



MID-COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Ana L. van Balen
Director

April 21, 2015

The Honorable George Leventhal
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Council President Leventhal:

The Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) appreciates the opportunity to share our comments on the County Executive's (CE's) Recommended FY16 Operating Budget. Our comments were gathered during deliberations held by our Quality of Life and Land Use, Zoning and Transportation subcommittee concentrating on budget areas of most important to our community. We have identified five areas of concern to us: (1) Schools, (2) Before and After Care, (3) Public Libraries, (4) Affordable Housing, and (5) Traffic Cameras. We encourage the County Council to consider the comments provided here during its own deliberations on the CE's recommended budget.

Schools

While the proposed budget holds funding at last year's level, MCPS enrollment continues to grow. We are concerned that this may lead to a decrease in student performance and would signal a lessened commitment by the County to provide our schools with the resources that they deem necessary to ensure the high quality education that we expect for our children. Therefore, we ask that the County Council fund the full budget requested by the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Board of Education.

Longer term, we think that the MCPS should consider developing a voluntary student mentorship program in which older, successful students would be matched with younger students performing less well, who could benefit from the mentoring by the older student. Older students could be incented to become mentors by offering them Student Service Learning credit for their time. We would ask that the County Council consider funding such a program, which could be effectively overseen by a Non-Profit Organization. We believe that

funding such a program could go a long way toward helping students who are struggling most with personal issues, to effectively cope with their situations and to succeed. We also think it could be an effective way to help close the performance gap.

Before and After Care

We shared our concerns in January 2015 of the proposed before and after care regulations, specifically noting that no criteria had been provided for the quality of child care, and that special needs children and families with low incomes are not adequately addressed. Moreover, the proposed regulations have no periodic evaluation process to determine if the current child care provider is adequately serving the school's needs, and there are no related standards specified. We believe that the County Council should allocate funds for a more comprehensive solution to before and after care, including those proposed by Councilman Reimer and Councilwoman Navarro, which would establish a county child care office and ensure appropriate training and other services for Spanish-speaking providers.

Public Libraries

We support the budget's proposed 5% increase in funding for public libraries. The library system is an integral part of the Mid-County region, serving the educational, language, and computer needs of our communities, and the library system has suffered too long, bearing too much of the brunt of budget trimming efforts in recent years. We back increased funding to support additional library hours, circulation services, computers and materials.

Affordable Housing

The Board supports the budget's proposed \$43.9 million to preserve the affordable housing program, the most basic form of economic development. We are encouraged by the "Charter to End Homelessness" signed by County Executive Leggett with Mayor Bowser and County Executive Baker, but urge the County Council to attend to the needs of the Montgomery County low and moderate income population by continuing incentives for mixed income housing and rent subsidies.

Traffic Cameras

Finally, MCCAB questions the expected increase in the proposed budget for traffic cameras. There is a perception that this proposal would be viewed as a revenue-generating mechanism, rather than serve an intended public safety purpose. The Council's close scrutiny is therefore warranted, and any approval by the Council of a larger budget in this

area should come only after additional justification is provided to it demonstrating a clear public safety need and purpose.

In conclusion, the MCCAB recognizes the difficult choices that the County Council must make in making the right choices for our communities, and trusts that it will make the right decisions in the County's best interest. We believe that these issues deserve your close attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kieran C. McHargue". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a long, sweeping horizontal line at the end.

Kieran McHargue, Chair
Mid-County Citizen's Advisory Board