

**Testimony of Sandra S. Landis**  
**Montgomery County Chapter Leader for Start School Later**  
**Montgomery County Council FY 2024 Budget Hearing**  
**April 11, 2023**

Good evening Council President Glass, Vice President Friedson, Members of the Council, and others here tonight.

My name is Sandra Landis, and I am appearing before you for the second consecutive year to discuss the same issue. I am the Montgomery County Chapter Leader of Start School Later ([www.startschoollater.net](http://www.startschoollater.net)), a national organization dedicated to ensuring school start times compatible with health, safety, education, and equity. Sadly this year, the need for my advocacy is even more critical than it was last year, as we collectively mourn the quality of life our teens and communities formerly enjoyed, due to increased incidence of violence, hatred, suicide and despair. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening to present some ideas for addressing this.

Although starting school at safe and healthy bell times seems to fall within the purview of MCPS, the reason MCPS advises that they cannot move to healthy bell times for secondary school students is because they have an insufficient number of school buses. As such, they only transport their elementary students at safe and healthy bell times. While tens of thousands of middle and high school students and their families deal with this daily, the County is simultaneously in the midst of a “Ride-On Reimagined” review of the Montgomery County bus network. If we could combine the need to transport our all our students to school at safe and healthy bell times with the ongoing Ride-on assessment, we can scope out and cost what it

would take to being able to transport all our 160+ thousand students to and from school at appropriate bell times.

I have been advised that the County has an approximately \$80 million surplus in income tax revenue collected. If neither MCPS nor the current Ride-On study have sufficient revenues to fund a comprehensive look at getting all our children to school at safe and healthy bell times using all our available transportation assets, perhaps a small portion of these funds could be directed to complete such a study and/or loop in reviewing Metro assets as well, if needed. MCPS is an integral part of this effort because they have the data on where students live, and more importantly, where they attend school.

Establishing later bell times is fundamental to secondary students' mental and physical health and well-being. The National Sleep Foundation, [U.S. Surgeon General](#) , [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), as well as most medical groups in the country, [recommend](#) that secondary school start times begin no earlier than 8:30 a.m. due to biological changes that occur in adolescence when teens' need for sleep to support their emerging higher level brain functions increases, but their onset of sleep is delayed. Additionally, the more active REM sleep during which the brain is most engaged occurs toward the end of the sleep cycle. So we are currently not only waking teenagers too early, but we are waking them up during the most critical portion of their sleep cycle.

I am convinced that MCPS cannot solve this transportation problem without help from the county. That said, I am absolutely certain that given the diversity of our county, MCPS is part of the broader solution for our teens. We need to have our students arrive at school

available to learn, and need to structure the school day in ways that enhance student interaction to create a safe, welcoming culture where education, ideas and camaraderie can flourish. This cannot be accomplished if students are forced to start every day off with a schedule that interferes with their biological brain development and that has been proven to cause increased aggression and gun violence, and mental health and a host of other problems.

Thank you, again, for your time and interest in this important matter.