

MEMORANDUM

December 1, 2020

TO: Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee
Education & Culture (E&C) Committee

FROM: Vivian Yao, Legislative Analyst

SUBJECT: Special appropriation to DHHS FY21 Operating Budget - \$312,455 for Children, Youth, and Family Services - Therapeutic Recreation Services for School-Age Youth

PURPOSE: Review and make recommendations on the proposed special appropriation

Those expected to participate in the worksession include:

- JoAnn Barnes, Chief, Children Youth and Family Services, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
- Luis Cardona, Administrator, Positive Youth Development Coordinator, DHHS
- Deborah Lambert, Office of Management and Budget

The Joint Committee will review the \$312,455 special appropriation to DHHS for therapeutic recreation services for school-age youth sponsored by Councilmembers Jawando and Riemer. The draft resolution and accompanying memo from the Councilmembers are attached at ©1-4. A public hearing is scheduled for December 1, 2020.

Council staff notes that the Joint Committee will review this appropriation on its own merits even though it has been proposed by Councilmembers Jawando and Riemer as a part of a package of appropriations and legislation related to prohibiting the placement of School Resource Officers (SROs) in school buildings. Council action on the appropriation is scheduled for December 8, 2020, prior to further consideration of the SRO legislation, which is scheduled in 2021. The decision to appropriate funds at this time would be independent of any potential savings that may or may not be realized by passage of the legislation.

In response to a request from Councilmembers, DHHS provided recommendations (©5-6) on how mental health services for youth could be expanded. Taking into account recent efforts to expand school-based mental health services through teletherapy sessions during the pandemic, DHHS recommended incorporating a flexible community-based therapeutic recreation model into current Children, Youth and Family Services programs including School and Community Youth Services (SCYS), Positive Youth Development (PYD), and Linkages to Learning (LTL).

Key attributes of the appropriation include the following:

- Funding would support socially distant, in-person therapeutic recreation opportunities, as allowable by public health guidelines, for school-age youth outside of their home.
- The purpose of the service would be to engage youth in activities that support mental health wellness, socialization, coping skills, and stress management. Outreach to youth and effective, enjoyable in-person engagement is needed to address feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Services will be in-person whenever possible and delivered by human service workers with mental health and therapeutic recreation training, employed by a mental health agency, and either licensed or supervised by licensed clinical staff.
- Services will be youth-oriented, trauma-informed, culturally relevant, creative and engaging, and incorporate sports, outdoor adventure activities, and visual arts.
- Services will promote family bonding by having joint activities with other family members on a regular basis.
- Funding will be used to expand PYD services and contracts, Wellness Center services, and expand Safe Space and Street Outreach Network staffing to provide outdoor sports activities, outings and trips, and gardening and arts healing-based activities.
- Funding will expand existing SCYS and/or LTL contracts to provide 1-to-1 and small group services.
- The annual cost for the services is \$750,000.
- Source of funds is general fund reserves.

Council staff recommends approval of the supplemental appropriation. The proposed services are needed by youth who have experienced social isolation, anxiety, and depression. The service model leverages existing DHHS programs through an alternative staffing model that works around the shortage of bilingual and culturally diverse licensed mental health therapists. The proposed services are supported by research, and DHHS staff believe that a therapeutic recreation model focusing on mental health “could be the best way to support youth at this time.”



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

WILL JAWANDO
COUNCILMEMBER
AT-LARGE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Montgomery County Council
FROM: Will Jawando and Hans Riemer, Councilmembers
DATE: November 12, 2020
SUBJECT: Removing SRO's from MCPS and Special Appropriations

Today Montgomery County has a police officer in every high school and several middle schools. At the same time, our counselor-to-student ratios lag far behind other school systems both in the region and nationally. Over time, our county government has chosen to prioritize funding of police in schools who can quickly make arrests, instead of professionals and services that can assist our students with non-law enforcement-based interventions and mental health or wellbeing.

Over the past four years, almost half of all student arrests were of Black children, a cohort that is one-fifth of the student body.¹ These disparities raise serious concerns about the school-to-prison pipeline. In fact there are broad disparities in how students are treated once they enter the criminal justice system. Black students are nearly 20 times more likely to be held by the Department of Juvenile Services for pretrial detainment for misdemeanor offenses than their white peers.² Black students are 85% less likely to be referred for Screening and Assessment Services for Children and Adolescents (SASCA) Diversion Programs for substance abuse and mental health.³ Black students are 320% more likely to be incarcerated at the conclusion of their trial than white students.⁴

While we know our SRO's are good people doing the job they have been assigned, there are better research-based approaches to resolving disciplinary problems and more effective ways to use precious county resources. School counselors, nurses, therapists, and security guards are better equipped to help students deal with the challenges that today may result in arrests. We should address behavioral problems early through guidance, mental health support, and restorative justice techniques rather than criminalizing adolescent mistakes.

