

CIP Testimony - Feb. 10

Good Evening.

I'm Toula Athas and I'm a Wootton mom. Following yesterday's tragic shooting at Wootton, I'd like to begin by thanking the Rockville and Montgomery County police departments, MCPS, and Wootton's staff for their swift response and for the County Council's support. Now more than ever, I urge you to stand with Wootton to make the school safer, healthier and stronger. Perhaps this tragedy could have been avoided if Wootton still had a School Resource Officer - one that was allowed **INSIDE** the building. As we saw, threats happen inside schools as much as outside. I urge you to install an SRO at Wootton with full access to the building.

Please, allocate funding to protect what matters—our children's health, safety and well-being. This extends to a safe school building. Physical environments communicate values and when a school like Wootton is allowed to deteriorate, it signals that disorder is acceptable, standards don't matter, and that the people inside those walls aren't worth protecting or supporting. The decisions you make today on capital improvements have far reaching consequences.

For Wootton, the CIP process has been a never ending ordeal – 17 long years of broken promises, delays, rule changes, leap-frogging, and finally ejection from the CIP. In 2009, MCPS promised us a renovation by 2018. Then came a series of delays. Astonishingly, you allowed Poolesville HS – who wasn't even on the CIP—to jump ahead of Wootton. Poolesville is now rebuilt. Don't we teach our kids to be patient, wait their turn, not to skip lines. ***Does that moral code not apply to you?*** Wootton has waited its turn patiently for 17 years, but we never get to the end of the line, it just keeps getting longer. In 2024, our completion date was delayed to 2029 and last year you removed Wootton from the CIP entirely. Frankly, the timeline is very suspect. ***It begs the question, is there an ulterior motive at play?***

Wootton remains a disaster. Its FCI score is among the worst in the county, its HVAC, plumbing and electrical systems all failing. Just today, Wootton's power failed again. For years, parents have been complaining and submitting work orders to address mold, air quality, nonfunctioning water fountains and toilets. **This is unacceptable. We don't live in a developing country. Montgomery County is one of the most affluent counties in America. How is this even possible? It is unconscionable.**

Now MCPS is attempting to fix this with a bait and switch — moving us to Crown in a ploy to hush us up and distract from their years of mismanagement. Kill two birds with one stone. Give them a safe building, but in the process destroy a thriving cluster,

dismantle a 55 year legacy of excellence, and create unnecessary anxiety and chaos for high schoolers caught in a transition. **How's that equitable to our students? This is a burden to students, who should instead be focused on setting themselves up for success in college and in life. That should be your focus as well.**

Option H is a mistake. It creates more problems than it solves and is anti-growth. Please, add Wootton to the current CIP cycle. At the very least, fund a feasibility study that creates a clear path to modernization. Take accountability, make amends for past mistakes, earn our trust and **keep your promises**. Use your leverage to convince the Board of Education to reject Option H. And above all else, please do right by Wootton.

Thank you.