



SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

March 1, 2017

Ike Leggett, County Executive
Montgomery County

[delivered via e-mail]

Advice from the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board re:
FY18 OPERATING BUDGET

Dear Mr. Leggett:

We thank you for your request for advice from the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board. Throughout this past year, the Board has engaged with residents of the Silver Spring Regional Area regarding issues such as transportation, economic development, housing, youth activities and the environment. The budget priorities listed below were derived from comments made by members of the Silver Spring and Takoma Park community during our public meetings, dialogues with Montgomery County public officials during Board meetings and public comments made during your Silver Spring budget forum on January 25, 2017. Please note, that our budget priorities are not listed in order of importance, as we view all of the priorities as areas critical to our community.

Funding For Mental Health Professionals in MCPS

During the final half of 2016, the Board was fortunate enough to host several principals of regional area public schools. While age spectrum of students they represent was varied, the challenges that these principals noted were not. We recognized a common theme – mental health. Today's digital landscape and tumultuous political climate have put increased pressure on our county's children today, and MCPS feels it. We were informed that MCPS schools have one counselor per grade level, which equates to approximately one counselor per 250 students. These individuals visit the school only once per week and have a wide array of administrative responsibilities in addition to the most important, which is counseling students. When asked by our panel and concerned residents what the Board could do, the response was to advocate for more onsite mental health resources for their students. It has become clear to us based on our public discussions and input from our community, that students' mental health has a direct impact on academic achievement, among other critical education outcomes. Thus, we recommend that your budget take into consideration the increased needs of our students and increase funding to allow for the hiring of additional mental health professionals for MCPS.

More Funding to Combat Homelessness

We recognize and appreciate the County's efforts to work with the many agencies, non-profits and individuals that work with the homeless in the County. Yet, we believe more work must be done. On several occasions this past year, it was brought to the Board's attention that there have been an increasing number of homeless encampments in and around the downtown Silver Spring area. We believe this is a result of a lack of shelter availability and rehabilitation resources. We recommend that more funding be directed toward the establishment of employment assistance, outreach and rehabilitation facilities.



Maintain or Increase Funding for Safe, Affordable and Secure Rental Housing

We thank you for your devotion to ensuring that Silver Spring maintains a level of housing that is not only highly desirable, but also affordable to individuals of a wide range of economic means. The growing number of concerns by those who rent their homes, as well as the tragic events that have occurred over the course of this past year, has highlighted the importance of the County's role in advancing, quality, affordable and secure rental housing. We strongly recommend that the County Executive and Council to continue to invest in the welfare of its residents and advise that you increase funding, commensurate with the growing need, for renter outreach, education and organizing. We are confident that such support will help reduce indirect costs of unstable communities, including student achievement and senior welfare, while working to expand the health and prosperity for all our communities.

Maintain and Modernize Funding for Non-Profit Organizations

We advise the County to expand support non-profit organizations that make the Regional Area a welcoming and livable place. Non-profit organizations are a large part of why our Regional Area continues to thrive and serve as inspiration for the nation. During this past year, the Board had the opportunity to meet with a variety of Silver Spring-area non-profits to learn about their work. One concern we had was that there may, in some instances, be duplication in the services provided in some critical areas, while other critical areas are under resourced. We further advise more support for the County's partnership with the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative to direct scarce resources more effectively to programs shown to work, cognizant that outcome metrics may at times require flexibility in measurement and evaluation a reasonable timeframe, but nevertheless part of an evidence based budgeting program.

Sincerely,

[SIGNATURE ON FILE]

DeAndre MORrow
Chair, Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board

cc:

SSCAB Members
Reemberto Rodriguez, Director (Silver Spring Regional Area)