MID-COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Ana L. van Balen
Director

April 23, 2013

The Honorable Nancy Navarro
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Council President Navarro and Councilmembers:

The Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) appreciates the opportunity to share our comments on the County Executive's (CE's) Recommended FY14 Operating Budget. Our comments were gathered during deliberations held by our Quality of Life committee concentrating on budget areas most important to our community such as public safety, health and human services, transportation, libraries, culture, and recreation, community development and housing, environment, and community engagement.

We understand the many economic constraints facing the CE and County Council and therefore have strived here to provide comments and suggestions that balance community needs with our available resources and that will assist our Government in setting the appropriate priorities for the County. We encourage the County Council to consider our input during its deliberations the CE's recommended budget.

Public Safety

Police

We support in part the budget's proposed 4.0 percent increase ($9,995,179) for the Department of Police. However, the MCCAB is concerned with the CE's recommended pay increase for Police personnel. The MCCAB understands that while staff has gone without increases for several years now, the pay increase proposed by the CE is exorbitant and cannot be

sustained within the current economic circumstances facing the County. We suggest that a significant portion of the funding intended for the pay increases would be better spent to restore Police staffing that had been reduced in previous years and supplement other County agency needs as appropriate.

Fire and Rescue Service

We support in part the budget's proposed 6.6 percent increase ($13,563,328) for the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service. However, the MCCAB is concerned with the CE's recommended pay increase for County Fire and Rescue personnel. The MCCAB understands that while staff has gone without increases for several years now, the pay increase proposed by the CE is exorbitant and cannot be sustained within the current economic circumstances facing the County. We suggest that a significant portion of the funding intended for the pay increases would be better spent to restore $200,000 in daywork overtime Fire and Rescue staffing at Rescue 1 (Bethesda-Chevy Chase), Rescue 2 (Wheaton) and Station 5 (Kensington) that was eliminated in the FY13 Operating Budget. Data provided to the MCCAB by the Wheaton Volunteer Rescue Squad indicates this staffing reduction resulted in 52 "failures to respond" at Rescue 2 (Wheaton) in 2012. As we have stated in previous letters these staffing reductions raise serious public safety concerns. Therefore, we urge the County Council to restore funding for this staffing.

Pedestrian Safety

We support the budget's proposed $67.8 million in FY14 expenditures in support of pedestrian safety and $7.4 million for pedestrian safety initiatives. This funding will provide for maintenance and expansion of existing programs to reduce collisions and resulting injuries, and increase walkability throughout our community.

Health and Human Services

Department of Health and Human Services

We support the budget's proposed 0.6 percent ($1,488,293) increase in funding for the Department of Health and Human Services. This additional funding will provide important physical and behavioral health services, economic and housing security services such as Special Needs Housing (SNH), and enable the agency to respond effectively to emerging needs of our community. The MCCAB is especially concerned with current housing for special needs such as the homeless population and providing better housing stability for vulnerable households.

Transportation

Department of Transportation

We support maintaining sufficient funding for the Department of Transportation and are concerned with the budget's proposed 2.0 percent ($936,468) decrease to the agency. Lack of sufficient funding may have adverse effect on important transportation programs and maintenance to improve traffic and pedestrian safety in our community.

Transit Services

We support the budget's proposed 2.3 percent ($2,682,664) increase in funding for the Division of Transit Services. This additional funding will provide for expansion of Ride On operations and improved commuter services that will promote increased use of mass transit and other transportation alternatives within our community.

Libraries, Culture, and Recreation

Public Libraries

We support the budget's proposed 10.5 percent ($3,306,783) increase in funding for public libraries. This funding would provide for additional library staff, hours, circulation services, and materials. Funding for libraries has been significantly reduced in prior budgets, and we agree with the County Executive that it is time to begin restoring library services that are vital for County residents. We also applaud the CE and Council for moving forward with the upcoming design and construction of the new Wheaton Library and Recreation Center.

Recreation

We support the budget's proposed 7.5 percent ($1,966,135) increase in funding for the Department of Recreation. This additional funding would enhance important senior programs, weekend/evening teen programs, and student employment programs.

Community Development and Housing

Economic Development

We support maintaining sufficient funding for the Department of Economic Development as in previous budgets and are concerned with the proposed decrease of 5.1 percent ($614,705).

Lack of sufficient funding for DED may have adverse effect on the agency's ability to continue critical business development programs to attract companies to start up, relocate, or expand in Montgomery County and limit the potential for greater job creation and capital investment within our community.

Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL)

We support the budget's 13.9 percent ($100,000) increase for the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL). This additional funding will provide for an additional capacity building and enable MCAEL to support program grants to organizations that provide adult English literacy services including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to County residents seeking to learn English.

Housing and Community Affairs

We support the budget's proposed 26.0 percent ($7,674,689) increase in funding for the Department of Housing and Community Affairs. This additional funding will provide our community with access to a broad range of services to help our citizens to obtain affordable housing, live in safe and sanitary living conditions, and take advantage of loan and rental assistance programs through the Montgomery Housing Initiative.

Environment

Environmental Protection

We support the budget's proposed 3.9 percent ($756,178) increase in funding for the Department of Environmental Protection. This additional funding provides for expansion of environmental policy and compliance efforts to further ensure environment conservation and protection for our community.

Community Engagement

Mid-County Regional Center

The MCCAB supports restoring staff reductions at the Mid-County Regional Center. As major infrastructure projects to revitalize the Georgia Avenue corridor progress, such as Wheaton Redevelopment, construction of the Georgia Avenue and Randolph Road interchange, the Glenmont Sector Plan, and the Wheaton Library and Recreation Center, the Mid-County Regional Center will play an increasingly important role in helping to coordinate County and State agencies, as well as advocating for the needs of local residents. Adequate staffing at the

Mid-County Regional Center will likely help facilitate inter-agency and community coordination and communications thus improving the timely execution of these infrastructure projects.

In conclusion, the County's recovery from the Great Recession, like so many other jurisdictions, has been slow, and with impending budgetary impacts such as federal sequestration and state budget decisions all of us must continue to work together to balance County needs with County resources that have been significantly limited by these constraints. We commend the CE and his staff for formulating and submitting a comprehensive budget package and encourage the County Council to consider our comments as they deliberate the FY14 Operating Budget.

Sincerely,

Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board

Richard Newman, Chair

cc: Isiah Leggett, County Executive