed in 2017 -- and thanks to your strong leadership and continued bipartisan collaboration -- the City has received multiple credit rating increases that reflect a proven track record of balanced operations and responsible fiscal decisions.

But I stand before you tonight mindful that the challenges facing our city are not simply fiscal. After decades of work by multiple mayoral administrations to combat the scourge of gun violence in our streets, a global pandemic and national economic crisis have forced Indianapolis -- and nearly every other major city in this country -- to confront an epidemic that has cost too many lives.

That is why tonight, in addition to the 2022 budget, I am also introducing a comprehensive financial package that leverages the full strength of the American Rescue Plan to invest more than four hundred million dollars in once-in-a-generation programming -- including the single-largest commitment to IMPD and community-based public safety efforts in our city’s two-hundred-year history.

Together, this spending plan will focus on ensuring that Indianapolis remains a thriving, equitable, and safer city.

Last year, you will recall, I gave this address virtually. As uncertain as that moment seemed, we were still months away from the eventual deployment of three life-saving vaccines.

As the impacts of the pandemic have continued to stretch on, I am proud that this Council has joined me in the push for progress on behalf of Indianapolis residents.

We have launched efforts like Circle City Forward, seeking to repair, replace, and modernize neighborhood assets including a multi-million-dollar investment in Indianapolis Parks facilities, a new DPW solid waste garage, and a modern forensics lab and coroner facility.

The second round of Circle City Forward put 25 million dollars into residential streets -- those smaller arteries that we normally can’t address in an average construction season. Thanks to the support of the City-County Council, every single district will see investment in much needed projects that have been overlooked for far too long.

The last year has also included pivotal development victories that are leveraging the success of our downtown back into neighborhoods.

Chief among them is the announced re-location of Elanco’s global headquarters to the site where the GM stamping plant once stood. This development will bring hundreds of jobs and more than one hundred million dollars in investment to The Valley and surrounding neighborhoods.

In addition, we have cut the ribbon of the first phase of 16 Tech; we have watched as the Infosys corporate campus leapt out of the ground at the old airport terminal and -- late last year -- we marked the long-awaited opening of the Assessment and Intervention Center in the Twin Aire neighborhood. This facility is providing better treatment of mental illness and addiction for those who would otherwise wind up cycling through the criminal justice system.

We mobilized resources and our experience as a host city to organize some of the most significant sporting events America has seen since the start of the pandemic, most prominently the entirety of March Madness.

To our civic partners including the United Way of Central Indiana, the Indy Chamber, EmployIndy, the Indianapolis Arts Council, Visit Indy, the Indiana Sports Corp. and many more, who have implemented innovative and creative solutions that have kept Indianapolis going -- I say thank you.

To our human service providers, who have stepped up in the face of unprecedented challenges and continued to ensure that our most vulnerable residents receive the care and support they need -- I say thank you.

To our corporate and philanthropic community who found new ways to show up for their employees, for their neighbors, and for our city -- I say thank you.

And to our healthcare professionals, our front line workers, our public safety officials, and of course -- Doctor Virginia Caine and the Marion County Public Health Department, tonight I thank you for your relentless efforts to combat COVID-19.

Tonight’s fiscal proposal seeks to meet the moment that we find ourselves in and create transformative change with investments including:

● A 20-million-dollar commitment for the development and preservation of affordable housing, as well as over 40 million dollars for other housing and neighborhood redevelopment efforts.

● Over 22 million dollars in 2022 for small business support, workforce development, and economic recovery programming.

● A three-year, 17.5-million-dollar plan to upgrade and invest in our neighborhood parks.

● And nearly 3.5 million dollars in funding for arts and cultural programming including direct grant dollars for small and diverse institutions.

In today’s world, where “working-from-wherever” is increasingly common-place, we will ensure that Indianapolis remains an attractive city for businesses, companies, and talent. We will also ensure that Indianapolis, as the economic engine for Central Indiana and the state, can continue to support the infrastructure needs of the area.

For example, during the 2021 construction season, Indy DPW programmed 167.5 million dollars in total capital projects.

Over the next three years, we will invest substantial resources into much-needed infrastructure projects, including 50 million dollars of American Rescue Plan funding for projects that will prevent flooding in neighborhoods and repair city streets.

Additionally, tonight I have submitted a fiscal ordinance for a third phase of Circle City Forward that will allow us to invest 25 million dollars in greenway and trails projects.