School discipline begins with the teacher, ensuring that all teachers are properly trained in mediating conflicts. Students are another key factor: ensuring that students take steps to atone for the harm they have caused has been correlated with lower suspension and expulsion rates and with students feeling

¹ Statistic derived from previous 4 years of Maryland Department of Education Public School Arrest Data reports. These reports indicate that from SY 2015-2016 through SY 2018-2019, 475 of the 1042 students arrested on MCPS property were Black.

² Statistic is derived from Table 5.24 of the 2016-6 OLO School to Prison Pipeline Report, page 72

³ Statistic is derived from Table on page ii of 2016-6 OLO School to Prison Pipeline Report.

⁴ Statistic is derived from Table 5.27 of the 2016-6 OLO School to Prison Pipeline Report, page 73

safer in the school community. Principals and other administrators are also a key component, as they frequently request arrests or police intervention as a means of resolving disciplinary problems. Training all employees in MCPS in restorative justice and other practices to ensure equitable discipline from the classroom up through the administration is essential to reducing disparities and ensuring better outcomes for all students. That is one of the key goals of our appropriations.

The package of appropriations and legislation we are introducing today will invest in mental health professionals and restorative justice while prohibiting the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) from placing SROs in school buildings. The discontinuation of the SRO program would achieve approximately \$3 million in annual cost savings in future fiscal years. We are not suggesting firing these officers, rather they should be moved to other unfilled positions within MCPD.

Beginning next year, the \$3 million in savings would be allocated to 3 separate programs that will better address the needs of students: 1) Providing funding for an after school student service hub model to reduce risk factors for students through the Montgomery County Collaboration Council (\$406,000), 2) Providing recreational therapeutic group activities for students through HHS (\$312,455), and 3) Providing funding for restorative justice training for MCPS educators and staff (\$750,000). Our goal is to provide at least some funding before the end of the fiscal year. Next year when we begin to work through the budget, we need to take a closer look at the counseling and therapy needs for students and look at addressing mental health professional ratios. It is necessary to begin to address these mental health challenges as soon as possible. Thank you for your careful consideration of these proposals.

Resolution No.: _____
Introduced: _____
Adopted: _____

**COUNTY COUNCIL
FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND**

Lead Sponsors: Councilmembers Jawando and Riemer

SUBJECT: Special Appropriation to the FY21 Operating Budget
Montgomery County Government
Department of Health and Human Services
Children Youth and Family Services, Therapeutic Recreation Services for School-
Age Youth, \$312,455
Source of Funds: General Fund Reserves

Background

1. Section 308 of the County Charter provides that a special appropriation is an appropriation which states that it is necessary to meet an unforeseen disaster or other emergency, or to act without delay in the public interest. Each special appropriation shall be approved by not less than six Councilmembers. The Council may approve a special appropriation at any time after public notice by news release. Each special appropriation shall specify the source of funds to finance it.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted youth mental health and well-being. Vulnerable youth face significant challenges as a result of the economic impacts resulting from COVID-19, and social isolation arising from the need to prevent the spread of the virus. Continued distance learning in public schools and limited opportunities to congregate safely with peers due to COVID-19 prevention measures have increased feelings of alienation and isolation among young people.
3. At this point in the pandemic, instead of expanding virtual teletherapy linked to specific school communities, the Department of Health and Human Services recommends investing in a flexible community-based therapeutic recreation model that allows for socially distant in-person opportunities for youth outside of their home that can be incorporated into current services models like School and Community Youth Services (SCYS), Positive Youth Development (PYD), Linkages to Learning (LTL).
4. This special appropriation provides \$312,455 for therapeutic recreation activities for school-age children and youth, which support mental health wellness, socialization, coping skills, and stress management, including the following:

- Healing-informed recreational leisure and family strengthening activities through PYD contracts and PYD programs including the Street Outreach Network, Safe Space, High School Wellness Centers.
 - One-on-one or small group services delivered by social emotional wellness staff, with bi-lingual skills, as needed, under the supervision of a licensed mental health professional through existing SCYS or LTL contracts.
5. The annual cost for the services is \$750,000.
 6. Notice of public hearing was given and a public hearing was held.
 7. The County Council declares this request is in the public interest to be acted upon without delay as provided for under special appropriation requirements described in Article 3, Section 308 of the Montgomery County Charter.

Action

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland approves the following resolution:

A special appropriation to the FY21 Operating Budget of the Montgomery County Government, Department of Health and Human Services, Children, Youth, and Family Services is approved as follows:

<u>Personnel Expense</u>	<u>Operating Expense</u>	<u>Capital Outlay</u>	<u>Source TOTALof Funds</u>
\$106,205	\$206,250	\$0	General Fund Reserves

This is a correct copy of Council action.

