

**Testimony on behalf of County Executive on
Bill 29-23E, Administration – Non-merit Positions – Department of Environmental
Protection – Department of Transportation, with accompanying Resolutions to adopt
Executive Regulation 5-23 and Executive Regulation 6-23**

July 11, 2023

Good afternoon. My name is Fariba Kassiri, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Montgomery County Government, and I am here on behalf of County Executive Elrich to testify in support of Bill 29-23E. This Bill converts one position from the Department of Transportation and one from the Department of Environmental Protection to non-merit, appointed positions.

I would like to clarify that the staff packet indicates we would be creating two new positions. Instead, we will repurpose two existing positions, which will be cost-neutral and not change the personnel compliment.

This action would, however, provide key strategic leadership at the top of these two departments. The action proposed by this Bill brings these two positions in alignment with similar positions in other mission-critical departments such as HHS, Police, Fire, DHCA, TEBS, and OMB - which have appointed deputy directors and/or division chiefs. The appointment process for these high-level, non-merit positions offers the public the opportunity for input and requires County Council's interview and approval.

These two positions are deeply involved in the development of high-level, Countywide policies and services that have a direct impact on the quality of life for Montgomery County residents. These positions also have key management responsibilities, maintain public engagement, develop and implement high-impact programs that protect the county's air, water and land, and ensure top-notch, safe and equitable transportation options across the County.

The Division of Transit Services, with a budget of nearly \$183M and a staff of 870 people, represents the vast majority of front-facing staff in DOT and the most significant direct public service provided by the Department on a daily basis.

The Department of Environmental Protection, with an operating budget of \$187M, a CIP budget of \$400M, and a staff of 250 people, leads the County's efforts in all areas of environmental protection such as climate change, energy, watershed restoration, as well as recycling and resource management.

Repurposing these existing positions to non-merit will increase the value that these positions bring to the County and ensure full accountability to the taxpayers of Montgomery County, the County Council, and the County Executive. Furthermore, the non-merit designation of these positions allows for regular innovation at the senior management level in these mission critical departments, thereby resulting in more effective operations and value to taxpayers.

We appreciate your consideration of this bill and your favorable vote.