

Written Testimony for the FY26 Operating Budget Public Hearing - 4/08/2025
by Kellie Butsack, % Story Tapestries - 19301 Hempstone Ave., Poolesville MD 20837

Thank you, President Stewart, VP Jawando, and honorable Council Members for this opportunity to testify. My name is Kellie Butsack and I submit this written testimony on behalf of the arts services organization, Story Tapestries, and our Montgomery County partners.

Story Tapestries is an arts services organization that meets education, mental health, workforce development, digital equity and economic stability objectives through the use of the arts as a tool to support personal and community development for individuals of all ages. Since becoming a 501c3 nonprofit in 2010, our programs and services have impacted over 3 million lives through performances, workshops and professional development programs. In 2025, we celebrate our 15th Anniversary of advocating for, and elevating the voices of, the communities we serve.

We believe in a collaborative project process to provide sustainable community growth and development. The overarching goal of our work is to design a blueprint for programming that integrates a network of partners and individuals who collectively support the growth of the entire community and foster quality programs capable of also addressing the changing needs of the community.

The arts represent the enduring legacy of our community. The arts are the means by which we experience and understand our collective and individual history and cultures. The arts are at the very core of humanity. At Story Tapestries, we see first-hand every day how the arts are essential to the well-being and socio-economic health of Montgomery County. Because we use the arts every day as a powerful tool to create accessible, open spaces and opportunities for individuals to reach their potential and to work together to address community issues for all ages across Montgomery County - whether we are teaching literacy and STEM in an MCPS classroom, doing workforce development in a homeless shelter, offering digital literacy to young adults and seniors, or facilitating community conversations in Long Branch.

We need the direct and indirect funding through our partners that the County provides to continue the work we do, to continue to keep the arts accessible as a tool for all - for our constituents and partners, and especially for those across our community who otherwise lack access to the arts and the tools and resources that provide the skills needed to increase educational and workforce development outcomes for Montgomery County.

We collaborate with Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless and WorkSource Montgomery to provide hard and soft workforce skills, resources and connections to opportunities. We partner with Montgomery College, MCPS and MontCo Parks to provide arts-integrated educational programs, and **we advocate for full funding their proposed budgets as well as the County Executive's proposed 3% increase for the Arts and Humanities Council and the additional \$500,000 requested to meet projected demand in FY26. I also ask that you consider funding a Rec Center in Montgomery Village, continue to fund BlackRock Ctr for the Arts and finally, that you designate funding for Story Tapestries to expand the critical work we do to address disparities in early childhood development, ensure access to quality education and resources, and support students, adults and families through programs that bridge socioeconomic gaps and promote equitable outcomes.** The full scope of our work reached nearly a million individuals last year (over 900,000) and includes training, coaching and mentorship for aspiring teaching artists to increase their skill set, obtain employment and earn a living wage.

In DC and across the state, budgets are being cut, positions are being eliminated, and the arts are facing marginalization, impacting the cultural capital they contribute to our County, our communities and society at large. We appreciate the Council's steadfast commitment and support for our sector, especially through difficult times, past and present. Your advocacy and support for the arts at the local level is needed now more than ever.

Please consider continuing and expanding your support of the arts and humanities. The arts make the process of growth and learning one of openness and encouragement, giving each person the opportunity to reach their own highest potential. An increased investment in the cultural sector is a proven investment in our socio-economic well-being and growth and the future prosperity of all residents across Montgomery County.

Thank you.

Sincerely submitted,
Kellie Butsack