

Belated written testimony for April 8, 2025 Council hearing on the Operating Budget

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to be submitted via

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/PHSignUp.html#signup>

Dear Council President Stewart and members of the County Council,

I'm Betty Thompson. I'm a lifelong library lover who cares about people with disabilities – with personal experience through my family and my aging body.

First I want to thank you and CE Elrich for past support for our excellent library staff, programs, collections, and services. They matter in my life and many thousands of lives in the County, in so many ways. Beyond the joy of paper books, the library can be where people find and meet with pro-bono confidential advisors about legal and financial worries. Book club meetings. Language practice for adults. Online access to periodicals, newspapers, films, and many sources of information. In-library Internet access for people who don't have other reliable Internet in a safe environment. Years of Covid masks and tests. Resources for federal workers and many others in the current unstable job environment, when 80,000 federal government workers in Montgomery County are worried.

People with disabilities value all of those resources. They also value specialized collections like the Braille collection and materials about many kinds of disabilities. They value the physical accessibility of libraries, for which the County has made a serious commitment and investment in recent years. They value the County's many outstanding librarians as a source of information and assistance in making full use of library resources.

The library budget accounts for less than 1% of the county's operating budget, but the impact that libraries have on our lives is far greater than that. Hundreds of thousands of Montgomery County residents use our libraries. Even love our libraries.

We live amid turmoil and challenges through all levels of government, and Montgomery County Public Libraries are no exception. Specifically, the current Executive Order seeks to eliminate the Institute of Museum and Library Services which provided funding to Maryland libraries. According to the American Library Association, it involves the elimination of that funding and will decimate services such as early literacy development and reading programs, high-speed internet access, employment assistance, homework and research resources and accessible reading materials. We know that the Montgomery County Library System uses this funding for capital projects, staff development, and special programming.

With this as background, County Executive Elrich's FY 2026 budget request for MCPL becomes even more critical. His request maintains core MCPL service and provides a small bump to support the two strategic areas of digital publications and world language collections. At a minimum, I urge you to support the County Executive's budget request for MCPL, and to keep in mind how people with disabilities rely on library information and services. Our public libraries are one of the county's most valuable assets. We urge you to fully fund the operating budget, so that they can continue to better the lives of all residents in Montgomery County.

Thank you for your time and attention.