Selena Mendy Singleton, Esq.
Clerk of the Council

Information requested from DHHS to inform Council proposal to expand School-Based Mental Health Services

Background: Council staff met with DHHS on 11/4/2020 to inform that Councilmembers Jawando and Rice are interested in expanding school-based mental health services and solicit ideas for how to best expand such services. The discussion included the following salient points:

1. While expansion of in-person school-based therapy when students are in schools is an excellent way to provide greater access to children and youth in need of these supports, we are operating in a different landscape now
2. At this point in the pandemic, rather than invest in expansion of virtual teletherapy linked to specific school communities, DHHS recommends flexible community-based models that also allow for socially distant in-person opportunities for youth to have experiences outside their home, as allowable by public health guidelines, per parent and youth permission or preference
3. Given ongoing gap between need for bilingual and culturally diverse licensed mental health therapists and available therapists, DHHS suggests alternative staffing models to accomplish expansion of needed supports
4. There are current service models (SCYS, PYD, LTL and perhaps EBB) and funding mechanisms (current contracts) that can be leveraged to realize this kind of expansion

A 2020 Journal of Youth Development Study emphasizes that the pandemic has impacted youth mental health and wellbeing. Research on structured Out of School Time programs can be applied to help support youth even during social distancing, shelter-in-place and during distance learning. (Journal of Youth Development | <http://jyd.pitt.edu/> | Vol. 15 Issue 2 DOI 10.5195/jyd.2020.962). Given this research and the above discussion points, DHHS Chiefs and administrators from CYF and BHCS concurred that a “therapeutic recreation model” with a focus on mental health (akin to one that used to exist in county government in years past) could be the best way to support more youth in need at this time. Below is more detail on this model:

- Target: School-age children and youth (pre-K-12th grade)
- Purpose: To provide outreach and therapeutic recreation in order to engage youth in activities that support mental health wellness, socialization, coping skills, and stress management.
- Why: Outreach to youth and effective, enjoyable in-person engagement is urgent during the pandemic. Youth report feeling isolated, and MCPS and HHS professionals involved with youth report increased anxiety and depression. Socially distanced, safe outlets are needed to support youth mental health.
- How: Outreach and activities will be in-person whenever possible and provided by human services workers with mental health training that are employed by a mental health agency. Services may, though not necessarily, be provided by licensed staff; however unlicensed staff would work under the supervision of licensed staff in order to receive consultation, guidance and support from a clinical professional. These workers would:
 1. Receive training and ongoing supervision in therapeutic recreation techniques and activities designed specifically to explore and support mental health and wellness
 2. Ensure programs are youth-oriented, trauma-informed, culturally relevant, creative and engaging
 3. Incorporate sports, outdoor adventure activities, visual arts
 4. Promote family bonding by having joint activities with other family members on a regular basis

As is the case now with PYD and many LTL and SCYS services, services would be marketed and offered in a manner that counters the stigma often associated with accessing mental health services. Outreach would prioritize not just students/families identified based on a review of the combined MCPS/HHS data (including further identification of students currently not engaged in distance learning); but also via collaboration with providers that have relationships with youth and families during this pandemic- perhaps utilizing joint programming as a bridge to these services, and these services as a bridge to therapy services as warranted and available. These partnerships should occur across the organizing mental health agency provider(s) and DHHS, MCPS, the Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth & Families; area CDC consolidation HUBs, non-profit CBOs, and others.

Basic Budget:

- **Expand PYD services and contracts** **\$255,000 (annualized)**
 - Expand programs like Club 480, IMPACT, and DRS Sports funding to sponsor youth to provide recreational programs that are outdoors
 - Provide a variety of outdoor leisure activities that also include outings and trips, as well as gardening and arts healing-based activities that are outdoors as well. Gardening projects would be directed to both children and families as a joint activity.
 - Have 6 PT Safe Space staff increased hours to engage 50 youth, providing healing informed recreational leisure activities
 - Have 8 Street Outreach Network Staff engage 64 children/youth in healing informed recreational and leisure activities
 - Each Wellness Center will engage 28 youth in healing informed recreational activities as well as implement a family community gardening project to help strengthen family

- **Expand SCYS &/or LTL contracts** **\$495,000 (annualized)**
 - Serve an additional 150 students/families via increased and focused use of social/emotional wellness staff (Therapeutic Recreation/ Youth Development Specialists, Youth Coaches/Mentors, and other job titles and functions to vary based on population served, with bi-lingual skills as needed). These staff would primarily provide 1-to-1 services under the supervision of a licensed mental health professional, but also possible small group services, depending on youth/parent comfort level and permission; and receive ongoing staff development on engagement and intervention techniques.
 - At least 1 current SCYS provider is, via other agency programming, already providing limited outside, socially distant and 1-on-1 support with licensed and non-licensed staff and could expand this service with an updated scope and expansion of budget
 - SCYS contracts name focus school communities (that do not have LTL or HSWCs) for dedicated service but are split out by larger geographic catchment areas in alignment with the county Regional Service Center service areas. As such, youth identified by MCPS at (or currently not engaged in) schools not currently named in these contracts could be served, as well as those identified by other partners.