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Cuyahoga County Health and Human Services Budget Presentation Process Concludes, Council Deliberation Begins

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Introduction

Over the past few weeks, Cuyahoga County has been undergoing its budget process for the 2018-2019 biennium. Department leaders in the Budish Administration have been presenting to County Council with their thoughts on the proposed budget and some of their plans in the next two years. The Center for Community Solutions has been closely monitoring the budget process. While there have been many County Council meetings that have covered a variety of topics, this recap focuses on presentations by agencies that are involved in Health and Human Services (HHS), or departments where the decisions made will have an impact on the overall health and human service system in the county. This edition of *County Budgeting Matters* covers three days of testimony from HHS departments and other elected officials with responsibilities that directly affect the HHS community. County Council has begun the amendment deliberation process and will begin introducing those amendments for consideration and discussion the week of Monday, November 13, 2017.

October 19, 2017

The morning session of the Cuyahoga County Committee of the Whole on October 19, 2017, featured a number of departments in Cuyahoga County Health and Human Services presenting information about their organization, and their perspective on the county budget.

The meeting opened with public testimony from the Council On Older Persons (COOP), a standing committee of The Center for Community Solutions; Reverend Lorenzo Norris; representatives from Community Partnership on Aging (CARE); the Benjamin Rose on Aging-One Call for Wellness; and additional stakeholders speaking on behalf of seniors.

Interim Director, Department of Health and Human Services Walter Parfejewiec

The hearings opened with testimony from the interim director of the Department of Health and Human Services, Walter Parfejewiec. Former Director Tom Pristow announced his departure a few weeks ago. In his testimony, Director Parfejewiec reviewed the vastness of the County Department of Health and Human Services, which has a staff of over 2,200 and a combined budget across departments of \$336 million. Director Parfejewiec commented how the number of individuals in the county who are at 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level or less has risen steadily the past few years from 390,000 in 1999, to 430,000 from 2005-2009, and 460,000 in 2011-2015.

Even in light of that data, the department was still forced to make about \$13.3 million in overall cuts across the various HHS agencies. Fortunately, about \$7.6 million was restored from unexpected increases from the federal government. The county expects to save money from not renewing a contract with Starting Point, an organization that runs a number of programs

related to early childhood development. Because of the contract expiration, coupled with a decision to limit overtime in Child and Family Services (saving \$6 million in the process), according to the county, there will be no reductions in staff or layoffs in any HHS divisions.

Division of Senior and Adult Services – Dr. Richard Jones, Administrator

The first person to present from the Division of Senior and Adult Services (DSAS) was Dr. Richard Jones. He noted how there are currently more than 47 million Americans in the United States that are 65 and over, and this figure is expected to increase to 72 million by 2030. Cuyahoga County currently allocates \$18.2 million to DSAS, whose funding is overwhelmingly supplied by the county HHS levies. The administration is hoping to boost the DSAS budget to \$19 million. Dr. Jones said that the budget proposal would allow him to maintain the service quality that people have come to expect from DSAS.

Dr. Jones cited programs that assist elderly residents at home, such as the Communities Assisting Residential Elders (CARE) program, as an example of the work that is being done at DSAS as a result of investment by the county government.

Dr. Jones testified that he has visions of enhancing Adult Protective Services, as well as the Kinship Care program, which has become even more essential as children are being placed with grandparents as a result of the opioid crisis. Additionally, he and his staff are working on identifying methods to reduce social isolation, a problem that is sometimes experienced by seniors who live alone at home.

County Council Vice President Pernel Jones asked Dr. Jones if his department still has a waiting list for county services, which has been a high priority of Council over the past few months. Dr. Jones replied that he has successfully been able to whittle down the waiting list to only a few dozen individuals and hopes to totally eliminate the waiting list in the next two to three weeks.

Councilwomen Yvonne Conwell, chairwoman of the Cuyahoga County Council Health, Human Services and Aging Committee, asked Dr. Jones if the county is ready for the “Silver Tsunami,” the expected increase in the number of seniors across the country. Dr. Jones said that, while the county has made great strides over the past few years, there are still policy solutions that he is vetting to prepare for the increase. Some of the current programming ideas that would help prepare his agency would cost an additional \$2.5 million.

