

## **Testimony before the Montgomery County Council- FY26 Budget- PreK**

April 8, 2025

Good evening Council President Stewart and members of the County Council.

My name is Ramatou Bakari. We live in Montgomery Village. I am a mother of six children, from age 3 to age 22, from preschool to college.

Tonight, I am here to talk about the need for affordable preK for our 3 and 4 year old children in Montgomery County.

For my family, preK childcare subsidy program and the working parents assistance program has supported my children's education and development. It has also been important for me because it gives me the opportunity to go to work while my two youngest Fatima and Amir are in a healthy, safe, learning environment.

But even with this help, I still have to come up with nearly \$1000 each month to pay for daycare.

What we have right now is too fragmented- patching together scholarships with a mess of paperwork and it is left to the parent to figure things out.

It's a headache and it's very stressful to go through these bureaucratic requirements. Let me give you an example so you might understand better.

- My first application was denied because a letter from my employer stating my salary was not enough.
- Then I was told that the font on my pay stubs was too small to read so it was denied again.

And that is for someone like me who speaks English and is comfortable with computers. Imagine what it is like for those who cannot.

It's not just me. There are many others. I have a friend who only qualified for 20 hours of care for her 4 year old son and that was after she was rejected the first time and I had to help advocate for her. For the remaining 30 hours of work each week, my friend has to take her son to the hair salon where she works.

A universal preK program would make it easier- it means that if I get a promotion at my job, I don't have to spend time calculating whether I can afford to accept the promotion.

The first step to getting us to universal preK is to come up with one collective vision and plan for expansion.

Council members, we commend the County Executive for recommending \$6.3 M more for Working Parents Assistance program than last year. However, what we have currently is a fragmented system.

There are 35,200 children aged 35 months to 60 months in Montgomery County and 29,300 children aged 35 months to 60 months are enrolled in a preK program. What is the plan to address the 5,900 children for whom there are not enough preK seats?

How will this year's budget support a holistic approach that does not compromise on placing children in preK seats?

Thank you.