



SSJC BUDGET DEMANDS

Our demands of the Council:

1. Strengthen mental and behavioral health crisis response rather than defaulting to police.
2. Oppose MCPD tools that perpetuate a militarized warrior culture, such as new sniper rifles, a drone pilot program, and other weapons.
3. Reject increased police presence in our communities and schools.
4. Invest resources to implement a robust restorative justice program in our schools.
5. Beyond our specific mental health crisis response and education asks, we support investing in social services as an anti-crime, public safety measure, rather than investing in police on the streets.

I. MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS RESPONSE

SSJC has been a strong proponent of Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams (MCOTs) since our founding after the murder of Robert White by an MCPD officer five years ago. Our County cannot assure people in need of mental health support – particularly young Black men – that they will be safe if police respond. Police should respond only in situations where there is imminent or present danger to human life, and even then, with an MCOT taking the lead once they arrive at the scene. Numerous communities have many years of success with civilian-only responders. The County needs to follow through on its commitment to implement this model.

MCPD's Use of Force Reports consistently show that officers too often apply force when engaging with people experiencing a mental or behavioral health crisis. For 2022, MCPD reported that of the 1,415 reported use-of-force incidents, 55% involved mental or behavioral health factors. One-third of the use-of-force incidents involved a person with an officer-reported mental illness. Even excluding the 503 use-of-force incidents attributable to the new definition of "use of force," the 912 other use-of-force incidents is still a recent all-time high. SSJC has brought this travesty to the attention of the Council year after year. This has to stop.

We urge the Council to substantially increase MCOT funding so that MCOTs have the capacity to respond to all mental and behavioral health situations that police typically show up for, as well as situations that go unidentified due to a narrow view of what constitutes a mental or behavioral health support need. MCOTs should be dispatched for 19% of 911 calls – an average of 138 calls each day, based on projected call volume – not just the 6 MCOTs have been doing the past few months. Our figure of 138 MCOT responses per day represents an expansive vision of when community members can and should be met with care, not cops.¹

¹ [OLO analysis](#) revealed that MCPD classified 2.3% of dispatched calls as "mental health situations." [A Vera Institute analysis](#) found that though departments identified only 2% of calls as behavioral health-related, in fact 19% fall under "expansive behavioral health and can best be answered by civilian-only MCOTs, rather than requiring an armed law enforcement officer.

HHS has acknowledged that it is having problems filling MCOT vacancies, specifically for therapists with master's degrees. We've seen that the County can take dramatic financial actions to hire police officers. We call on the Council to provide additional funding to incentivize hiring MCOT team members. We were pleased to see that more staff at the Crisis Center are now eligible for the \$1,500 annual stipend. If it does not already, this category should include MCOT team members. The County needs to continue to invest in both clinicians and peer specialists, especially to attract and retain a diverse staff in which the cultural and linguistic groups most prevalent in our county are represented.

Given the MCOT hiring difficulties, we also urge the Council to recommend that the Executive revisit the make-up of the teams. We know that other successful programs rely less on licensed mental health professionals in their civilian response teams; instead, they send out medics alongside peers. There is ample evidence from programs similar to MCOTs that experienced peers can often respond to crises instead of clinicians. Furthermore, the Council should urge the Executive and HHS to ensure staffing qualifications include non-licensed individuals with mental health educational backgrounds.

The County can also ensure MCOTs are successful by investing in specially-equipped vans and conducting a public health marketing campaign to ensure that all MoCo residents, particularly those from marginalized communities, are aware of 988, the Crisis Center, and MCOT-only response as resources.

We also urge the Council to require the Executive to include performance measures about MCOTs, such as the number of calls MCOTs respond to, the percentage of MCOT responses that have a police co-response, staff demographics, and client feedback.

II. MONTGOMERY COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT BUDGET

- **We Oppose Funding That Perpetuates MCPD's Warrior Culture**

We object to budget items that perpetuate a militarization of the police, such as: six firearm instructors, militarization via new precision and sniper rifles, and piloting surveillance tools including drones. SSJC members still remember being surveilled by snipers stationed on the roof of the Veterans Plaza Civic Building during our earliest protests after Robert White's killing. As MCPD claims it is shifting from a warrior culture to a guardian culture, police cannot simply replace their old tools.

