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From: William M. Paparian <t
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To: PublicComment-AutoResponse
Subject: Feb. 23rd Council agenda - Item 12 Sales Tax

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With the June 2026 election closing in, we face a defining moment: whether to approve the Essential Services Restoration Act, a half-cent sales tax hike that would push our countywide rate to 10.25%—and combined local rates in Pasadena and many other cities to 11.75% or higher in some spots. This isn't a small tweak; it's another layer of pressure on families already struggling to make ends meet. I will be voting NO on this measure, and I urge every one of you—particularly those of us in Pasadena—to join me in opposing it. My stance is rooted in affordability, fairness, accountability, and the real pain our community is feeling right now.

I stand firmly with Supervisor Kathryn Barger, the only Board member to vote no when this was placed on the ballot, because her arguments hit home harder than ever in places like Pasadena. Supervisor Barger declared unequivocally: "Backfilling federal funding cuts on the backs of county taxpayers is not acceptable." These cuts—tied to federal policies like the Big Beautiful Bill—aren't our fault. Why should Pasadena families pay the price for decisions made far away in Washington? As Barger stressed, "Los Angeles County residents are already stretched thin."

And nowhere is that truer than in Pasadena, where the cost of living has skyrocketed to unsustainable levels. Pasadena is one of the most unaffordable cities in the entire country. Recent rankings place us near the top of the "most unaffordable" list, with a cost-of-living index around 185-190 (nearly double the national average). Housing alone is brutal: average rents hover at \$2,350-\$2,400 for a one-bedroom, median home prices exceed \$1 million, and monthly costs for a single person can top \$3,500—or over \$7,700 for a family of four. Groceries, utilities, transportation, and healthcare eat up what's left. Incomes simply aren't keeping pace—housing costs have outstripped wage growth dramatically since 2020, leaving fewer households able to afford homes or even stable rentals. Even with Pasadena's rent stabilization capping increases at just 2.25% for 2025-2026 in covered units, the overall burden from high baselines, property taxes, and everyday expenses is crushing.

Now imagine layering on this sales tax hike. It would make every purchase—groceries for your kids, school supplies, gas to get to work, a family dinner out—more expensive in a city where people are already stretched to the breaking point. Our county has the highest sales tax of any major metropolis, and this would make it worse, driving shoppers across borders to lower-tax areas and hurting local businesses. In Pasadena, with our vibrant but competitive retail scene, that could mean lost jobs and even less economic vitality when we need it most.

Accountability is another huge issue. This revenue isn't ring-fenced for healthcare—it's dumped into the general fund with broad discretion. Barger captured our shared skepticism perfectly: "We are not, as a whole, credible when it comes to promises made, promises broken." We've seen temporary taxes ~~linger before~~. Why

trust vague assurances now, when Pasadena residents are fighting just to stay afloat? Barger also called for Sacramento to lead: "The state should have taken the lead." State inaction shouldn't force local taxpayers—especially in high-cost areas like Pasadena—to bail out the system.

Better alternatives exist: cut waste, address mismanagement, prioritize spending, or demand real state and federal relief. This tax isn't about saving healthcare—it's about shifting the burden onto families already facing an affordability crisis in Pasadena and across the county. Supervisor Barger's stand is about protecting taxpayers, period—no partisanship, just common sense. It resonates deeply here, where the dream of living comfortably in our beautiful city feels increasingly out of reach. We've endured enough: soaring rents and home prices, inflation, high everyday costs. Enough is enough. Voting YES would pile on more pressure when we need relief, not another hit to our wallets. When you head to the polls in June, vote NO on the Essential Services Restoration Act. Talk to your neighbors, share these realities, and let's protect our families, our businesses, and the affordability we desperately need to preserve in Pasadena. We deserve better solutions, not more taxes. Join me: vote NO.