

Melissa Coretz Goemann  
Silver Spring, MD 20901  
April 4, 2025

## **Montgomery County FY25 Operating Budget Testimony**

Dear members of the Montgomery County Council:

My name is Melissa Coretz Goemann. I am a resident of Silver Spring and live in District 5. My adult children previously attended Montgomery County Public Schools, including Northwood High School, where I served on the PTSA. I serve as the Senior Policy Counsel for the National Youth Justice Network and I am the Co-Chair of the Montgomery County Commission on Juvenile Justice, though this testimony is offered in my personal capacity.

**I am writing to urge the County Council to not only fully fund MCPS's FY25 budget recommendations, but to add funding to the MCPS FY25 budget in order to maintain FY24 levels for Restorative Justice Specialists and stipends for Restorative Justice Coaches, so that MCPS can continue to strengthen the program.**

As a youth justice professional, I am aware of the substantial research indicating that restorative practices have been successfully used in schools throughout the country to develop a healthy school climate and replace exclusionary discipline (i.e., severe punishments such as suspension and expulsion) and criminalization with healing centered approaches. MCPS data speaks for itself: in the 2023-24 academic year, 79% of students whose conflict was handled through a restorative approach did not repeat an offense; at all 8 schools where restorative justice specialists serve on staff two days a week overall suspensions were reduced; and the percentage decrease of Black/African American suspensions at schools with an assigned restorative justice specialist was much higher than the percentage decrease of Black/African American suspensions at schools without an assigned restorative justice specialist.<sup>1</sup>

Shifting school culture from punishment and pushout to restorative justice is going to take time, intention, and resources. To implement this critical, proven program to support students' safety and development, Montgomery County must:

- Fund a full-time restorative justice position in every middle and high school.
- Use operating funds for MCPS to conduct a public education campaign on restorative justice for students, parents, teachers, and administrators that builds a clearer understanding of what it is and combats misinformation.
- Create clear, standardized restorative justice protocols and guidelines centered in

---

<sup>1</sup> MCPS Restorative Justice Update to the Montgomery County Council Education & Culture Committee, January 30, 2025.

racial justice so that it can be implemented equitably.

- Center students in implementing restorative justice through funding peer-led models.
- Reallocate funding away from punitive, police-driven strategies towards mental health and restorative justice professionals and educators who can support students' needs.

Making a commitment to fully implement restorative justice in Montgomery County's public school system is a paradigm shift and it is a critical one, because punitive school cultures lead to school pushout and fuel the school-to-prison pipeline. According to a June, 2023, report by the Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight, "Racial disparities in the School to Prison Pipeline persist [in Montgomery County Public Schools] with Black children being twice as likely to be suspended or referred to juvenile services compared to their share of student enrollment."<sup>2</sup> **I urge the Council to fully fund MCPS's FY25 budget recommendations and add sufficient funding to MCPS's budget to strengthen funding for restorative practices.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Coretz Goemann

---

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Bonner-Tomkins, "Addressing Racial Inequity in the School to Prison Pipeline" (Montgomery County, MD: Office of Legislative Oversight, June 27, 2023): ii, [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2023\\_reports/OLORReport2023-6.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2023_reports/OLORReport2023-6.pdf).