



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

April 18, 2024

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #24-65
FY24 Capital Budget, Judicial Security Improvements (\$500,000)

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #24-65 *Judicial Security Improvements* has the potential to advance racial equity and social justice in the County. The supplemental funding addresses life safety issues, increasing security and protection for Circuit Court judges and other building personnel, which could support people seeking services in the Judicial Center facilities.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of SA #24-65 is to install new security doors at each level of the Judicial Center Annex North Tower to restrict access to two elevators on each floor for judicial staff use. These updates will leave four elevators on each floor for public access. The work performed includes the installation of card readers, an intercom, and a fire alarm pull station on each floor.

According to the project description form (PDF), Judicial Security Improvements (No. 362401), the Judicial Center Annex¹ opened in April 2014. The Judicial Center (JD) facilities, which include the Circuit Court and Judicial Center Annex, provide services to Montgomery County residents, including marriage licenses, business licenses, domestic

¹ Judicial Center Annex PDF. Available at:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OMB/Resources/Files/omb/pdfs/fy23/ciprec/P100300.pdf>.

violence assistance, modification of child support, recordation of land, civil or family case, and jury duty.

Several Judicial staff are located in hallways that are not secured, including 17 Circuit Court Judge Chambers, four Appellate Judge Chambers, and ten Senior Judges. According to the Department, the Judges, Register of Wills, Clerk of Court, Chief Deputy Clerk, Court Administrator, and Deputy Court Administrator must travel through the public hallway and use one of the public elevators or use the public stairwell to access their vehicle which is parked in a secured garage.

The PDF notes the lack of secured spaces puts these individuals at risk. The U.S. Marshals Service reported a 387 percent increase in threats against federal judges and personnel nationwide from 2015 to 2021.² The MD Supreme Court Chief Justice convened a Security Task Force to “examine safety for judges entering and exiting courthouses, including going to and from their vehicles, and for judges who do not have access to secured corridors at their courthouses, both of which have been key concerns for judicial officers.”³ The Task Force will also examine physical and procedural security processes and make recommendations based on best practices.

III. **ANALYSIS:** ORESJ has previously reviewed upgrades to County facilities. Our analysis and methodology can be found in the following REIA’s:

- #24-56 - HVAC/Elec Replacement: Fire Stations
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/24-56.pdf>
- #23-23 - HVAC/Electric Replacement & #23-77 EOB HVAC Renovation
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-23-23-77.pdf>
- #23-70 - FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program for the Public Safety Communications Center Phase II
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-70.pdf>
- #23-69 - FY23-28 Capital Improvements Program for the construction of a new 6th District Police Station
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-69.pdf>

There are several methods for assessing the extent to which Capital Improvements Programs (CIP) advance racial equity and social justice. Montgomery County's Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORES) developed a CIP Budget Equity Tool (BET) and Guidance Manual to help stakeholders incorporate a racial equity lens into project development and resource decisions. Best practices for using a racial equity tool, such as the CIP BET, suggest that the tool should be used early and often in project development and involve diverse stakeholders, including community members.

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/baltimore/news/new-security-task-force-aimed-at-protecting-maryland-judges/>

³ <https://thedailyrecord.com/2023/12/07/maryland-chief-justice-announces-security-task-force-following-judges-killing/>

Applying a racial equity lens to this security enhancement project is needed, given the potential impact on diverse court users and the need to ensure an equitable and inclusive user experience. As this is a new project, opportunities exist to apply a racial equity lens as the project commences through completion.

The Circuit Court recently was awarded a grant to hire a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coordinator, which presents an opportunity to consider racial equity throughout the security improvement project's implementation. The DEI Coordinator's duties include assisting in designing and developing court procedures, practices, and business processes through an equitable lens, as well as helping make the court environment more welcoming for culturally diverse litigants.⁴ Once onboarded, the DEI Coordinator could help facilitate the application of a racial equity lens to the security improvements project as the work is performed.

cc: David Dise, Director, Department of General Services
James A. Bonifant, Administrative Judge, Montgomery County Circuit Court
Tim Sheridan, Court Administrator, Montgomery County Circuit Court
Ken Hartman, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, Office of the County Executive

⁴ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cct/careers/Diversity-Equity-Inclusion-Coordinator.html>