

Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement

Office of Legislative Oversight

BILL 21-24 GENERAL PROVISIONS – NAMING OF COUNTY FACILITIES

SUMMARY

The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) cannot discern the impact of Bill 21-24, General Provisions—Naming of County Facilities, on racial equity and social justice (RESJ) in the County. To affirmatively advance RESJ, OLO offers two policy options for Council consideration.

PURPOSE OF RESJ STATEMENTS

The purpose of RESJ impact statements (RESJIS) is to evaluate the anticipated impact of legislation on racial equity and social justice in the County. Racial equity and social justice refer to a process that focuses on centering the needs, leadership, and power of communities of color and low-income communities with a goal of eliminating racial and social inequities.¹ Achieving racial equity and social justice usually requires seeing, thinking, and working differently to address the racial and social harms that have caused racial and social disparities.²

PURPOSE OF BILL 21-24

Under Administrative Procedure (AP) 5-19, adopted in 2008, the County Executive follows a set process for naming County-owned facilities. To name a facility after an individual via Executive Order, the person must have been inactive in their field for at least five years and either made a significant contribution to the community or County or be a notable historical figure in Montgomery County, the State, or the nation.³ The process involves three steps:

1. The County Executive forms an ad hoc committee to consider naming the facility;
2. The Committee, chaired by the Chief Administrative Officer, makes a recommendation; and
3. The Executive reviews the recommendation and finalizes the naming through an Executive Order.⁴

The purpose of Bill 21-24 is to establish a process for the County Council, like the County Executive, to name County facilities after individuals based on specific criteria. Similar to AP 5-19, Bill 21-24 would permit the Council to pass a resolution to name a County facility after an individual who has been inactive in their field for at least five years and either made a significant contribution to the program represented by the County facility or the community or is a historically significant person in the County, the State, or the nation.⁵

Before adopting a resolution, the Council must consult the County Executive and hold a public hearing. The resolution requires the approval of at least seven Councilmembers.⁶

The Council introduced Bill 21-24, General Provisions – Naming of County Facilities, on October 15, 2024.

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NAMING OF LOCAL FACILITIES AND RACIAL EQUITY

The naming of places, parks, public facilities, and other infrastructure has often reflected a history of racial and social inequity. For instance, many community members in Montgomery County have challenged the racial inequity of having public schools named after local enslavers and segregationists.⁷ As communities nationwide seek to update naming practices related to places, buildings, parks, and other infrastructure, a common concern is how to create and implement equitable place naming practices.⁸ Through thoughtful collaboration, it is possible to create a name that honors the past, engages visitors in the present, and provides a window into the future for a community space.⁹

A review of public facility naming practices among local jurisdictions suggests that advancing RESJ through naming policies requires (1) community engagement inclusive of BIPOC stakeholders and (2) consideration of whether namesakes supported the oppression of BIPOC and women. A summary of promising practices for advancing RESJ in the naming of facilities for the District of Columbia, Alexandria, Arlington, and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) follows:

- **District of Columbia.** In 2020, DC formed a working group to review the names of government-owned facilities to ensure that the views of the individuals honored by these names were consistent with its values, which include uplifting and empowering BIPOC.¹⁰ Through a survey, the working group engaged with more than 2,500 residents and developed recommendations that include the consideration of five questions when assessing the legacy of District namesakes:¹¹
 - Is there any evidence of the namesake supporting the institution of slavery?
 - Is there any evidence that the namesake serving as an author of policy, legislation, or actions that suppressed BIPOC and/or women?
 - Is there any evidence that the namesake participated in the oppression of BIPOC and/or women?
 - Is there any evidence that the namesake was a member of any supremacist organization?
 - Is there any evidence that the namesake committed a violation of the DC Human Rights Act, in whole or part, including discrimination by age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and natural origin?
- **City of Alexandria.** In 2023, the City of Alexandria established a “Confederate Street Renaming” project to rename streets named after Confederate officers. In January 2024, the City Council voted to rename three streets and rededicate a fourth.¹² Thus far, Alexandria has identified 41 streets named after Confederate figures.¹³
- **Arlington County.** Arlington County has also engaged its BIPOC communities in renaming public landmarks. In July 2021, the County Board of Arlington renamed Lee Highway to Langston Boulevard in honor of John Mercer Langston, an abolitionist, attorney, educator, diplomat, and the first Black member of Congress from Virginia.¹⁴ The initiative sprang from the Langston Boulevard Alliance’s¹⁵ goal to create a more welcoming and equitable place for all living near, working on, or visiting Arlington.¹⁶
- **MCPS.** In 2019, MCPS launched a review of the names of its schools.¹⁷ The committee, comprised of MCPS staff, historians, and student researchers from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County identified six schools with enslaver namesakes. In 2021, Col. E Brooke Lee Middle School, named after a segregationist,¹⁸ was renamed Odessa Shannon Middle School in honor of the first Black woman in the County elected to the Board of Education and as the founder of County’s Human Rights Hall of Fame.^{19 20} In June 2022, the Board of Education adopted amendments to Policy FFA (Section F Facilities Development) governing the naming of school facilities.²¹ The new criteria adopted recognized that naming a facility after an individual must reflect the ideals, core values, and commitments outlined in Board policies, including Policy ACA (Section A) on Nondiscrimination, Equity, and Cultural Proficiency, and should equitably represent the diversity of the County.²²

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ANTICIPATED RESJ IMPACTS

To consider the anticipated impact of Bill 21-24 on RESJ, OLO considers two related questions:

- Who are the primary beneficiaries of this bill?
- What racial and social inequities could the passage of this bill weaken or strengthen?