Councilman Anthony Harrison asked what other services are in high demand among local seniors. Dr. Jones explained that there is definite need to address bed bugs. Almost consistently, DSAS is not able to keep up with the number of seniors affected by this issue. Mr. Harrison expressed concern, saying that he does not feel that the current funding to DSAS is keeping up with the demand. This line of questions led to a particularly poignant moment, when

Councilman Hairston asked what Dr. Jones would do if he were given an additional \$1,000,000 in the budget. Dr. Jones immediately listed that he would add an APS worker, and expand the OPTIONS program and the Senior Center Innovation Program.

Councilman Mike Gallagher and Councilwoman Nan Baker inquired about the expected increase in the number of seniors by 2030, adding that there needs to be an active economic development strategy to recruit families to the county to expand the tax base and support the need of the county's senior population.

Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board – Valeria A. Harper

Next on the agenda was a presentation by new ADAMHS Board Chief Executive Officer Valeria Harper. CEO Harper explained that the ADAMHS Board's budget is \$39 million, which is a flat funding amount from the last county budget. She testified that, even though the county is maintaining its funding commitment levels from two years ago, the ADAMHS Board has seen a gradual loss in state funding of about \$5 million from four years ago. With the increasing demands related to the opioid epidemic, the ADAMHS Board staff is seeking to expand prevention and early intervention programming to ultimately decrease the costs of treatment.

CEO Harper also warned of a potential decrease in the ability to meet community needs with the possibility of Medicaid expansion being eliminated at the state level. Councilman Scott Tuma asked Ms. Harper to describe an example of what would happen if Medicaid expansion is eliminated at the state level, and how it would directly impact county residents. Ms. Harper testified that one of the things that would immediately be affected are detoxification facilities, which are critical to help those addicted to opioids and wean them off the drugs. Councilman Dale Miller noted that the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's office projected that 850 individuals from Cuyahoga County will die from a drug overdose in 2017.

HHSA Chairwoman Yvonne Conwell noted that the ADAMHS Board also deals with the mental health needs of county residents, in addition to helping those addicted to drugs. She asked Director Harper to share with council how the ADAMHS Board is balancing those needs. Director Harper candidly responded, "Admittedly, we are having a hard time. But we are trying to allocate dollars as best we can."

Councilwoman Shontel Brown and Councilwoman Conwell expressed concerns about the possibility of the ADAMHS Board being flat-funded. Director Harper said that because of the flat funding, ADAMHS is not able to adequately respond to other health needs among county residents, such as programming to help victims of domestic violence.

President Brady ended the testimonial session by saying that one of the main culprits in the creation of the opioid epidemic is the distribution of medical painkillers, which leads to

addiction and illicit drug use. (Authors Note: Cuyahoga County announced the following week that it [planned to sue](#) the manufacturers and distributors of painkillers as a contributor to the overall health epidemic.)

Division of Children and Family Services – Cynthia Weiskittel

Director Weiskittel testified that the Department of Children and Family Services is not expecting to see any elimination of programming and services. She did note that the workload on her staff is increasing, as the number of children in foster care in the county is at its highest levels since 2007. The number of children who are born exposed to drugs has increased by 32 percent over the past two years.

Councilwoman Conwell asked Director Weiskittel to explain more details about the issue, saying that studies indicate children do better when they are at home versus foster care. She followed with a question about how the county is dealing with how to keep children in the home of a trusted family member. Director Weiskittel said that the staff tries hard to provide as much support to the children in their own home, and placing children in foster care is a last resort.

Councilwoman Shontel Brown confirmed that no one in Child and Family Services would be losing their jobs. Rather, the county is hoping to decrease the amount of overtime use among employees, as a way to reduce overall spending. According to additional testimony from Director Parfejewiec, the amount of reduction in overtime spending is \$2.25 million.

Councilman Jones followed up in trying to understand the cuts to the budget, specifically the reduction in funding in a contract with Starting Point, a nonprofit that focuses on assisting early childhood learning centers.

