

RE: Subject Supplemental Appropriation #24-28 to the FY24 Operating Budget, \$3,000,000 Stronger Connections Grant for Montgomery County Public Schools (Source of Funds: State Grant)

Paula Bienenfeld Public Testimony, Agenda Item #!9
November 28, 2023

To the Councilmembers:

I am providing this public testimony in opposition to the \$3,000,000 grant to MPCCS, specifically regarding the 'Combatting Hate' portion of this funding, which comes from a state grant. The reason is that once again, antisemitism is excluded from the funding which ostensibly is focused on 'hate.'

Specifically, the memorandum from Dr. McKnight states that the funds are to be used to implement "the district-wide anti-hate/bias plan." This plan explicitly excludes antisemitism. As you know, over the course of the work sessions on the anti-hate/bias/ anti-racism survey and audit, members of the Montgomery County Jewish Parents Coalition requested repeatedly that antisemitism be included in the anti-racism work and training modules. We were told no repeatedly. So, any 'combatting hate' training by nature will not include antisemitism.

The memorandum from Dr. McKnight also states that the request is in part "In response to the increased number of hate-bias incidents experienced throughout the district in the school year 2022-23." Most of those incidents were incidents of antisemitism. They include numerous swastikas in schools; Jewish students being told by fellow students that they are 'dirty Jews;' in one case, this semester, a teacher telling their students in class that 'the Jews killed Jesus.'

In addition, in the memorandum from Ms. Tiffany Ward, the Director of the County Executive's Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice, she states specifically that the program "will advance equitable outcomes for low-income children, students of color, and their families" This will exclude many Jewish students and their families.

It is the height of cynicism that the funds are to be used, "Where students recently experienced a natural disaster or traumatic event," yet will not be used to combat the antisemitism that our Jewish and Israeli children have experienced, and continue to experience, nor to address their trauma after the horrific barbaric acts of October 7th that have affected their family and friends directly.

Antisemitism is coming from fellow students and from teachers. This antisemitism most recently included a 'DEI leader/teacher' at Tilden Middle School who posted on social media that 'Israelis murder Palestinians and harvest their organs.' This funding must explicitly address antisemitism.

I request that this funding be halted until it includes antisemitism training, and from a reputable organization.

Thank you,

Paula Bienenfeld
Montgomery County Jewish Parents Coalition Lead