

April 7, 2025

Testimony of Christopher Bruch

Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Operating Budget

Council President Stewart and members of the Council, my name is Chris Bruch, I am President and CEO of the Bethesda based Donohoe Companies, and I am a 61-year resident of the County.

I am here today in opposition to any tax or fee increases. The Nation is bracing for a multi-year economic downturn and economists at GMU's Center For Regional Analysis predict Maryland and Montgomery County will be the most impacted jurisdictions in the DMV. Meanwhile, it seems to be business as usual for our County Government. Your pattern of annual budget increases and employee growth is unsustainable. How can a 7.7% budget increase be warranted when there has been virtually no population growth, no job growth, no MCPS enrollment growth, and no increase in services. If there were ever a time for fiscal constraint and belt-tightening, it's now. What's happening is analogous to a hurricane, the Weather Channel has a category 5 storm on radar, it's heading directly at us, but rather than preparing, our strategy is hope that it will turn and miss us.

Why not challenge departments and agencies across the board to find 1.5% savings, that's \$120M. Reduce your 40K employee head count by eliminating positions vacant for 6 or more months, 5% reduction would yield \$250M, cancel \$36M for the Dickerson incinerator, spend only enough to complete a feasibility study and cost estimate. These items alone could yield \$400M in savings, but it requires leadership and tough decisions.

It's disappointing that our County, which has the largest concentration of Federal employees and contractors has no empathy or concern for the 10K+ Federal employees and contractors that are recently unemployed. Are we tone deaf or just in denial. Now is not the time to raise taxes or fees on our neighbors, coping with life-changing events, now is the time to demonstrate fiscal restraint and prepare to survive a multi-year category-5 storm.

Thank you.