Councilwoman Conwell asked for more explanation about how the administration is proposing to eliminate overtime costs for HHS workers and how that will save money. Director Weiskittel said that she expects that the issue was that CFS did not have enough workers, so overtime costs were higher to handle the increasing caseloads. Now that the county has added more staff, the overtime costs will decrease, saving money overall. Director Weiskittel explained that the savings would come from a 24-hour hotline that employees were trained to staff, even when they were in their “off time.” Now, with the additional employees, there will not be a need to pay overtime to ensure that the hotline is fully staffed.

Cuyahoga Job and Family Services – David Merriman/Christy Nicholls, Interim Administrator of Cuyahoga JFS

The next speakers were Assistant Director of Cuyahoga County Health and Human Services David Merriman, and Christy Nicholls, acting administrator of Cuyahoga Job and Family Services. Director Merriman opened his testimony with statistics, sharing that JFS serves 418,000 residents every year. Over 250,000 families are served by SNAP/TANF/Medicaid and Childcare. The department has the largest budget in the county at \$81 million, with \$35.5 million allocated for personnel and \$16 million in benefits.

JFS will be facing a budget reduction. Some overtime pay will be eliminated, resulting in a cost savings of over \$2 million. They also will reduce \$1 million from the Children with Disabilities fund, which is a service that is provided by the State of Ohio. According to testimony by Mr. Merriman, more than \$1 million of these funds go unused anyway, so the county is going to simply allocate what they expect to use.

Councilman Hairston asked Mr. Merriman and Ms. Nicholls to explain how the county will continue to improve service quality over time, while not adding any additional staff. Councilmembers have heard complaints in the past about not being able to reach case workers, resulting in poor response times and unsatisfactory service quality. Councilmembers want to make sure that the case workers are able to effectively manage the cases, which will result in improved morale, better turnover, and better service quality to county residents. Ms. Nicholls explained that the call center has seen improvements and that the resolution response rate was now at 80 percent, meaning that 80 percent of the calls that came into the county resulted in the callers receiving the support that they called in for.

By far, one of the most misunderstood issues of the entire county budget was presented by Council President Brady, who closed the testimony by trying to better understand the HHS Levy Reserve Fund versus \$7 million in reserve money that the administration has set aside for any funds that may be needed on HHS issues over the next two years. According to the administration, the HHS Levy Fund stands at \$47 million at the end of 2017. This would be included in the overall percentage that the county has held in reserve. However, the administration is trying to hold onto \$7 million of that money, in the likely expectation that they will have to use that towards HHS expenditures that are currently unbudgeted, and will inevitably come up over the next two years.

Office of Child Support Services- Deborah Watkins

The final presentation of the morning was from the Office of Child Support Services (OCSS). OCSS serves 380,000 individuals in Cuyahoga County each year. They are scheduled to receive

the same amount of money as in 2017, with a slight increase in personnel costs due to a 2 percent COLA adjustment, but a decrease in expenses due to a modification in information technology and data collection.

One significant change is a repurposing of dollars that are used for the Fatherhood Initiative, as that program will be funded through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding, instead of Cuyahoga County HHS levy funding.

Office of Homeless Services – Ruth Gillett

Administrator for the Office of Homeless Services Ruth Gillett presented her testimony in the form of a rap.

Administrator Gillett was first asked about the state of the oversight contract with Norma Herr, which has come under criticism from advocates over the past few months. She said that she did not have an update to present at this time.

Councilman Schron followed up by asking Ms. Gillett about the lack of funding and the low service quality at the local homeless shelter. He specifically asked Ms. Gillett to respond to critics of OHS, adding the question “Is the funding enough?” According to the administrator, the current level of funding is not enough.

Councilwoman Conwell asked about a unique proposal, which involved a partnership with Eliza Bryant Village. The concept would be that homeless seniors who were in need of housing would be able to house at Eliza Bryant, which has some beds available. Administrator Gillett said that she is waiting to hear back from Eliza Bryant.