In total, DPW’s Infrastructure capital plan will receive an additional 125 million dollars in new investment, putting us on pace for an historic 1.1 billion dollars of spending since 2016 -- all without raising taxes or privatizing more assets.

But we haven’t just been investing in the bricks and mortar of our community. We’re also continuing to strengthen our city’s social safety net.

This year, 6 million dollars went into Operation: Feed Indy—a broad and sweeping effort to bolster resources for those who already were, or who soon became, food insecure during the pandemic.

Tonight, I’m proposing an additional 6 million dollars of investment of American Rescue Plan dollars next year -- dollars that will allow us to invest in neighborhood-led solutions, as well as provide continued support to our major partners fighting hunger.

Throughout the past year, federal money has accelerated our Community Plan to End Homelessness to the tune of over 20 million dollars, allowing us to offer beds to any neighbor experiencing homelessness. And since the start of this year, we’ve placed more than two hundred and twenty individuals from shelter into housing.

We’ve continued our Pathway to Employment effort, connecting residents experiencing homelessness with resources and jobs. And we’ve sustained our “housing-first” strategy, increasing the goal of our Housing to Recovery Fund to 10 million dollars.

In addition, I am proud to announce tonight that our spending plan sets aside 12-million-dollars for our first city-constructed low-barrier shelter and comprehensive services facility.

This watershed investment will be guided by studies already underway, evaluating the specific needs of our homeless population and bringing together community partners that will allow us to transition individuals to permanent supportive housing.

As the COVID recession took hold, our efforts to keep more residents housed went into overdrive. To date, our rental assistance program has distributed more than 53 million dollars to landlords across Marion County, helping more than 23 thousand families stay in their homes.

As we continue to battle the pandemic, we know that incomes are still being impacted. So tonight, I’m proud to announce that we are submitting a proposal to the council that would allow us to partner with the State of Indiana to add up to 100 million additional dollars to our rental assistance program.

As meaningful as all these accomplishments have been, they’re not what I want to focus on tonight.

While Indianapolis is a unique place in so many ways, I speak to you tonight as our city finds itself exactly like every other major American city in one tragic respect: Indianapolis has experienced a tidal wave of gun violence that has swept across the United States, in no small measure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I want to be clear: while our community reels from the effects of this national trend, the impact of each and every one of these acts of violence has been devastatingly personal. Across this city, residents are justifiably angry at a culture of death that has been fueled by an oversupply of guns and a deficit of hope.

But the acknowledgment of pain felt by those scarred by gun violence is meaningless without action. The compassion we all feel is insufficient if it does not translate into change.

That is why the historic fiscal package I present tonight is aimed squarely at addressing the gun violence epidemic in our city.

To understand where these resources will take us, it is important to first acknowledge the work that took place before COVID-19 brought the world to its knees:

- Four years of work with this body to fund the hiring of 150 more police officers, and the creation of the innovative Crime Gun Intelligence Center.

- Four years of working with this body to increase the amount of grant funding for grass-roots organizations fighting cycles of violence by more than 1 million dollars.

- Four years of working with this body to make investments in long-overdue technology aimed at increasing community trust, like bodycams, or increasing police effectiveness, like our B-Link program.

- Four years of working with this body to focus on treating substance abuse and mental health issues, rather than just arresting those who suffer.

- Four years of working with this body to deliver, in this budget, the first time since 1996 in which **zero** tax dollars will go toward private jail facilities.

But tonight, I have to be blunt with all of you about where we now find ourselves.

All of the programs and policies we put in place over the last four years were rendered, in a matter of just months, completely incapable of dealing with the scope of the crisis facing cities from coast to coast.

We have not sat idly by and simply watched this tragedy unfold. Since the start of the pandemic, working with the City-County Council, we have:

- Increased funding, staffing, and support for intimate partner violence prevention programming.

- Promoted resources that addressed the devastating mental health toll of the pandemic.

- Enhanced IMPD’s data infrastructure to facilitate a real-time gun violence reduction strategy.

- Enacted critical reforms to improve trust and collaboration between neighborhoods and law enforcement.

- And added additional funding for community groups working with at-risk young adults.

We have also said loudly and clearly that no American city – including Indianapolis – possessed the resources to scale our strategy to meet the need of a public health crisis that has shaken the local economy to its foundations and uprooted the social fabric of everything from child care to K-12 education.

