

Public Hearing Testimony
FY 2026 Operating Budget
April 7, 1:30 p.m

Montgomery County Partners for Animal Well-being (MCPAW)
Victoria Thomas, Vice Chair

Good afternoon.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak advocate for the vulnerable animals of our County who can't speak for themselves, and the underserved residents who love them.

My name is Vicki Thomas and I am Vice Chair of the Montgomery County Partners for Animal Well-being—MCPAW-- a 501(c)(3) nonprofit animal welfare organization. Our programs include fostering homeless animals, assisting underserved residents with low cost spay/neuter and vet care, and running a petfood pantry. I also volunteer at MCASAC three times a week and am a member of the Animal Services Advisory Committee.

I know the Council has numerous priorities and hard decisions this year, but many of us in the animal welfare community believe that helping both the homeless pets in the county shelter and the pets of underserved residents is important. Pets mean just as much to those families who have less, as they do to us. As Director Hairfield has said, this is a matter of equity and fairness. MCPAW, like OAS, believes that no family should have to give up a furry family member because of cost.

As I mentioned, MCPAW runs a bi-monthly petfood distribution which we started during the pandemic, and five years later with continued economic uncertainty, the need hasn't lessened. Last year we distributed over 70,000 pounds of pet food. However, our donations of food and funds have decreased, like most nonprofits. MCPAW endorses the Animal Services Advisory Committee's request of \$30,000 for community petfood in the OAS budget, which will be shared with our organization and other nonprofits. This is a very tangible way of helping keep pets out of the shelter or off our county's street and with their families. This investment will not only decrease the costs of the number of animals in the shelter, which has a limited capacity for care, but it is also an matter of fairness and compassion.

I also urge you to continue full funding for the Office of Animal Services including for targeted spay/neuter and basic vet care for underserved residents. People who can't afford food for their pets cannot afford to spay/neuter or provide basic vet care for their pets.

Research suggests that at least 5 subsidized surgeries for pets belonging to underserved individuals per 1,000 residents will help reduce shelter intake. So, in the long run targeted spay/neuter will reduce costs to the county by reducing the number of animals entering MCASAC. And a Spay/Neuter program is also mandated in Chapter 5 of the County Code.

I am currently fostering four abandoned kittens (and nine other cats), and while they are ridiculously cute, we don't want more kittens born then there are families care for them, so they don't end up in the shelter or starving on our county's streets.

Thank you again for all you do for our county residents, both human and furry.

And please let me know if you need some kittens.