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# Message from the Council President

Every budget brings its own set of challenges and opportunities, but this budget is among one of the strongest I can remember and sets us on the road for recovery and long-term growth in Montgomery County. The Council approved the County's \$6.3 billion Fiscal Year 2023 Operating Budget and \$5.3 billion FY23-28 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to fund essential needs in our community. Thanks to the support of our federal and state partners, and an economic recovery that was stronger than anticipated, we have more resources to work with than we ever imagined possible at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed us to determine new and sustainable ways to help our community thrive.



Among some of the highlights of the Council's budget deliberations this year for the CIP were school construction, infrastructure improvements, and community projects. As part of the Operating Budget, the Council increased Montgomery County's ongoing investments in education, expanding access to health and human services, generating and preserving affordable housing and reinforcing ongoing pandemic recovery efforts. These priorities were funded while keeping the effective property tax rate flat, maintaining a \$692 property tax credit for homeowners and providing more competitive salaries for Montgomery County employees who continue to be on the frontlines of COVID-19 recovery efforts. Moreover, the budget continues the tradition of fiscal responsibility that has allowed us to maintain the County's AAA bond rating that is the hallmark of well-run governments. The Council ensured that resources were maintained to honor the County's long-term commitment to its retired employees and to fully fund the County's reserve funding, which is 10 percent of adjusted governmental revenues and provides \$70 million in additional pre-funding for Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB).

This year we funded our school system's \$2.9 billion operating budget request. This amount funds Montgomery County Public Schools (MCSP) at \$86 million above the Maintenance of Effort level, which is mandated by the State of Maryland.

The Council funded a budget of \$321.8 million for Montgomery College, which is \$2.5 million more than what's required under state law. The Council added \$500,000 in funding to support the East County Education Center by adding scholarships for students, increasing salaries and adding additional positions for the East County Education Center, which will begin the College's efforts to expand access and eventually launch the East County Campus. The capital budget provides \$333.9 million to the College for capital and information technology projects and includes funding to complete the construction of the Catherine and Isiah Leggett Math and Science Building on the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus. For the third consecutive year, the College budget includes no per-credit-hour increase in tuition rates for students for FY23.

A heavy emphasis of this budget is supporting our most vulnerable populations. The Council recognized that the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has been at the center of the County's COVID-19 response and needed to significantly increase many services to meet the emergency needs of our residents, funding more than \$421 million to DHHS. We recognized that as pandemic-related federal funds decrease, we will need to continue to assess the needs of our community and focus on the most critical yet most basic needs of residents, including food insecurity. The Council supported over \$1 million with the goal to create the new Office of Food System Resiliency, and \$4 million in one-time funding to continue the County's response to this continued and pressing need.

In addition, the Council funded multiple initiatives to support the mental health and social services for students, including allocating funding to open the wellness center at John F. Kennedy High School at the beginning of the next school year and an increase of \$3.7 million for mental health and case management services at ten priority high schools without an existing wellness center. The Council also added \$5.5 million to support programs to expand mental health, case management and positive youth development services.

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The Council funded the budget for Children, Youth and Families at \$115.76 million and includes an increase of more than \$1 million for the Newcomers Initiative, which serves as a response to the unprecedented increase in the number of unaccompanied migrant children and asylum-seeking families traveling through the southern U.S. border and arriving in Montgomery County. It also adds \$630,626 for new Linkages to Learning programs and \$311,168 to support the functions of Child Welfare Services.

We continued our commitment to generating and preserving affordable housing and allocated more than \$49 million in capital and operating funds to support the production and preservation of affordable housing through the Housing Initiative Fund. We also approved \$19.5 million in funding for the County's rental assistance programs. The capital budget provides \$40 million for the Preservation of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing Project to preserve existing affordable housing in high-growth, transit-oriented corridors from rising rents.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, first responders faced increased risks and stresses as they worked on the frontlines to support our community. In order to continue to support public safety employees and assist departments with recruitment and retention efforts, the Council unanimously supported collective bargaining agreements and \$11 million in pay raises for County public safety employees, including raises for police officers and first responders to bring salaries in line with neighboring jurisdictions in the region and help address attrition, particularly in the County Police Department.

I want to thank my Council colleagues and the Council staff for their dedication and hard work, and to our residents who, even during a pandemic, made the effort during the budget process to make their voices heard on the critical issues that matter. Thank you also to the County Executive and his staff, and to the governing boards and staff of M-NCPPC, WSSC, MCPS and Montgomery College.

While at times the last several years have felt overwhelming, I have never felt more confident about the future of our County. This budget is fiscally responsible, meets our community's needs and allows us to continue building upon Montgomery County's great foundation to reach an even stronger and more successful future, all together.



Gabe Albornoz  
President, Montgomery County Council