

**Written Testimony of Monika Carter Laws
on behalf of Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs
Montgomery County Council Public Hearing on the FY27-32 CIP Budget
for Montgomery County Parks
February 17, 2026**

Madam President and distinguished members of the Montgomery County Council, I am Monika Carter Laws, resident of Montgomery County, Board Member of the Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs and Park Advocate for Black Hill Regional Park located in Boyds, Maryland.

It is my pleasure to provide written testimony on behalf of the Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs in support of fully funding Montgomery Parks' proposed FY'27 budget as it pertains to the County Executive's recommended budget for the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for Fiscal Years 2027-2032.

Montgomery Parks' budget outline for FY'27 covers important funding that would positively impact Black Hill Discovery Center and their nature programs across a wide spectrum. As you know, the CIP funds critical investments in the Montgomery Park system to include new parks and amenities, environmental restoration, and rehabilitation projects that extend the life of the parks for generations to come.

Specifically, I would like to direct your attention to the importance of funding the following Parks' projects and programs just to name a few:

- New solar initiative
- Increased funding to rehabilitate and modernize aging infrastructure and park amenities.

It is my understanding that these items are not being funded in the current proposed CIP Budget.

I further understand that as far as future funding for Nature Centers in particular, there is a potential opportunity to set aside and provide a portion of CIP Budget funding for Nature Centers to use for ongoing nature center renovations. Having these funds made available to Nature Centers in this regard would be significantly beneficial. For the most part, Montgomery Parks

nature facilities to include the Black Hill Discovery Center are housed in old buildings. It is the goal of Nature Centers to keep their dwellings and surroundings safe and welcoming for the public to include making the buildings accessible. It is important for those with mobility issues to be able to access the buildings. With this said, it would be extremely helpful for Nature Centers to have a specific Development Fund established in the CIP that would solely support Nature Centers. The establishment and carveout in the budget for a Development Fund for Nature Centers would allow Nature Centers to make repairs and updates more routinely and quickly and provide better customer experiences across the board.

It is important to note in this testimony that if a Nature Center Park Development Fund were to be created in the CIP, Black Hill Discovery Center would be one of 5 sites that would benefit. After 40 years, the Black Hill Discovery Center building has deteriorated in several respects. Specifically, some improvement projects that would be a funding priority include the following:

- Replacing many of the windows, the wood window frames, and the wooden paneling on the outside of the building.
- Replacing outside wood paneling as much of it is rotting.

Please note, Black Hill Discovery Center overlooks Little Seneca Lake in Black Hill Regional Park. In addition to normal wear and tear, often storms roll in off the lake and hit the building directly. The storm damage over time has caused some of the windows to fall down and the wood around them has shifted over time, creating gaps. With dedicated CIP funding for Nature Centers, including Black Hill Discovery Center, there would be less lag time between identifying a need for a project and then getting started on completing it, since money would be available.

Founded in April 2001, this year the Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs will celebrate its 25th Anniversary. This is an important milestone of direct engagement, advocacy and involvement with Montgomery Parks Foundation and its global mission to support our parks. I have served on the Board of Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs for more than fifteen years and have witnessed the power and success of this dynamic relationship.

The Board of Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs is an all-volunteer Board. As Board members, we dedicate considerable time out of our professional and personal lives to assist Black Hill Discovery Center staff to meet their community Park goals. I invite you to visit the Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs website at www.friendsofblackhillnature.org to learn more about our dedicated work with Black Hill Discovery Center and Black Hill Regional Park.

Thank you for your time and consideration. The Board of the Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs is ready to work with the Montgomery County Council and Montgomery Parks Foundation to secure adequate funding for Montgomery Parks and Black Hill Regional Park programs and initiatives.