

Written Testimony for Montgomery County FY Budget Hearing

Submitted by: Yamuna Perera

Subject: Funding for Intellectual and Developmental Disability Services

Dear Council Members,

My name is Yamuna Perera, and I am writing to urge you to prioritize funding for services that support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Montgomery County.

Years ago, at the age of 24, I served as a Qualified Intellectual Disability Professional. I entered the field with little experience but quickly gained a deep understanding of how much individuals with disabilities rely on the people who care for them. That job changed me forever. It opened my eyes to their vulnerability and to the cracks in our system that can cause irreparable harm when left unaddressed.

One incident that has stayed with me all these years involved a non-verbal client who returned from the hospital after suffering severe burns during a sitz bath at his group home. He had painful hemorrhoids and was placed in water that was too hot. Unable to speak, he couldn't let anyone know he was in pain. By the time someone noticed, it was too late. He spent nearly a month in the hospital. This was not just an unfortunate accident, it was negligence. Sadly, cases like this often happen.

That is why I am urging you to act now to prevent future harm. I want to acknowledge the important step the County has taken in raising wages to \$17.15 per hour for large employers and \$15.50 for mid-sized employers. This is progress, but unfortunately, it is not enough.

Without additional funding, service providers are now being forced to make difficult choices, such as cutting staff or reducing services, just to cover wage increases. This puts both caregivers and the individuals they serve at risk.

I respectfully ask the County to prioritize targeted funding in the following three areas:

1. Better Pay *and* Training for Caregivers

Caregivers are the heart of the support system for people with disabilities. While increased wages are helpful, they must be coupled with comprehensive, ongoing training. Proper training equips staff to provide safe, compassionate, and consistent care, and helps reduce burnout and turnover.

2. More Oversight and Accountability

To prevent neglect and abuse, group homes and care facilities must receive more frequent, unannounced inspections. Families and staff should also have access to a clear, confidential,

and safe way to report concerns without fear of retaliation. Oversight ensures transparency, accountability, and ultimately, protection for those who cannot advocate for themselves.

3. More Programs for Adults with Disabilities

Many adults with disabilities want to work, live independently, and be part of their community but lack of access to the programs that would help them do so. While I appreciate the County's increased funding for Aging and Disability Services, at least \$1–2 million more is needed to expand job training, independent living support, and community engagement programs.

At the core of this request is a simple truth: this is about people. People who deserve dignity, respect, opportunity, and protection.

The individuals I worked with cannot write to you today. But I can. I've seen what happens when the system fails, and I am asking you to help prevent future failures by investing in the services that matter most.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to making Montgomery County a safer, more inclusive community for all.

Sincerely,
Yamuna Perera