Public Testimony of Olivia Burlingame
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Good afternoon council members and thank you for holding this meeting on what is becoming an increasingly important topic that will have lasting impacts for our kids and families in the county.

My name is Olivia Burlingame and I'm here to speak to the zoning text amendment on data centers and Bill 4-26 that proposes a task force on data centers.
I am a parent of three, a former high school teacher, and a concerned member of the Silver Spring community. My family has lived in the area since my now college kid was a kindergartener, and I grew up in the state.

When it comes to data centers in Montgomery County we have to take our time and appreciate the lessons learned from other communities around the country who have already come to know what a data center means in real life, whether it's in their backyard, down the block or at the other end of their county; because now, all over the country, data centers are being fast-tracked with limited oversight.

First and foremost, I want us to remember that not all novice technologies should be engaged with just because they are the new shiny big thing that big tech wants us to adopt. Remember when cell phones weren't in the classroom? Ask any teacher how helpful smart phones in schools have been and they can read you the dirty laundry list; we all know how detrimental they are to our kids' health now. Data centers are another new big thing.

But, what I, as a mother, look at is how supportive this is of the rights and needs of families like mine and my neighbors? What do we actually need and what have we asked for? Unlike the companies pushing this on us as a direct result of the federal AI Action Plan, I'm asking what problems are data centers solving for us? I'm talking about everyday families who are raising kids, are at home with our parents that we take care of, or helping out with our extended families?

So I want to first be clear about where this big push is coming from. I don't need a data center to support AI being used as a supposed safety and security tool in my kid's high school, for example. Nor do I need AI health diagnostics that have been proven to be inaccurate.

What I am getting at is: what is the real need being addressed by new data center construction and infrastructure in MoCo?

Second, I want to say that I really appreciate the zoning text amendment (ZTA) proposal because we need strong regulation and siting parameters for data centers to ensure they are only in industrial zones. These help us safeguard our families and limit some amounts of harm to us, the environment, and our overall public health.

But that is not where we should stop because it is not adequate.

Let's remember what communities with data centers have already taught us; and I want to be clear that I am not just talking about AI hyperscale data centers, but all of them. What we know is that despite what these industries tell you, [data centers don't bring lasting jobs nor do most short-term jobs (which are mostly during the construction phase) go to community members](#), and utility rates go up - essentially they put the cost on us. They drain our energy and water at a time when the UN has even declared our global water supply is going bankrupt and we are at the point of no return, this is the real context.

With such huge stakes on the line and a lasting infrastructure being proposed that will impact future generations, **we must move forward on both proposals very carefully with intention and attention to detail:** we must regulate data centers to industrial zones while also ensuring that a robust study of the costs and benefits to communities is carried out. This must be done with strong community engagement and leadership from the get go and that means having many community members on the task force.

That's why I support the ZTA with an amendment that calls for a moratorium on data centers while a transparent and comprehensive study through the task force is conducted. We must ensure that we get this right and don't sacrifice our communities' public health and well-being in the meantime. Through the Task Force study we will glean key insights and gather recommendations for all key stakeholders to consider, including every day community members and families.

And one of them might very well be that data center development is not the way forward for Montgomery County and that in fact we need a moratorium.

In short, the ZTA and the Task Force proposals are not mutually exclusive, we should and must do both to protect our communities right now to ensure we head down the most just path for our families and community members. Let's keep our kids and their future families in mind.

Thank you.