- **We Reject MCPD's Community Outreach Increased Emphasis on Community Outreach**

- The department's Community Resources Bureau is proposing to almost triple the number of community events over FY21 levels: to 2-3 events per day on average. We note that the Bureau also has a performance measure of bringing

use of force incidents down 8.3%. We reject the argument that the more interactions police have with communities, the more trust communities will have in them and the safer those communities will be. We ask: why not just focus on eliminating use of force and competently performing core activities such as addressing crime? A youth basketball tournament is not going to be the thing that convinces anyone impacted by police harm that they can trust the police.

III. REPLACE CEOS WITH ROBUST RESTORATIVE JUSTICE RESOURCES

- **We Oppose Funding for Community Engagement Officers (CEOs)**

Alongside student advocate groups such as Young People for Progress and Racial Justice NOW!, we continue to oppose the Community Resource Bureau's CEO 2.0 program in our schools.

In the school year 2021-2022, Black students made up 22% of the MCPS student population and represented 45% of the CEO arrests. Similarly, special education students made up 13% of the MCPS student population and 25% of the CEO arrests. Many of the County's student advocacy organizations are calling for more resources to deter and prevent violence, rather than feeding students into the school-to-prison pipeline.

Between August and December of 2021 – when officers were not stationed in schools, but assigned as CEOs – police were still called to schools almost 1,700 times. Less than 1% (11 incidents out of the nearly 1,700 times the police were called) involved immediate safety concerns. These numbers demonstrate that rather than relying on CEOs exclusively for serious dangers, school staff are excessively calling for officers with guns to threaten and intimidate students. School teachers, counselors, administrators, and security guards should be equipped to handle 99% of issues with no police involvement needed.

Even in those 11 immediate safety incidents that may have warranted a police response, there is no justification for assigning a CEO to the school to respond to these exceedingly rare incidents that require police. Indeed, the benefits for police presence is unclear – overall, research shows that school officer programs do nothing to prevent shootings or gun-related incidents – whereas their many harmful effects – on students with disabilities and students of color, immigrant youth, and in particular Black boys – have been proven time and time again. We need a different approach.

- **We Call for Expanded Funding for Restorative Justice Programs in Schools**

It is evident from the MCPS presentation on January 30 that Restorative Justice (RJ) programs in the schools have been slow to get off the ground. To accelerate implementation, MCPS should be able to hire some dedicated school-based staff for these programs and at the very least release RJ stipend holders from some of their other responsibilities so that they can dedicate their time and energy to learning and practicing these new approaches. We also urge the Council to recommend MCPS look at whether more RJ unit specialists are needed to

support this work, especially where the needs are greatest and in the case of complex incidents that may require experience to navigate. Finally, we see Wellness Centers, counselors, social workers, and other socio-emotional supports as essential to ensuring the success of these efforts and student well-being in general. We continue to demand that the Council expand the Wellness Centers to cover the middle schools, not just the County high schools.

IV. MORE POLICE WON'T REDUCE CRIME. INVESTMENTS IN SOCIAL SERVICES WILL.

Year after year, MCPD and Sheriff budgets go up. After decades of study in jurisdictions across the country, evidence that adding police reduces crime is inconclusive at best. Instead, the County needs to invest in proven anti-crime measures that bring with them general public benefits: social services. In addition to the mental health crisis and school supports we have already mentioned, the County should look to outreach for youth, including after-school programming and summer jobs. Violence interruption programs such as the Street Outreach Network and drug treatment programs, as well as addressing basic needs such as shelter, food, and healthcare, will get at the root causes of crime while promoting health and well-being.

This year, the department is not adding very many officers, but they are throwing money to recruit and retain their existing force, in the form of \$14.5 million in bonuses, pay raises, overtime rate increases, and other incentives.

The patrol services budget alone has gone up by \$9 million, despite **decreasing** by a handful of officers, due to these rising personnel costs. Particularly as the cost of each officer on the street goes up, we urge the Council to consider whether more officers patrolling our communities is the best use of taxpayer funds. We all share the goal of community safety. We believe it can best be achieved by investing in our communities.