

Good Afternoon, Council President Stewart, Vice President Jawando, and County Council Members,

My name is Patty Winters and I am the proud team leader of that rockin' group of volunteers, Phoenix Rising: Maryland Recovery School Advocates.

Phoenix Rising is well aware that the Recovery Academic Program (RAP) was somehow not included in the Montgomery County Public School(MCPS)'s FY26 budget so here are three reasons for speaking with you today about re-funding it, in anticipation of the FY27 budget hearings:

1. We all know that the Fentanyl crisis and adolescents struggling with substance use disorders (SUDs) tragically still exist, and more tragically with no end in sight. We saw some improvement in 2024 resulting from proactive programs and education strategies, so this is not the time to end a key contributor to that progress. Without our recovery school, our precious youth striving to sustain their sobriety will not have a place to resume working toward their high school diploma with positive peer pressure and professional recovery support as part of their school day and will probably return to their previous environment (the people, places and things they need to change) at their cluster school or bus stop.

Without RAP, we stand to lose the incremental progress we have made in reducing overdose, which could mean students losing their future at the very least and their lives at the most.

2. Indeed, MCPS's decision to not include RAP in their FY26 budget was made on the heels of efforts that were in progress to open a Downcounty location, hire bilingual Spanish-speaking teachers, and finally raise the principal's position to full-time, all due to the growing need to have RAP as part of these precious students' continuum of care (see National Institute on Drug Abuse graphic in the first of my three May 12 emails).

3. The CIP connection is that unlike when RAP opened in 2018 when its ideal location was not a problem thanks to MCPS's partnership with Sheppard Pratt who agreed to house RAP at their Landing site, we will now need to find a new home for RAP.

Sheppard Pratt, like most related entities supporting school and community-based mental health and substance use services, lost significant federal funding.

This loss of funding forced Sheppard Pratt to cut many programs, including RAP.

Consequently, they can no longer fund recovery services or a space for RAP beyond the end of this academic year.

This raises the possibility that when MCPS does re-fund RAP they (MCPS) might not have a suitable space to house it (as I was told by MCPS Capital Budget and Projects Manager Donald Connelly in January), thus requiring CIP funds.

(Operational funds for recovery support services might also be required depending on the recovery support provider arrangement, and I will be back to address that concern at the appropriate time.

Deeper-dive reasons to re-fund RAP include how it has helped students avoid relapse, regain their self-respect, and become responsible citizens, and how it has strengthened the County's workforce by relieving students' parents of the stress inherent with a child suffering from an SUD so they can be attentive at their job.

Think about what these parents must go through when they discover cash or valuables missing, find their child overdosed, learn that their child was caught stealing, or just hear their phone ring, etc.

We must also be mindful that with the senseless and counterproductive elimination of federal funds and the impending cuts to Medicaid, students will

have even fewer mental health and substance use recovery supports in the community. If they also lose the school-based supports provided by RAP, these precious students' futures or lives will be lost.

There are other return-on-investment reasons to support re-funding RAP and I am currently gathering cost-benefit data to provide to you and MCPS in future testimonials.

Please do not forget about RAP and what it does for our students who need it and their families as the FY26 budget process concludes. I am here today and will return on occasion to help keep it on your radar until and during the FY27 budget hearings.

And please enjoy the photos and references that accompany this testimonial (emailed to you yesterday due the file size if they were included in this document) to appreciate RAP as the rebirth of the first-ever recovery school, our very own Phoenix school.

With thanks for your dedication and hard work for our children's growth and safety,

Patty Winters

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