

Dear Members of the County Council:

I am writing as a longtime resident, psychotherapist, and co-chair of the Silver Spring Justice Coalition mental health committee. Five years after an MCPD officer killed Robert White, Montgomery County can still not insure the safety of individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. A call to 911 or 988, especially from those who are Black, or Brown, or immigrants, is still a call for a police response to a mental health crisis in the majority of instances. I urge the County Council to fully fund and implement mental health crisis response (MCOTs) to cover all calls throughout the county, day and night, every day of the year.

The 2023-2024 budget should fund full staffing and implementation of this critical social service. Other jurisdictions are responding creatively to the difficulty in hiring mental health providers by offering generous incentives and by hiring other skilled and dedicated caregivers such as EMTs, peers with lived experience, and individuals who are not yet licensed. We must do the same.

The data on increasing levels of use of force against individuals who are mentally ill by MCPD tells us all we need to know – this is not and should not be their job. Only in the most limited circumstances where there is active or imminent violence should MCPD be on the scene, and even then, accompanied by an MCOT.

Our county budget should reflect the need for the full range of social services that stabilize our county residents, increase public safety, and lower the number of mental health crises. This should include robust school mental health programs and the removal of police from our schools. There is no getting around the fact that the presence of police means danger to Black, Brown, immigrant, and other vulnerable youth. We have an opportunity to build communities of care in our schools by removing police and investing in restorative justice programs in all middle and high schools. I urge you to increase funding for dedicated restorative justice staff.

MCPD should put their focus on ending use of force with strong regulations and accountability and strict adherence to existing use of force laws. I strongly oppose funding for sniper rifles, drones, and other weapons of war. Let's put those funds into housing, education, mental health care, and the other social services.

Sincerely,

Naomi Nim, Ed.D., LPC, NCC, BC-DMT