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Testimony Of The Boston Municipal Research Bureau

Before The
The City Council Committee On Ways & Means

February 3, 1998

Regarding: Docket #0286 - Message and order approving an appropriation of \$9 million from the Capital Fund to be expended for the purpose of procuring, installing and implementing a city-wide administration information system for human resources, payroll and finance functions.

The Bureau is testifying in support of the \$9 million appropriation for furthering the City's technological capabilities. This new system is a long-awaited step forward in improving the City's finance and HR system and the Council should approve this appropriation. The Bureau has been a long time user of the City's financial and human resource information systems. As such, we have an intimate knowledge of the capacity of the current system as well as its shortcomings. In fact, over the years our research reports have recommended changes and improvements to this system. It has become evident to the Bureau that an upgrade in this system is very much needed. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the following points.

- The Bureau has reviewed the financing mechanism recommended for the \$9.0 million with the City Auditor as well as other public finance experts. The Bureau is satisfied that with the City's experience in managing its bond proceeds, the \$9.0 million from the arbitrage rebate fund is appropriate to finance the initial costs of the new system.
- This project is a huge undertaking affecting all city departments. Successful implementation will require significant staff training and a change in the work culture. The Council should not only support this project now, but should support this effort throughout the duration of the project ensuring that it remains a priority of the City.
- The City and unions must be willing to commit to staff training as well as re-training of positions that are no longer necessary. Each and every change should not automatically be a bargaining issue. In many instances, training will make a job easier and less work for the employee. Efforts to maintain the status quo should be resisted and not support by the Council.
- Savings and greater efficiencies over time should help offset some of the costs for this project. The City Council should hold the Administration accountable for savings and efficiencies and look for improvement in government services over time. The budget process is an opportune time for the Council to evaluate technology achievements each year.

- In time, the new system will allow for a greater decentralization of decision-making but that will require strong central oversight.
- This system needs to fit into a comprehensive technology vision for all city government which does not exist now. Several departments operate separate computer systems for their own needs. To achieve a citywide vision, the City first should fill the vacant MIS Director position and broaden its scope and responsibility.

The Bureau urges the City Council to support docket #0286.