

My name is Cordell Pugh and I am testifying as a private resident in support of the Supplemental Appropriation for the Drone as First Responder Pilot Program. Thank you to the Council President, Council, Council Staff, the County Executive, Dr. Stoddard, and the Police Department, especially the Special Operations Division, for their attention to this crucial program.

Every day, the Emergency Communications Center, Montgomery County Police supervisors, and other partners spend hours continually receiving, prioritizing, updating, and shuffling the Computer-Aided Dispatch queue of pending calls for service. Urgent emergency calls, as well as higher numbers of lower-priority calls for service, make response times to lower-priority calls stretch to several hours, which is unacceptable. As the Public Safety Committee's work session touched on yesterday, these delayed response times are misconstrued and when not efficiently provided with information, community members frequently believe they are waiting for Officers for extended periods for a number of incorrect reasons. The Drone as First Responder Pilot Program, especially with its integration of live audio from 911 calltaking, will be another crucial tool to more effectively and efficiently triage and address which calls are truly the most pressing and demand the in-person presence of the first available Officers.

Drones are already used in Montgomery County to rapidly and successfully find missing people, assist with the peaceful resolution of standoffs, and gather vital information during collision reconstructions, when victims are unable to tell their side of the story. Just earlier this month, the Special Operations Division used a drone to help peacefully and swiftly resolve a dynamic and hazardous barricade situation in Downtown Silver Spring, footage of which was shared on social

media. Maryland State Police also deploy drones for assistance with a variety of tasks across the State. Anecdotally, various federal law enforcement agencies throughout the National Capital Region also use drones for a variety of investigatory and security tasks, though there is limited public information regarding their deployments. **In 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice published an in-depth report: *Drones: A Report on the Use of Drones by Public Safety Agencies—and a Wake-Up Call about the Threat of Malicious Drone Attacks*. I would urge any interested councilmembers to take the time to look over what this report, Captain Cokinos’ presentation, and other publications highlighting the successes other agencies across the Country have found by using drones in public safety.**

Across the River, the Fairfax County Police Department, which added a full-time drone program manager earlier this year, has employed their drones several dozen times this year, for tasks ranging from Collision Reconstruction and monitoring underwater searches to finding Critically Missing People and gathering critical information during barricade situations. The Fairfax County Police Department this year also used their drones to assist in documenting five homicide scenes, as well as several serious injury assaults, where increased visual documentation will be invaluable during subsequent stages of investigation and prosecution. If not sooner, once White’s Ferry celebrates its long-overdue reopening, I would urge the Public Safety Committee, other Councilmembers, and Council Staff to visit these and other Northern Virginia agencies currently leading the region in public safety drone deployments.

The Drone as First Responder Pilot Program, as well as other vital initiatives such as Pensions for the dedicated Public Safety Emergency Communications Specialists at the County’s

Emergency Communications Center, will ensure the Police Department is positioned to adequately serve Montgomery County and provide what the majority of residents, workers, and visitors expect. These next few years have the potential to be transformative for the 21st-century future of the Montgomery County Police Department. I support the Supplemental Appropriation for the Drone as First Responder Pilot Program.

Thank you for letting me testify today.

As one the last speakers on today's very short list of speakers, thank you to the Council, Council Staff, and all those involved in today's hearing.