



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

**FY15 Budget Priorities  
Submitted to the  
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Service  
October 14, 2013**

Hello Ms. Ahluwalia; good evening. My name is Sharika Dhar. I am a senior at Richard Montgomery High School and a youth representative on the Commission on Children and Youth.

The Commission promotes the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing and productive adults. Our top priority is to support policy and budget decisions that promote the safety and well-being of children and youth, and, furthermore, work to ensure children and youth have successful futures.

The Commission is working to affirm the needs, aspirations and achievements of all the County's young people through its three subcommittees.

The first is the Youth Having a Voice Committee. This group is responsible for planning a *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable* and then putting youth opinion into action. This is the Commission's 7<sup>th</sup> gathering of teens from across the County to discuss issues that are important in their lives. Not only do youth have the opportunity to talk, but adults – members of the County Council, Board of Education, HHS senior leadership and others – have the chance to hear, learn and act on the concerns of the youth.

This year's Roundtable, scheduled for December 4, 2013, will focus on the MCPS 10<sup>th</sup> grade health curriculum, particularly access to accurate and complete information about sexual health, and food available during the school day, specifically access to appealing, nutritional foods for the 33.2 percent of MCPS students that receive Free and Reduced Meals.

The second committee is the Out-of-School Time (OST) Success Committee, which is conducting an extensive survey of OST providers to identify and promote critical factors that lead to the success of OST programming, with a focus on strengthening youth mentoring programs.

**Department of Health and Human Services**

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Third, the Social Media Literacy Committee is researching and promoting strategies for the education of youth and parents on the negative as well as the positive impact of social media.

From birth through adulthood, children and youth require support across the continuum to succeed. We ask that you take into account the most vulnerable children and youth as you begin to craft the HHS fiscal year 2015 budget.

We would specifically like to see the County work to reverse the unfortunate educational and incarceration trends of young men of color. One way in which HHS can contribute to better outcomes is to continue to support funding for quality programs that address the out of school time needs of all youth.

The benefits of increased OST participation are well documented. They include: improved school attendance, engagement in learning, and higher test scores and grades. And, the frequency and duration of afterschool participation increases positive outcomes. Second, and of special note, high-risk youth show the greatest benefits.<sup>1</sup> The Commission will have more detailed recommendations for you about the most common, important, and supportable needs of OST programs throughout the County when we finishes collecting and analyzing data from our survey of OST providers.

In addition, we would like to see improved supports for children involved with child welfare, such as increased focus on strengthening youth mentoring programs, increased programming for youth in foster care who are parenting their own children, and offering more support for youth who age out of the system. A simple improvement that would greatly contribute to the success of older youth in the system would be to increase funding to help them complete the driving hours required to obtain a license. This is an important step towards independent living and can increase access to employment and participation in OST programming.

The members of the Commission appreciate your support of our mission to protect and promote the social, emotional, physical and sexual health of the young people here in Montgomery County. We look forward to working with you this year. Please feel free to contact us to inform us about how we may best support your efforts and partner with you to benefit the County's children and youth. **Thank you!**

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<sup>1</sup> The Afterschool Alliance. (2008). Evaluations backgrounder: A summary of formal evaluations of the academic impact of afterschool programs. Retrieved January 5, 2009 from: [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org).