



SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

March 6, 2015

Mr. Isiah Leggett
County Executive
101 Monroe Street 2nd Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

**Advice from the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board re:
Fiscal Year 2016 Operating Budget**

Dear County Executive Leggett:

We appreciate your willingness to engage the community and seek direct input about budget priorities in preparing the Fiscal Year 2016 Operating Budget, including the priorities of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board (SSCAB) and its members' communities. Although the County anticipates a shortfall in FY2016, consider our budget priorities, derived from public comments made during your Silver Spring budget forum on January 14, 2015, and from discussions throughout the year during our SSCAB meetings with members of the Silver Spring and Takoma Park communities. These priorities, in no particular order of importance, focus on the need to improve police-community relations; assistance for people's everyday needs; and improvements to our local economy – all of which are critical as we continue to work toward our shared goal of a thriving community.

Improve Community Policing Efforts

Over the last several months through community events and appearances before SSCAB, leaders of the Montgomery County Police Department have made concerted and appreciated efforts to improve their relationship with the community, especially in light of the police brutality cases in Ferguson, Missouri and Staten Island, New York City. Provision of requested funding will enhance community policing efforts and continue to foster constant interchange between the police and public necessary to maintain and improve our trusting and professional relationship. Further provision of funds for de-escalation training, which includes examining alternatives to excessive force, and the potential development of a police advisory board can also improve civilian trust in our law enforcement.



Maintain or Increase Transportation Funding

Our transportation infrastructure, which will include the Transit Center, Purple Line, and priority Bus Rapid Transit Corridors, remains critical to the safe and efficient movement of residents, guests, and business employees. We advise that the County increase funding for the maintenance of our expanding transportation infrastructure and talk more with the community about funding ideas. We additionally write in support of fully funding the Silver Spring Urban District's budgetary requests provided under separate cover, as their efforts play a key role in ensuring Silver Spring is attractive to both businesses and residents. We also ask that you increase funding to extend free hours for high school students taking Ride-On buses after school to and from programs that shape them as future members of the region's workforce.

Maintain or Increase Funding for Affordable and Secure Living

We appreciate you heeding the calls for more affordable housing, recently evidenced by the affordable housing project for seniors next to the new Silver Spring Library. An increase in funding for programs promoting affordable living is also vital due to increases in housing and food costs that outpace the level of household incomes. We also ask for increased funding for renter and landlord education and outreach programs so that renters and landlords can better understand their responsibilities and potentially reduce costly conflicts over housing conditions. Currently, some people attracted to the Regional Area's success with arts and entertainment, walkability, and diversity, can't afford to stay in the area. Increasing funding for assistance with affordable and secure living helps those that want to come to, stay and serve the region socially, economically and civically.

Maintain or Increase Funding for Services for the Homeless

We recognize that Silver Spring has a notable homeless population. More work needs to be done at Progress Place, such as outside seating or more temporary housing, to make life more bearable for those going through the period of homelessness, reduce the loitering in the Central Business District, and reduce the existence of homeless camps like the one that existed on Georgia Avenue. To get rid of homelessness, more funding is helpful for employment assistance and mental health and drug treatment facilities to decrease the number of people living on the streets, in their cars, or in homeless shelters. Such funding is needed to improve our human capital which further improves our economic development.

Fund Resources Keeping Our Regional Area Inviting to Live, Play, and Work

We ask that you continue to fund the work of nonprofits that make our Regional Area a welcoming place to live, play and work. SSCAB has worked to mold the region into a place we want to stay in, such as participating in placemaking, advocating for green space and an intergenerational center. Several nonprofits advance the grassroots work SSCAB has already done. Attention must also be committed to ensuring pedestrian safety and safe vehicular flow around the Library when it opens to make it an inviting place for families and seniors to utilize. Lastly, we ask that you continue funding County initiatives that help business owners thrive and make Silver Spring a better place to work, like the reformed review processes and e-services from the Department of Permitting Services.

In spite of the budgetary shortfall, please consider these budget priorities mentioned as investments that foster the development of human capital, a positive sense of community and economic prosperity for Silver Spring and Takoma Park.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernice D. Mireku-North". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B'.

Bernice Mireku-North
Chair, Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board

cc:
County Council Members
SSCAB Members