OLO cannot discern the primary beneficiaries of Bill 21-24 beyond the County Council itself who would have the same naming authority as the County Executive because of its enactment. It is not clear whether and how members of the public would benefit overall or if there would be differences in benefit or burden by race, ethnicity, income, or any other social constructs. As such, OLO cannot discern whether the Bill advances or undermines RESJ. As such, OLO finds the RESJ impact of Bill 21-24 to be indeterminate.

Moreover, without an understanding of who benefits the most from the Bill, or who is most burdened by it, OLO cannot discern whether any racial or social inequities could be weakened or strengthened by the Bill. OLO anticipates that the actual RESJ impact of this bill will depend on the makeup of the ad hoc committees that the Council assembles to consider namesakes and the criteria they consider in recommending potential namesakes.

RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS

Bill 44-20 amending the County's Racial Equity and Social Justice Act requires OLO to consider whether recommended amendments to narrow racial and social inequities are warranted in developing RESJ impact statements for bills.²³ OLO cannot discern the anticipated RESJ impact of Bill 24-24 in the County. Yet should the County Council seek to affirmatively advance RESJ with Bill 24-24, OLO offers two policy options for consideration based on the promising practices of other jurisdictions and agencies seeking to advance RESJ in their naming of public facilities:

- Require inclusion of BIPOC stakeholders in ad hoc committees considering the naming of public facilities.
- Require ad hoc committee to apply a racial equity and social justice lens in identifying and screening potential namesakes by considering both their role, politically and personally, in the oppression of BIPOC, women, or other groups that have been marginalized historically.

CAVEATS

Two caveats to this racial equity and social justice impact statement should be noted. First, predicting the impact of legislation on racial equity and social justice is a challenging analytical endeavor due to data limitations, uncertainty, and other factors. Second, this RESJ impact statement is intended to inform the legislative process rather than determine whether the Council should enact legislation. Thus, any conclusion made in this statement does not represent OLO's endorsement of, or objection to, the bill under consideration.

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- ¹ Definition of racial equity and social justice adopted from “Applying a Racial Equity Lens into Federal Nutrition Programs” by Marlysa Gamblin, et.al. Bread for the World, and from Racial Equity Tools <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>
- ² Ibid.
- ³ See Administrative Procedure 5-19 in the [Introduction Staff Report for Bill 21-24](#).
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ [Introduction Staff Report for Bill 21-24](#).
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ [Seven MCPS schools named after enslavers could be renamed | MoCo360](#)
- ⁸ 106 Group. What’s in a Name? The Importance of Equitable Place Naming Practices for Communities. Undated. <https://106group.com/whats-in-a-name-the-importance-of-equitable-place-naming-practices-for-communities/>
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Government of the District of Columbia. 2020. District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions (DCFACES) working Group Report. https://mayor.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/mayoromb/page_content/attachments/DC%20FACES%20Executive%20Summary_r10sm.pdf
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² City of Alexandria, Virginia Memorandum. From Mayor Justin M. Wilson to Members of the City Council. <https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/ConfederateStreetRenamingProcessProposal.pdf>
- ¹³ Alexandria Living (Web site). Name Changes Coming to Local Roadways. Jan 4, 2024. <https://alexandrialivingmagazine.com/news/name-changes-coming-to-local-roadways/>
- ¹⁴ King, Bennett, Elaine Furlow, Ginger Brown. 2024. The Path to Langston Boulevard: How Lee Highway Was Changed to a Better Name. Langston Boulevard Alliance. August 20. <https://langstonblvdalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Langston-Boulevard-Renaming-Process-Report-LBA-081924.pdf>
- ¹⁵ Langston Boulevard Alliance was created by a grassroots coalition of Civic Associations initially created in 2013 to discuss the need for a county plan for the 4.6 mile stretch of Langston Boulevard (previously known as Lee Highway). <https://langstonblvdalliance.com/our-history/>
- ¹⁶ Bennett et al. 2024.
- ¹⁷ Peetz, Caitlynn. 2019. Review Group Says Six Montgomery County Schools Named After Slave Owners, MoCo 360. August 14 [Review Group Says Six Montgomery County Schools Named After Slave Owners | MoCo360](#)
- ¹⁸ History Sidebar. E. Brooke Lee’s Silver Spring. February 28, 2020. <https://blog.historian4hire.net/2020/02/28/e-brooke-lees-silver-spring/>
- ¹⁹ Griffen, Elia. 2023. Seven MCPS schools named after enslavers could be on the way to changing their names. MoCo 360. October 20, <https://moco360.media/2023/10/19/seven-mcps-schools-named-after-enslavers-could-be-on-the-way-to-changing-their-names/>
- ²⁰ Maryland Women’s Hall of Fame. Odessa M. Shannon 1928-2020. Maryland State Archives. <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/educ/exhibits/womenshallfame/html/shannon.html>
- ²¹ Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Web Site. 2022. Amended Board of Education Policies. FFA, Naming School Facilities. <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/policy-public-comment/changes/changes-2022/#>
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Bill 44-20, Racial Equity and Social Justice – Impact Statements – Advisory Committee – Amendments, Montgomery County, Maryland, December 1, 2020. https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllms/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2682_1_12149_Bill_44-20_Signed_20201211.pdf