Invest in Children - Dr. Rebekah Dorman

The next presentation was from Dr. Rebekah Dorman, director of Invest In Children. Invest In Children will continue to work on the early care and education system. With 67 Universal Pre-K early childhood sites across the county, the county is able to support high-quality pre-kindergarten for 4,900 children every year. Invest In Children is currently flat funded from the last budget, with the exception of a \$500,000 reduction that would affect one program. The agency is beginning to use portions of a \$10 million allocation received from the county last year, to aid Universal Pre-K expansion. The agency is also continuing efforts to help child care facilities meet new state-mandated quality guidelines. The initiative, called “Step Up to Quality,” requires that all state-funded child care facilities be rated and compliant with the new quality standards by July, 2020. The county works through a state-designated compliance organization called Starting Point, to aid the providers. Dr. Dorman said that the \$500,000 cut to the Invest in Children budget would affect a contract with Starting Point that works with

Family Child Care Homes. Dr. Dorman said that, eventually, the State of Ohio is going to require all state-funded child care facilities to be “highly rated” with three to five stars. Councilwoman Conwell asked how that \$500,000 cut would be absorbed by Starting Point, and the response was “staffing levels at Starting Point.”

Family and Children First Council – Robin Martin

The next presentation was from Robin Martin, director of the Family & Children First Council. FCFC receives \$4.6 million, which is flat from the previous budget. Councilmembers were informed about one change that is taking place over the next biennium, which is bringing an external program evaluator into the county. Councilmembers Hairston and others expressed their support for the Closing the Achievement Gap (CTAG) initiative, which works with youth to improve school attendance and increase academic achievement.

Office of Re-Entry - Crystal Bryant

Crystal Bryant, director of the Cuyahoga County Office of Re-Entry, presented about how her department is funded by HHS levy dollars, and how the department is both advocate and convener, and how it is funded. She is hoping to create a Research Analyst position. Such a researcher would be able to measure the impact of programming and initiatives on the actual recidivism rate. This person would be able to gather data from the federal and state level prison systems, which can be combined with county data, to more accurately measure the recidivism rate among county residents. Director Bryant also mentioned an important resource guide called “Going Home to Stay,” which is given as an informational resource to help those who are returning from prison to be connected to community services available to them. Moving forward, the county will begin to print fewer copies of the Going Home guide and send an electronic copy to those interested in the materials.

Administration - Maggie Kennan

Maggie Kennan, director of the Office of Budget and Management, testified that the budget for the officials in the administration offices was flat from the previous budget. The only changes to costs were in personnel, accounting for COLA and increase in insurance costs, with no reduction in the number of personnel. The amounts requested are \$1.2 million budgeted in 2018 and \$1.2 million in 2019.

Department of Communications – Eliza Wing

Communications Director Eliza Wing discussed her budget, which remains flat from the last budget, of approximately \$800,000. She highlighted some of the work that the office has done to get employees’ feedback on the current communication strategy and to improve

communication with county residents. One of the items mentioned by employees is that they do not want to read about county news first on Cleveland.com. A remedy to that is that the county executive will publish a weekly newsletter for employees with the latest county information.

Councilman Miller asked how many other county agencies have staff that does communications works not affiliated with the central office of Communication. Ms. Wing said that there are other agencies that do communication-related work, but that she is actively working to centralize communication and external information sharing.

Councilman Schron referred to advertisements from counties across the country advertising themselves as an economic development destination. He asked Ms. Wing: “Who does marketing for the county? Do you work with Destination Cleveland on marketing the county?” She explained that the county does market itself as a destination, but that strategic “buys” are not necessarily a high priority as they are not necessarily the best use of dollars.

Councilwoman Baker asked about where residents can go to learn more about the services offered by the county. Ms. Wing informed the Councilwoman that the county has a great relationship with the library system as a place to get important announcements on county services, including renewal applications for benefits and workforce announcements.

The final question of the session came from Dale Miller, chair of the Finance Committee, who asked, “Who specifically markets the county?” Ms. Wing said that no one specifically markets the county. Rather, TeamNEO markets the region, with the county included in marketing and advertising.

Also testifying that day was Patrick McDonald, director of the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections, and Mr. Mark Griffin, who serves as the county’s inspector general.

October 23, 2017

Department of Information Technology – Scot Rourke

Scot Rourke, chief transformation and information officer, faced a number of questions from council members, as he described the implementation of the \$25 million [Enterprise Resource Planning](#) (ERP). According to Mr. Rourke, over the next two years, the Department of Information Technology (IT) plans to add 10 positions, but does not expect the number of employees (160) to go up as he expects the positions will be filled by attrition. The new staff members will be assigned to the new ERP system, a data-driven “one stop shop” system that is meant to streamline and maximize the impact of county services to citizens. One aspect of the ERP system is the creation of a constituent relationship manager (CRM), which will be utilized

by all HHS departments, once it is up and running. By 2020 and 2021, the county will need to add 15 staff members, but the county expects that those, too, would be managed by attrition.

