

**Testimony of Mitchell Tropin**

**Montgomery College SEIU**

**Montgomery County Council**

**FY22 Operating Budget Public Hearing**

**April 7, 2021 at 7 p.m.**

Good evening, Council President and members of the county council. My name is Mitchell Tropin. I am executive vice president of SEIU Local 500 and I am co-director of the Montgomery College Part Time Faculty Union, which is affiliated with Local 500.

I want to urge this council to fully support Montgomery College's proposed budget for the next fiscal year. This council has been a strong supporter of MC over the years but in the wake of the pandemic that support is even more critical.

When preparing my testimony, I remembered meeting several years ago a Hasidic rabbi. I was walking through Manhattan and there was a "Mitzvah wagon," which was a bookmobile converted to educate Jewish people about Hasidic Judaism. The rabbi showed me how when he prayed, he had little prayer boxes – mezuzahs—on his forehead, his heart and on his arm.

What I took away from that meeting was this: it is one thing to commit your heart and your mind to something important, but you haven't done your job unless you also commit to action. That was what the mezuzah on the arm represented.

You might ask, "What does this have to do with the fiscal 2022 budget?" Well, I realized that Montgomery College is an exemplary educational institution because it commits itself day in, day out to applying its heart and mind to supporting its students, faculty, and staff. But it also commits itself to action to make sure things get done and that they are done well.

In other words, fully supporting the budget requests of MC goes further than the mind. You are not giving money for good intentions. You are funding a college where action takes place to make sure students succeed and faculty are able to teach more effectively.

Let me give one great example of what I mean.

When the pandemic hit Maryland a year ago, it became clear that for the following summer and fall semesters, classes at all community colleges would be online. Now all of those institutions wanted faculty to teach well in an online environment. However, the commitment to action varied widely.

Some colleges gave no training to their faculty, even though some faculty had never taught online. Other colleges told their faculty to watch videos, and yet others gave a two-week training session. None of those colleges matched what MC did.

Full-time and part-time faculty were offered semester-long training in online instruction where they had instructors from MC's professional development program. In addition, faculty members were paired with faculty members who already had online training. These people were served as mentors who provided one on one support.

On top of that, the faculty members were paid a stipend when they completed the training. Mentors got paid as well.

Students taking classes at MC in the fall received top-quality instruction that took full advantage of what online teaching could offer. Students had that because of the full and complete commitment that MC has for educating our county's young adults.

Let me give another example of where the college showed its heart.

There was a lot of controversy among faculty about students who did not turn on their cameras when attending a ZOOM class. Faculty complained that they could not be sure the student was actually attending class or was paying attention. The easy answer was simply to make it mandatory that students turn on their cameras.

But we don't do that at MC. We investigated the situation and did research. A senior administration official discovered something important:

Some students did not have adequate Wi-Fi and Zoom required a good deal of broadband space.

Other students had to share their wi fi with siblings and other family members, which affected their ability to have cameras on

And perhaps more importantly, we have students from all different economic backgrounds and MC realized some students did not turn on their cameras because they were embarrassed about their homes.

The college decided not to require students to turn on their cameras, showing MC is a place that cares about our students as human beings, as individuals with their own story and people with feelings. More than anything else, we are a college with heart.

I am so proud to be part of the MC community.

Today, MC is preparing for the time when more classes will return to the classroom. We are always looking toward the future and seeing what actions we can embrace to make MC an even better institution.

For example, MC has signed agreements with a dozen or so four-year universities across the country that will enable our students to transfer more easily. Some of the colleges are as far west as Arizona.

In conclusion, the pandemic did hurt MC, but as we return to more normal times, I see amazing things taking place at Montgomery College. Paraphrasing Nina Simone, for MC, it's a new dawn, a new day, a new life for all of the MC community. And when I see what is happening at my college, I am feeling good.