

July 15, 2024

Hon. Marc Elrich
County Executive
Montgomery County Government
Executive Office Building
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: *Damascus High School Automotive Tech Program*

Dear County Executive Elrich,

As you know, the Upcounty Citizens Advisory Board (“UCAB”) is one of the five regional citizens’ advisory boards created to hear from regional stakeholders and provide guidance to the County Executive.

On January 8, 2024, we held a meeting regarding the current Automotive Tech classes offered at Damascus High School that are slated to be eliminated with the up-coming Damascus High School renovations. We received a briefing from Board of Education member Grace Rivera-Oven (D-1), Damascus High School Automotive Tech Teacher Mr. Ortiz, and current and former students and faculty about this crucial program, which has been slated for termination upon the renovation of the School facility. All of our guests supported retaining the program.

This automotive tech program is one of three in Montgomery County Public Schools and has educated students with the important skills of repairing vehicles using deductive problem solving for over 40 years. Given the shortage of automotive technicians nationwide—with an estimated shortfall of 37,000 technicians across the country—and the long waitlist for comparable programs at other County schools, programs like these are more important now than ever.¹ Other industry officials have estimated it to be well above 60,000.² Several students testified to us that this program allowed them to go on to productive and lucrative careers in the automotive tech industry in the County, where their services support both their community and the local economy, as well as many students mentioning how the problem solving skills learned from this class helped in a myriad of other industries that they now work.

At a time when the federal, state, and local governments have all made clear that expanding trade education is a priority, we should be moving to increase the number of programs, rather than cut

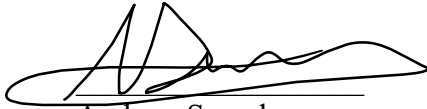
¹ See, for example, Victoria Lucas, *Henrico auto repair shop prepares for the worst as nationwide shortage of automotive technicians continues*, ABC 8 News (Sept. 11, 2023), <https://www.wric.com/news/local-news/henrico-county/henrico-auto-repair-shop-prepares-for-the-worst-as-nationwide-shortage-of-automotive-technicians-continues/>.

² Testimony of Mr. Harold Redden, of Fitzgerald Auto Malls, before the Montgomery County Public Schools Foundations, Inc.

them back. Governor Wes Moore has made expanding trade programs a priority of his education platform for Maryland.³

We encourage the County to do all it can, including working with the Board of Education, to ensure that the Damascus Tech Program remain a vital program and be preserved as part of the renovation plan for Damascus High School.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Saundry', written over a horizontal line.

Andrew Saundry
Chair, UpCounty Citizens Advisory Board

³ See, Rachel Baye, *Wes Moore's priorities for education includes more teachers of color and universal pre-K*, WYPR News (Jan. 17, 2023), <https://www.wypr.org/wypr-news/2023-01-17/wes-moores-priorities-for-education-includes-more-teachers-of-color-and-universal-pre-k>.