

May 12, 2025

Carol Stern



TESTIMONY: In Favor of an Income Tax Increase FY 2026 Budget

TO: Montgomery County County Council

My name is Carol Stern and I am a resident of Chevy Chase in District 1 and a member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation in Bethesda. **I am providing this testimony in support of a .1% income tax increase for FY 2026.** The timing of this income tax increase is critical – the Council should take action now, so that we can benefit from the increase in FY 2026.

Budgets are moral documents in that they illustrate the priorities that actually get funded. What the County Council chooses to fund—and chooses not to fund—are conscious choices and reveal priorities and values, and as a County, they are the primary way that we care for one another, especially for the vulnerable.

We know that an income tax increase is the only way to prevent catastrophic budget cuts to critical services in Montgomery County, including staff support for students with disabilities and mental health challenges, social services for our unhoused neighbors, and other critical funding for our most vulnerable residents. If we do not implement the income tax increase, the County Council will have to cut \$55 Million from the current budget.

A cut of \$55M would make it impossible to fully fund the Board of Education's FY26 Operating Budget recommendations for Montgomery County Public Schools. MCPS would not be able to staff critical positions, including 160 new special education teachers, 500 full-time paraeducators, or important restorative justice programming.

In MCPS, 23,000 students have a disability that requires additional support, 600 students are newly arrived refugees, and nearly half of students are in poverty. MCPS has more students accessing our federal free lunch program than the District of Columbia has students. And yet, MCPS's per pupil expenditure remains below what it was prior to the 2008 Great Recession.

We know that many other programs, including case management specialists for chronically unhoused residents and infrastructure for Montgomery County Public Parks, will be cut. We know what a difficult job this budget process is for the Council during these challenging times and we thank you for your dedication.

I respectfully urge the County Council to support a .1% increase in the income tax for FY 2026.