Councilman Schron asked if Mr. Rouke would be able to quantify cost savings associated with the ERP system, in order to adequately say that the system would save money and offset any additional personnel costs. Mr. Rouke said that he would not be able to say definitively how much money would be saved. Councilman Schron also asked about a comment that was made previously by Mr. Rouke, that the county would not be running two IT systems in parallel, as the county was transitioning from multiple databases to one data platform. In conclusion, Mr. Rouke testified that the county would have to run both systems in parallel through 2018 and 2019.

Dennis Kennedy, Office of the Fiscal Officer

Fiscal Officer Dennis Kennedy was the next to present and immediately was asked questions from Councilmembers about the process of funding the ERP. For the past year and a half, the fiscal office had maintained that the process be a “cash process” (meaning that the county would pay for services as they happen). The Fiscal Office learned with the last few weeks that the ERP project was actually being operated on an accrual basis (meaning that those who work on the project would provide the services and then be reimbursed with project monies). This is an important distinction, as council wants to ensure that they have the most up-to-date information on the costs of the project as it moves forward.

After the questioning about the ERP process, Fiscal Officer Kennedy proceeded on other components of his presentation. He explained that the bond process for the Quicken Loan Arena Transformation project is now complete. Additionally, the Fiscal Office has been involved in the MetroHealth transformation project and the Huntington Garage. His office has submitted budget reduction of \$300,000 per year in the 2018-2019 biennial budget, anticipating staff reductions as a result of the implementation of the ERP system.

Finally, Fiscal Officer Kennedy detailed how the county is hoping to receive \$3 million per year with enforcement of a rental registration system that is operated by the county, a move that came up at the very beginning of the budget process. This is part of an overall strategy to enforce existing rules that will result in increased revenue that the county can use towards its overall budget. This sparked questions from Councilwoman Yvonne Conwell who asked about the overall effectiveness of trying to fine rental property owners and get more money out of property owners that are already not in compliance with county rules on registering their properties. Later, in response to a statement by Councilman Pernel Jones, Mr. Kennedy noted that separate legislation would not be needed, because the authority was already granted under the Ohio Revised Code (ORC Section 5323.99).

October 30, 2017

A couple of weeks ago, County Executive Armond Budish proposed shifting \$17 million from the \$50 million Cuyahoga County Housing Demolition Fund to the General Operating Budget for the county. Administration officials said that, due to a recent windfall of federal “Hardest Hit” funding, the new money freed up a portion of the money that the county had allocated for other purposes. The meeting on October 30, 2017, focused exclusively on this topic.

Georgine Welo, mayor of the City of South Euclid, opened the meeting with public comment where she mentioned that Cuyahoga County has one of the highest rates of blighted homes, also noting that since 2010, the county has lost about 20,000 residents. She read a statement from the Mayor’s and Managers Association that also opposed the funding redirection. She noted that the fund is the only source of revenue that has the flexibility for residential and commercial demolition.

Frank Ford was next. Mr. Ford is the senior policy advisor from the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. He said that he noticed a number of errors in the county calculation in terms of how much money is needed for demolition. He argued that the amount is higher than originally thought, and that increased money should be layered on top of the existing committed funding.

Ayonna Blue-Donald, interim director for the City of Cleveland Building and Housing, provided the council with more statistics, noting that the City of Cleveland is home to 80 percent of the 941 properties ready to demolish. She also said that an additional 946 are ready for legal review, and that it is not realistic to say that the demolition efforts should be slowed to allow for more rehabilitation of houses in the city. She testified that there have been only 46 rehabilitation projects of condemned structures in the City of Cleveland. If Cuyahoga County reduces the \$17 million, the City of Cleveland will not be able to administer demolition funds after next year.

Melran Leach, Community Development in East Cleveland, shared the impact that the fund has on residents who are striving to keep their homes and their homeowners insurance. Blighted houses are a magnet for criminal activity, and that is not good for insurance providers for responsible homeowners. Additionally, he pointed out how East Cleveland, which is one of 59 municipalities in Cuyahoga County, is home to 10 percent of the blighted homes in Cuyahoga County.

