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Testimony in Opposition to the Special Appropriation to the FY22 Operating Budget Department of Police, COVID-19 ARPA Relief Funds (\$731,125)

My name is Heidi Rhodes and I live in Colesville, Maryland. I was an analyst for the National Security Agency for over 30 years before retiring and joining the work of Jews United for Justice. Today I am testifying on behalf of JUFJ against the special appropriation for the Police Department from the COVID-19 ARPA relief funds. My Jewish tradition teaches that we should not put a stumbling block before the blind (Leviticus 19:14); we must proactively remove the barriers that prevent members of our community from thriving in our County. Instead of mitigating the barriers of poverty, lack of housing, and disinvestment in public health, this special appropriation further invests in programs that may lead to over-criminalization of our County's BIPOC communities.

Reducing gun violence is about so much more than policing and criminalization. The Treasury Department recognized this when suggesting a range of non-carceral approaches for ARPA funds. The Council's proposed special appropriation ignores this holistic approach and continues an outdated insistence on policing as the primary way to address gun violence. There is no reason for the following programs to be funded through MCPD:

- \$156,250 for a gun violence intervention initiative should go directly to the Street Outreach Network in Health and Human Services.
- \$37,500 for Youth and Family Violence Prevention should go directly to the Family Justice Center and the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council.
- \$65,500 for a midnight madness activities program pilot should go directly to the Montgomery County Recreation Department — though we note that there is no data proving that such programs are effective in violence deterrence.

I am deeply concerned by the proposal for a Violent Crime Information Center (VCIC) that asks analysts to conduct link analysis, track weapons data, and generate violent crime statistical reports. In my previous career I too often saw analysis of datasets of incomplete and biased data being used to make life changing decisions — and that is my fear for the VCIC. What data is going to be analyzed? Police reports coming from already over-policed Black and brown

communities? Will data include gun seizures from cars, when we know that Black drivers make up 50% of traffic stops though they are 20% of our County's population? Will the results from the "analysis" lead to more no-knock warrants and the unnecessary criminalization of more individuals?

Ultimately, data proves that the best way to prevent crime and violence is to address the underlying issues that lead to crime, such as mental health care and stable housing. Instead, this special appropriation has the potential to lead to more police involvement where it doesn't belong, to more decisions being made based on analysis of faulty datasets, and to more harm and trauma.