

I am writing in support of the proposed resolution to approve Special Appropriations to the Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget Montgomery County Government, Department of Health and Human Services: Respite Care Program. For the past several years, my son James has been a beneficiary of Respite funding provided through The Arc of Montgomery County which he qualifies for based on his diagnoses of Autism and ADHD. The funds provided have had a large impact on not only James's life and well-being, but for our family as well.

James has significant communication and socialization difficulties, and requires a high level of structure to ensure he can function throughout the day. Each year, we have utilized our approved Respite funds to help offset the cost of sending him to a therapeutic recreation program for part of the summer. This program, run by Speech Pathologists, Special Education teachers, and college-level students allows James to participate safely in a type of 'summer camp' setting specifically geared to children with special needs that require a high level of support. It also assists in working on necessary communication and socialization skills. Prior to receiving funding, we had tried Montgomery County's extended school year and summer camps and had seen James's language and social skills regress in advance of the next school session. This program has allowed James not only a place where he can have fun in a safe and supported environment, but he has also ended his summers showing marked improvement in some of these skills. This type of program is costly, and had we not had access to funding through Respite he would likely not be able to attend.

This funding, in addition to providing James with a level of support not available at standard summer programs also provides our larger family unit with an incredible amount of support and relief. James requires constant care and attention at home, which while worthwhile and rewarding, takes a significant mental and emotional effort due the specialized care he requires and some of the behavioral challenges he faces. Respite allows my wife and I to be more mentally and emotionally available for both James and his sibling during those months by providing a break where we can work, complete necessary household tasks, and spend more quality time with each other. Had we not had this opportunity, summers would be immeasurably harder and likely require me to use all vacation/PTO time at my job to ensure his needs and our family's were adequately met, which would translate to our not being able to visit our extended family or take our children on life-enriching trips and experiences throughout the year.

Given the impact this funding has had on our lives, I fully support this proposal to increase funding so other families can find similar relief and financial support going forward. Thank you for your consideration.

Andrew Dunninger