Mark McDermott, vice president & Ohio market leader at Enterprise Community Partners, testified about the state of the housing market, as the county weathered the economic crisis in 2008.

Alan Butler, housing director for Cleveland Heights, stated his continued support for the County Demolition Fund. He testified that halting demolition of houses would be devastating to the state of housing in the city. To date, they have demolished over three dozen homes. He urged the county to keep the program as an essential tool for growth in the community.

John Anoliefo, Famicos Foundation, testified about the possibility of creating a blue-ribbon panel to address housing issues in Cuyahoga County, noting that “Housing is where it all begins.”

Martin Divito, representing Mayor Fletcher Burger of Bedford Heights, said that without the demolition fund, the city would still have the Ramada Inn that was torn down. She testified that the fund is an economic fund tool and can be used to leverage other governmental funds.

Justin Fleming, who serves as director of real estate, testified on behalf of Joel Ratner and Cleveland Neighborhood Progress and called on the county to create a County Housing Fund. There are more demolitions needed, but he also advocated for a “both, and” approach—keep the commitment for demolition, as well as invest in a housing fund.

Mahria Harris, director of homeownership services for Neighborhood Housing Services of Greater Cleveland, also testified in favor of preserving the demolition fund. He cited statistics that there are 600,000 occupied units in Cuyahoga County, with 13.5 percent of those homes being vacant.

Mayor Annette Blackwell, of Maple Heights, explained how the city is currently in fiscal emergency. Where there is blight and vacancy, there are crimes and reports of violence. She said that the city is already facing delinquencies of \$10 million in tax collections. She said that she supports both the restoration of the demolition funding and the creation of a housing fund.

Ed Mayer, speaking as a private citizen, said that money spent on demolition is money well spent.

City of Cleveland Councilman Tony Brancatelli testified how important the money from the county is to the City of Cleveland and its effort to fight blight.

Mayor Earl Liken, City of Shaker Heights, noted how his city used the money for commercial demolition that they would never have been able to do on their own. That demolition has allowed new development to take place in the Van Aken area.

Loh, as a private citizen, spoke about the importance of the demolition fund, but also reminded council that there needs to be subsidized housing for individuals, especially for those who are homeless.

After 55 minutes of public comment, Ted Carter, chief economic development and business officer, who serves as director of the Cuyahoga County Department of Development, approached the podium. He spoke about the returns the county has been getting on its economic development activities. Three million dollars of that money will be used to fund the creation of a County Housing Fund (not to be confused with the Housing Demolition Fund) for housing rehabilitation.

The questions from councilmembers, however, focused almost exclusively on the housing demolition proposal.

Vice President Jones recalled how, when the council was deliberating the initial amount for housing demolition, \$50 million was more than any other county in the country, but that it was merely a “drop in the bucket” for what was needed.

Councilman Schron was bothered by the county mentioning the JumpStart loan program (which is where the \$3 million to pay for the housing fund comes from) as an “unanticipated windfall.” Councilman Schron said that the county knew that they were going to see a return on their investment, and questioned the creation of a new housing fund as the wisest and best choice for the money.

Ken Surratt, deputy director of housing and community development in the Department of Development, testified that, of the new federal Hardest Hit funds that were coming into the county, 90 percent of funds go to Cleveland. Coupled with recent announcements that the City of Cleveland will put an initial \$5 million and then an additional \$8 million of city funding to demolition, the county feels that it more than offsets the diversion of money from the Demolition Fund.

Councilwoman Simon asked Mr. Carter: “Do you support the new funding of the county housing plan, and support taking funding from the housing demolition fund?” Mr. Carter said that he supported the budget as proposed by the administration.

Conclusion

There is a lot at stake for Cuyahoga County as it considers its strategic priorities over the next biennium and prepares to put a Health and Human Services Levy on the ballot in 2018. The Center for Community Solutions will closely monitor the deliberations and conclusion of the budget process, which will form the framework around which HHS decisions are made that affect the lives of all county residents. Stay tuned to The Center for Community Solutions for additional coverage of the outcome of this process.

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