Thankfully, I stand before you tonight to acknowledge and give thanks that our advocacy did not go unheard or unheeded. And earlier this year, the American Rescue Plan was signed into law, which has provided our city with a transformational opportunity to address the epidemic of gun violence head-on.

As a result, tonight I submit a budget and three-year spending plan to address the effects of COVID-19, including more than 150 million dollars directed towards an unprecedented anti-crime initiative.

We will do this not by abandoning our data-driven strategy, but by harnessing these one-time resources and continuing our work to modernize our law enforcement agencies.

That’s why tonight, I am asking this Council to invest 9 million dollars over the next 3 years in modern crime fighting technology, including cameras and license plate readers in high-crime areas, digital evidence software, a 360-degree virtual training system, and the launch of a gunfire detection pilot program.

We will do this not by assigning more tasks to the men and women of IMPD who have faced violence head on, but by growing the size of our community-based police force.

That’s why tonight, I am asking this Council to fund an additional 100 police officers who will be exclusively assigned to community patrols. And, I am proposing the expansion of the division of civilian Public Safety Officers within IMPD that will focus on non-emergency situations and paperwork, freeing our sworn law enforcement officers to focus on gun violence.

We will do this not by abandoning our dedication to gun violence intervention, but by doubling-down on these efforts.

That’s why tonight, I’m asking this Council to hire two new recruit classes of Peacemakers, growing the program to fifty public servants trained to assist police in preventing conflicts, and expanding our Group Violence Intervention policy work.

We will do this not by forgetting our community partners, but by quadrupling our investment in the efforts of those who seek to break the cycle of poverty and violence that has entangled far too many families over the last year. That’s why tonight, I’m asking this Council to dramatically increase our anti-violence community grants, distributing 45 million dollars over the next three years to groups who are fighting crime on our streets.

And our violence reduction plan must be more than reactive, but proactive. That’s why we must focus also on the root causes of violence.

Tonight, I am asking this Council to fund 30 million dollars of mental health programming over the next three years, as well as more than 10 million dollars in 2022 for re-entry, domestic violence services, training, and youth programming.

To repeat myself: I am asking this Council to work with me to allocate more than 150 million dollars in funding toward these efforts because there is no greater challenge facing our city than the pandemic-fueled scourge of violent crime.

Every American city is struggling with this crisis. But tonight, we have an opportunity to lead, not follow. To take advantage of this unique opportunity, and break cycles of violence more than a decade in the making. To lift up our weary neighbors and lend backup to our brave law enforcement officers.

This plan, once implemented, will save lives. This plan, once funded, will make our city safer. And perhaps just as critically -- this plan, once approved, will provide much-needed hope to residents in neighborhoods across Indianapolis.

Let’s not hide the ball -- while the federal funds that this body will consider over the coming months were tirelessly championed by Congressman Andre Carson, the American Rescue Plan did not pass unanimously. And Washington has continued to engage in partisan sparring about matters big and small.

That’s their fight.

Let it play out on cable news and on Twitter.

That’s not where our constituents live, and that’s not where they expect us to focus.

Because if we fall victim to the gamesmanship of that cartoon version of politics?

If we allow this Council and our administration to be pulled into the insular black hole of anti-social media campaigns aimed at driving us farther apart?

Well, we risk squandering a monumental moment where the history books will say that the City-County Government was tasked with matters of life and death.

That’s because at a time when vaccines are safe, widely available, and free, here is the reality: this year in Indianapolis, we have seen weeks where the deadliest effect of the pandemic has been lives lost to gun violence, not COVID-19.

Public Safety. Housing. Violence Reduction. Hunger.

Each of these investments are, at their core, anti-crime initiatives.

And I know all too well that there will be some who see this massive investment and question the scope of our efforts, calling them too broad to address the problem of violence.

There may be others who question the growth of our police department or the increase in our grassroots anti-violence efforts.

They will question why, in the midst of a simmering pandemic, our city is making such massive investments into crime-fighting programs.

My answer is simple, and has been affirmed by this Council before: gun violence is a public health crisis.

We have invested in the manpower, the programming, and the technology that has allowed us to inoculate and protect the public from the virus.

Now is the time to invest in the infrastructure to combat a much more complex, but no less deadly threat to the lives and livelihoods of our residents.

Now is the time to cast aside precedent and shed the burden of incrementalism that would prioritize safe politics over safe streets.

Now is the time for this Council to act– and act boldly– to turn the tide against the scourge of gun violence.

Now is the time... so together -- let’s get to work.