

Testimony before the Montgomery County Council

On the fiscal year 2010 Operating Budget

April 15, 2009

Good evening, President Andrews and Members of the Montgomery County Council. I am Kay Romero, President of Montgomery County Council of PTAs, and honored to speak on behalf of our fifty thousand members this evening. We appreciate this opportunity to tell you about our priorities for the fiscal year 2010 operating budget. I am submitting along with my testimony the MCCPTA FY 2010 Operating Budget Compact and our Resolution on FY 2010 Operating Budget Priorities developed with extensive input from local school communities and passed by our Delegates' Assembly. My testimony is also based on these documents.

It has become routine when we come before you in these budget hearings to begin by acknowledging that funding is limited, and hard decisions need to be made. This year resources are scarcer than ever. But many hard decisions have already been made. The Board of Education has forwarded a budget that includes program cuts and pay freezes. We would like to thank the public employees of Montgomery County, including MCPS employees, for giving up their previously-negotiated cost of living increases. We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the BOE to pare programs in a way that preserves class size and other academic priorities.

We support, at a minimum, full funding of the proposed MCPS operating budget. The budget you are now considering generally preserves current student/teacher ratios and supports special education and Middle School reform with the help of Federal stimulus funding. But it falls short in some crucial areas. This budget was prepared when severe fiscal constraints were expected, but the exact dimensions were not known. In part because of Federal stimulus funding, and in part because the State of Maryland is correcting a mistake it made last year's Thornton allocation, there are more State resources than anticipated when the school budget was prepared. The County Executive's budget substitutes state funds for local funds, while important school functions are being left unmet. The requested waiver of state Maintenance of Effort requirements potentially jeopardizes both this year's state funding, and next year's federal stimulus funding. We understand that County revenues are seriously depressed, and belt-tightening will be needed in all areas of the County budget. But we strongly oppose funding below the level of the Board of Education's requested budget. We urge you not to over-reach in substituting federal and state money for local money such that you risk losing both.

The unanticipated Thornton-related funds are in part non-recurring revenues; it would be unwise to use this portion for annual County expenses. The school system has many seldom-recurring expenses that would benefit greatly from these funds. In the wake of several recently-rolled out curriculum innovations, schools are behind in acquiring required supporting textbooks and other instructional materials. Many of our facilities need extensive repairs to roofs, restrooms, and heating and ventilation equipment. Security-related changes to entrances and surveillance systems are also needed. Spending the one-time make-up payment of FY09 Thornton funds on these items would be

consistent with both the needs of the schools and the requirements of federal stimulus money - without creating continuing obligations.

Academic supports, community outreach, and well-maintained buildings and portables continue to be major priorities for MCCPTA. There are cuts in positions in the MCPS budget that affect each of these areas. Because of the availability of state funds, we believe it is possible to restore some of these cuts. Our cluster coordinators will tell you about the effects of the proposed budget on each of their communities. It seems particularly short-sighted to cut positions from Maintenance and Plant Operations at the same time you are considering significant retrenchment in the capital budget.

Both school security and pedestrian safety are issues of growing concern in and around our schools. The MCCPTA Delegates' Assembly, after careful deliberation in local PTAs, has passed resolutions supporting more funding of educational facilities officers and crossing guards, which are part of the Montgomery County Police Department budget. The County Executive has proposed full funding for the Police Department. We hope to see full funding for Educational Facilities Officers and crossing guards.

Finally, full-time staffing of school health rooms is another formally adopted MCCPTA priority. We note some proposed cuts in health room coverage for summer school in your Public Health budget, as well as reductions in support of your school-based health and wellness centers, which we hope you will reconsider.

These are really tough economic times. We hope as you finalize your budget that you will remember Montgomery County Public Schools are not just a service for families for kids; they are the County's main draw for residents and business. This is not the time to dis-invest in our schools and our kids.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Kay Romero, President

Montgomery County Council of PTAs

Attachments:

FY2010 Operating Budget Priorities, October 30, 2008

- [MCCPTA FY2010 Operating Budget Compact](#)
- [Resolution on FY2010 Operating Budget Priorities](#)

[Resolution on Crossing Guards & Educational Facilities Officers](#), November 27, 2007

[Resolution on Health Technicians](#), September 26, 2006