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Testimony on the FY26 Operating Budget

My name is Deedee Jacobsohn, and I am a resident of North Bethesda in county district 4. I am a member of B'nai Israel Congregation, and my synagogue's commitment to acts of *tzedakah* (charity, or more accurately, the obligation to do what is just) profoundly influences the way I look at the county budget. The budget must do what is right; it must be a just document that protects and aids the most vulnerable members of our community.

I urge you to fully fund the FY26 recommendations for the MCPS budget. As a paraeducator, and proud member of SEIU Local 500, I want to see the union contracts honored. As a pre-k paraeducator, I especially want to see the commitments to expanding full-day pre-k fulfilled. Last year, Twinbrook Elementary School (where I work) was told it would transition to full-day pre-k; then the budget cuts took away that opportunity. Pre-k in Title 1 schools provides invaluable social and emotional learning. The children in our pre-k classes make tremendous progress towards kindergarten readiness, but clearly lag behind the full-day Head Start class across the hall. We cannot even fully implement the math or reading curriculum because there simply is not enough time.

I urge you to continue to fund pre-k expansion, not only by funding the MCPS budget, but by allocating and spending the money to open additional seats for pre-k in existing community facilities. We need universal pre-k so that all our children are ready for kindergarten, and funding community pre-k seats will help speed us towards that goal.

I urge you to increase the amount of money allocated for eviction prevention. Eviction is a shocking ordeal that traumatizes families and tears apart a community. Thousands of families could be spared from eviction if Montgomery County **increases its Emergency Rental Assistance Programs (ERAP) by \$50 million.** The investment in stable housing is a just approach that also reduces the county's expenses related to homelessness such as having to provide hotel rooms when shelters are full.

I urge you to increase funding for the Rapid Rehousing program to \$9.5 million so that current clients continue to receive short-term rental assistance and case

management, and that SEPH can aid additional clients in FY26. This is an effective program for moving people out of homelessness and into homes; as need is growing so must the county's support.

I urge you to provide funding for moving and storage assistance for people who have been evicted. On a recent group chat, I followed helplessly in real time as someone who had been evicted had to retrieve her damaged possessions which had been thrown outside along a highly trafficked street; meanwhile, some people stopped not to help but to help themselves to her belongings. This cruel and demeaning practice must end.

Finally, I urge you to increase food assistance grants by 10%. The number of residents seeking food assistance is growing, and the need will continue to increase as more of our neighbors lose their jobs and prices for everything rise. No one should go hungry in Montgomery County.

We are living in crazy, challenging times and I recognize that the county's budget woes are real. Yet we must continue to do what is right for our children and our most vulnerable neighbors, including those who face housing instability, because we aspire to build a thriving, caring and just community.