

Testimony before the Montgomery County Council- FY26 Budget- Prek
April 8, 2025

Good evening Council President Kate Stewart and members of the County Council. My name is Carlos Camacho. I was born and raised in Montgomery County and currently live in North Bethesda. Today I'm representing myself and Action in Montgomery. I am here testifying before you in support of the County Executive's FY26 budget but I would like to implore the Council to increase its investment in quality, affordable, and accessible early childhood education.

I embody three generations living in Montgomery County. My parents came to Montgomery County to provide me with a solid foundation to succeed in life. I am now attempting to do the same for my children. However, because of the high cost of child care, I am doubtful I will be able to stay here, in the County I love and chose to come back to.

My wife and I are both graduates from the University of Maryland and are both dedicated public servants. Combined we earn about 140% of the median household income in Montgomery County (2023 census data) and yet still we struggle to afford child care for our 2.5 year old daughter, Dahlia. Dahlia is vivacious and sweet. She loves going to the park, playing with dogs, and a good book - Curious George being her favorite. And no one is more excited than Dahlia about the arrival of her new baby brother Leo, who is 2.5 months old. I want more than anything to stay in Montgomery County but I sincerely doubt that we will be able to, given the amount we will have to pay when both Dahlia and Leo need childcare. Like many other young parents, the current cost of child care is forcing us to forgo critical milestones such as purchasing a home and saving for retirement. And because of this we will likely need to move outside of the County.

Let me remind you that for every \$1 spent on quality early childhood and education, society receives anywhere from \$4 to \$12 in returns on that investment in positive impacts on educational attainment, employment, health, truancy, and criminality. A 2017 meta study on the Impacts of Early Childhood Education on Medium- and Long-Term Educational Outcomes looked at 22 high-quality experimental and quasi-experimental studies conducted between 1960 and 2016 and found that on average, participation in ECE leads to statistically significant reductions in special education placement and grade repetition and increases in high school graduation rates. Like I said, ECE is a priceless investment - for children, parents, and society as a whole - but we only get one narrow window in each child's life to achieve this impact.

We cannot wait any longer for the market to figure this out. Just think about all of the market failures - supply cannot keep up with the demand, the County's own study acknowledges a gap in childcare seats of 23,700. ECE workers are the most underpaid education professionals with a median hourly wage of \$14.60 as of May 2023. Furthermore, we have a system where parents are forced to pay huge portions of their income at a time when they are only just beginning to approach their earning potential, and the cherry on top being that ECE centers are disincentivized to raise quality or enroll younger children (0-2) because it is not profitable.

While I commend the County Executive for his investment in MCPS, if we are serious about decreasing the achievement gap, then we must make a historic investment and commitment to make universal ECE a reality. That may not be possible today with this budget but I would be remiss not to emphasize this point. This needs to be the goal and it is possible because it already exists in many places.

As you examine the budget in committee, and working towards this goal, we urge you to ask:

- How will this budget help build capacity towards Blueprint goals for preK expansion?

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- On what timeline will all 3 and 4 year olds have access to full day, high quality preK?
How many seats will MCPS create and fill? HHS?

Thank you and I appreciate your time.