

I am strongly opposed to Bill 2-24 as it will continue to cripple Montgomery County if it is passed. Council Member Jawando is disguising The Freedom to Leave Act as “racial equity” and “restorative justice” initiatives to garner attention, sympathy and support. His constituents and fellow Council Members are buying it, too, on its surface. The bill itself, though, is misleading on many levels. It is designed to keep residents focused on the past as justification for the “greater cause” of Bill 2-24 and not on Montgomery County’s continued decline and increased taxes.

Stating the MCPD targets minorities for any traffic violation, today, is a fabrication of the truth because it is a statistical impossibility. 58.6%<sup>1</sup> of Montgomery County’s total population are minorities. Of Montgomery County’s total population, 77.5% are eligible to apply for and obtain a license to drive in Montgomery County, Maryland.<sup>2</sup> Dan Morse, journalist for the Washington Post, wrote the following in his 2022 article: “Auditors watched more than 500 video recordings taken by officers’ body cameras that showed them interacting with residents. “Most officers were courteous and friendly while handling calls for service and traffic stops,” the audit stated, adding that “there were no indications of racial bias in the [body camera] incidents observed. However, of the traffic stops reviewed in the random [body camera] sample, most interactions included people of color.”<sup>3</sup> Excluded from Morse’s article is that, prior to<sup>4</sup> and after<sup>5</sup> its publication, Montgomery County ranks as the one of the most diverse counties in the United States. Both Morse, in his article, and Council Member Jawando, with Bill 2-24, aim to undercut the professional and courteous manner the MCPD conducts itself with during interactions with residents who are in violation of the law by inserting racial bias where it has no standing.

The body worn camera’s primary purpose is accountability and transparency. It protects citizens against MCPD and LEO misconduct (and vice versa) by having every criminal and/or suspicious incident recorded. All complaints filed against any LEO of the MCPD require the LEO’s body worn camera footage to be reviewed and audited immediately. Depriving LEO’s ability to ask for consent to search the vehicle will allow crime to increase in Montgomery County. Take the February 27, 2023 arrest as an example. Over 2000 fentanyl pills, \$1100 and a .45 caliber handgun were confiscated by the MCPD during a traffic stop<sup>6</sup>. The MCPD’s Press Release concerning this matter can be found here.<sup>7</sup> All LEO’s

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<sup>1</sup> <https://usafacts.org/data/topics/people-society/population-and-demographics/our-changing-population/state/maryland/county/montgomery-county/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/montgomerycountymaryland/PST045222#PST045222>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/11/18/montgomery-county-police-audit/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mymcmedia.org/three-montgomery-county-cities-make-wallethubs-most-diverse-cities-in-america/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://wallethub.com/edu/cities-with-the-most-and-least-ethno-racial-and-linguistic-diversity/10264>

<sup>6</sup> <https://wtop.com/montgomery-county/2023/03/police-seize-more-than-2000-suspected-fentanyl-pills-from-md-man-during-traffic-stop/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press\\_Detail\\_Pol.aspx?Item\\_ID=42965](https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail_Pol.aspx?Item_ID=42965)

involved in the routine traffic stop adhered and abided by all internal and external protocols to the highest of standards. No racial bias was alleged or addressed during this incident.

The Freedom to Leave Act will only add more restrictions to the MCPD and will further prohibit the Police Department from doing its primary job. To protect and serve. Crime in Montgomery County, since 2020, has risen every year. Statistics and data are provided here<sup>8</sup> and here<sup>9</sup> for the public to view. The Montgomery County Police Department, in its current state, is understaffed with 176 vacancies. Estimates show an increase in vacancies in the coming years.<sup>10</sup> A \$20,000 signing bonus is currently in place and being used to combat vacancies and fill the void. This does nothing but serve as a disincentive to join. Nobody is going to willingly sign up, risk their lives and walk on eggshells with the proposed legislation and become a LEO for that pittance.

An increase in crime for each successive year since 2020 is a grave concern. Maryland's population is decreasing annually. It ranks 7th for net migration out-of-state<sup>11</sup> and 7th as having the highest tax burden.<sup>12</sup> Montgomery County, since 2020 and unlike other counties within the state, has also seen a mass exodus.<sup>13</sup> Combining its annually increasing crime with its declining population residency means one thing only. Increased taxes on the remaining county residents. Marc Elrich has a proposed 6.8 billion dollar operating budget (a 7.7% increase from FY23) on unnecessary items<sup>14</sup> in the midst of a looming economic recession<sup>15</sup> which the County Council has to review. You can review it as outlined here<sup>16</sup> in its entirety. Searching for "public safety" in the outlined budget proposal (footnote 16) only yields 5 matches. Nothing proactive is being done to improve the current (and projected) decline of the MCPD. The proposed distribution is a complete misappropriation of funds that fails to address the current crime crisis and police shortage. With the MCPD's low morale and its anticipated future

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mymcmedia.org/crime-in-county-increases-for-third-year-in-a-row/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=169&event\\_id=16031&meta\\_id=171079](https://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=169&event_id=16031&meta_id=171079)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/montgomery-county-police-union-warns-of-looming-crisis-amid-officer-shortage>

<sup>11</sup> [https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Documents/pop\\_estimate/estimates-post2010/table7B.pdf](https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Documents/pop_estimate/estimates-post2010/table7B.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://wallethub.com/edu/states-with-highest-lowest-tax-burden/20494>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/montgomerycountymaryland>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OMB/Resources/Files/omb/pdfs/fy24/psprec/FY24\\_BudgetinBrief.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OMB/Resources/Files/omb/pdfs/fy24/psprec/FY24_BudgetinBrief.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/recession-outlook-economy-dimon-solomon-gundlach-hanke-unemployment-hard-landing-2024-3?op=1>

