

Public Testimony by Byron Johns on Behalf of the NAACP-Montgomery County MD Parents' Council and the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence – April 8, 2024

Good afternoon, members of the Montgomery County Council. My name is Byron Johns, and I am here today representing the NAACP-MC Parents' Council and the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence.

I want to begin with a famous quote that resonates during uncertain times: "In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity." I deeply appreciate the efforts of our county leaders to provide stability, uphold the rule of law, and protect our communities and values.

You have asked for data and transparency, and I commend the Superintendent for providing that to us. However, it is crucial to critically analyze what this budget attempts to achieve—and what it fails to address.

What This Budget Does:

The budget has been referred to as the Superintendent's "Broccoli Budget," which candidly can be described as a "fixer-upper budget." It is fundamentally aimed at addressing the structural cracks in our district's foundation. While I believe that many of these issues were known or knowable, they have unfortunately been deferred for too long. If we do not act now, the decay will worsen, and the costs will escalate.

A major investment outlined in this budget is to address the underinvestment in Special Education services. Currently, only **4 in 5 Special Education students**—approximately **8,400 students**—are **below** grade level in literacy, while more than **1 in 5**—around **2,300 students**—are **well below** grade level. This investment is crucial and urgently needed.

What This Budget Does Not Do:

However, this budget does not adequately address the historical and foundational issues impacting our Black and Brown students. Specifically:

- **Black Students:** Over **1 in 2 Black students**—about **10,000 students**—are **below** grade level in literacy, and **1 in 10** are **well below** grade level.
- **Latino Students:** Approximately **2 of 3 Latino students**—around **19,000 students**—are also **below** grade level, with nearly **2 in 10** being **well below**.
- In mathematics, the statistics are even more alarming, with **4 of 5 Black students**—about **13,000 students**—being **below** grade level and **1 in 3**—around **5,000 students**—being **well below**. For Latino students, **9 of 10**—about **24,000 students**—are **below** grade level, with **2 in 5**—about **11,000 students**—being **well below**.

The State Board of Education has passed policies prioritizing literacy and math, including the retention of third-grade students that do not meet grade level standards. If we fail to address these literacy and numeracy gaps, these policies will inevitably require some students to repeat grades—leading to increased costs in the future.

Given these facts, we ask the Council to reconsider expanding afterschool and Out-of-School-Time academic support funding which has demonstrated efficacy. The magnitude of the issues calls for explicit allocations to provide more of our children access to effective support resources outside their classrooms and accelerate efforts to positively impact academic performance. **Each \$1 Million invested provides 25 weeks of afterschool/OOST high dosage academic supports for 1,000 students!! There is no miracle - without investments and additional time-on-tasks, many of these students will not have a chance to recover!**

In closing, I urge this Council to consider these priorities as you deliberate on the allocations for \$7.66 billion FY26 Operating Budget. In this uncertain climate, we must hold fast to protecting and providing a world class education and not deny our students their futures.

Thank you for your time and consideration.