



DEPARTMENT OF POLICE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

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Chief of Police

**Testimony in Support of Supplemental Appropriation #24-21
MCPD: Drone as First Responder (DFR)**

Captain Jason Cokinos
Montgomery County Police Department
Director, Special Operations Division

October 17, 2023

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Captain Jason Cokinos from the Montgomery County Police Department and I am here to provide testimony in support of the Drone as First Responder pilot program which I will refer to as “DFR”.

As everyone is aware, MCPD is facing staffing shortages and enduring ongoing recruitment challenges. At the same time, we must continue our mission to provide the highest quality police services to our community. We need to leverage technology and stay cutting edge to assist us in being more efficient and effective. The DFR program is one way to do that. MCPD has been successfully using unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) since 2020 under an existing program, but this pilot program would be different from what we have been doing previously.

DFR involves sending a UAS to a 911 or police generated call for service with the UAS arriving on the scene prior to, or in conjunction with, officers on the ground.

Our goals with this program would be to improve response times to emergencies, provide information to officers for better decision making and to increase de-escalation opportunities, help crime victims by aiding in locating criminal offenders, and to allow us to be more efficient by potentially avoiding the need for ground officers to continue response to certain events, which would then free those officers up for other tasks.

The DFR program is designed for the response only to 911 or police generated calls for service. This is NOT a program of surveillance or proactive patrol. Because of the type of airspace that we operate in, we work very closely with the FAA and TSA who oversee and approve our flight operations.

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What we are asking to do is simply pilot this program to see if it works for our community. DFR has been in use in Chula Vista California since 2018 and has a 5-year proven track record of success there. Multiple other cities in California such as Santa Monica and Beverly Hills also have established DFR programs.

MCPD has been carefully researching this program for over a year, and we were fortunate to travel to California to see this program firsthand. We were able to see live examples of de-escalation, the use of DFR to prevent unnecessary police contact with members of the public, and the efficiency of freeing up ground officers to respond to other emergencies. We see a real potential for this program to benefit everyone in our community and to enhance public safety for all.

Thank you for your time.

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