<sup>16</sup> [https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press\\_Detail.aspx?Item\\_ID=43039](https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=43039)

decline, do not be surprised, if and when, the County Councilmembers follow Denver, CO by contemplating legislation that allows non-citizens to become police officers.<sup>17</sup>

Tax revenue generated from businesses in Montgomery County, MD will not help compensate proposed funding geared towards projects lined up in the coming fiscal year nor protect Montgomery County residents from the coming tax increase. The crimes against property increase alone subverts any entrepreneurship opportunities because the risk and investment are too burdensome for those individuals willing to take it. “There were significant increases in auto theft (131.1 percent increase), stolen property (94.7 percent), shoplifting (38.1 percent), carjacking (28.6 percent), and non-commercial robbery (27.4 percent).”<sup>18</sup> The Comptroller of Maryland, in its annual report, has stated the following concerning Montgomery County’s economy: “Economic development officials have observed that new business formation has been slow in Maryland’s National Capital Region. Census data confirms that Montgomery County experienced the slowest growth in new business applications of any county in Maryland between 2019 and 2022.”<sup>19</sup> The Montgomery County Economic Indicators briefing also supports the Comptroller’s analysis: “It has been widely acknowledged that Montgomery County’s economy has been sluggish over the past two decades, but some of this sluggishness is due to trends outside of its control. For example, Montgomery County and the Washington, DC region had already experienced a rapid period of growth, and rapid economic expansions cannot last forever.”<sup>20</sup>

That leaves remaining citizens with a stagnant economy experiencing the slowest growth in new business applications, the highest net migration out of the county due to policies being implemented that provide no safety and security for its residents, a police department that is underfunded and understaffed with a low morale, and a 7.7% increased FY24 operating budget being proposed. Who floats the bill for this? The tax paying citizens of Montgomery County.

Some Council Members do not have the best interests of the remaining Montgomery County residents at heart when considering all the aforementioned issues. Take last year as an example. Current Council Members President Friedson, Vice President Stewart, Jawando and Mink were all in favor for a tax increase. Their justifications for the tax increase can be read here.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ultimatenevswire.org/2024/02/14/denver-considers-allowing-non-citizens-to-be-cops-firefighters/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://patch.com/maryland/rockville/crime-montgomery-county-increases-3rd-year-row>

[https://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=169&event\\_id=16031&meta\\_id=171079](https://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=169&event_id=16031&meta_id=171079)

<sup>19</sup> <https://marylandtaxes.gov/reports/static-files/SOTE.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/MoCoEconomicIndicatorsBriefingQ32023\\_010824\\_Final.pdf](https://www.montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/MoCoEconomicIndicatorsBriefingQ32023_010824_Final.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> <https://montgomeryperspective.com/2023/05/18/tax-hike-number-three/>

What is currently being proposed to mitigate a tax hike on its residents and keep Montgomery County afloat? The ZTA 24-01 FAITH (Facilitating Affordable Inclusive Transformational Housing) Act. Why bring this into the equation when it seemingly has nothing to do with my opposition to Bill 2-24? Go back to the proposed budget outline here<sup>22</sup> and search for housing. You will get 15 matches in the outline for housing when, remember, public safety only got warranted 5 results. Right below the 15th housing match you will see this: “\$3 million in funding to continue providing overflow sheltering in hotels.” That is the allocated money being proposed, at the taxpayers expense, to shelter the current number of illegal immigrants in Montgomery County. The ZTA 24-01 FAITH Act, albeit a novel concept, is being initiated to provide affordable housing in Montgomery County for its remaining residents due to its cost of living index. It is also aimed at providing shelter for illegal immigrants already residing in Montgomery County, as well as, the anticipated increase of illegal immigrants in the coming years. The ZTA 24-01 Act is nothing more than an open invitation for more illegal immigrants to come to Montgomery County<sup>23</sup> due to its sanctuary city status and soft on crime policies. How is that working out for residents in Chicago, IL that are experiencing the same thing.<sup>24</sup>

Bill 2-24 and The ZTA 24-01 FAITH Act do nothing for the betterment of Montgomery County as a whole. The Freedom to Leave Act deprives Montgomery County Police Officers from performing their duties and responsibilities. It will all but dissolve the MCPD staff morale, willingness to work and any possibility of recruitment to fill the vacancies. In return, citizens are paying more in taxes with no ROI for safety and security against an annual increase in crime. That is why the title of the bill is so aptly named The Freedom to Leave Act. The economic implications being imposed on the remaining citizens by the Freedom to Leave Act, if passed, and continued dissolution of the MCPD is too great to ignore and will result in more taxes, more out-of-county migration, more crime and less security.

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<sup>22</sup> [https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press\\_Detail.aspx?Item\\_ID=43039](https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=43039)

<sup>23</sup> <https://wjla.com/news/local/montgomery-county-housed-thousands-undocumented-migrants-immigrants-based-maryland-dmv-border-crisis-supreme-court-title-42-immigration-policy-asylum-migrants-mexico-texas-arizona-south-temporary-housing-church-joe-biden-kamala-harris>

<sup>24</sup> <https://news.yahoo.com/chicago-residents-speak-against-migrants-200417041.html>