TESTIMONY BEFORE THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY DELEGATION
JOINT PRIORITIES HEARING
NOVEMBER 20, 2006

Good evening Senator Hogan, Delegate Barclay and Members of the Montgomery County Delegation. I am Victor Salazar, Vice-President for Legislation for the Montgomery County Council of PTA's. I speak for over 50,000 parents and advocate on behalf of more than 138,000 Montgomery County Public School students to ensure that they are provided with the educational resources necessary to meet and exceed Maryland's high student performance standards. We value this opportunity to highlight our concerns regarding the funding of public education and school construction projects, upgrading portable classroom design requirements, and securing adequate laws for the care and protection of our youth and children.

I would like to begin this evening by discussing the funding of public education and address the challenges posed by the reintroduction of legislation during the 2007 session with regards to Net Taxable Income and the funding of the Geographic Cost of Education Index.

MCCPTA recognizes that Thornton State Aid Formulas distribute education funding to Montgomery County and other jurisdictions based on a combination of factors that include wealth, income and state income tax returns filed by September 1st. During the 2006 session of the Maryland General Assembly legislation was introduced proposing the utilization of net taxable income data at a later date which would have benefited over 20 Maryland school districts and resulted in an estimated loss of $20 million dollars to Montgomery County students in FY 07.

The passing of this legislation would have resulted in a step backwards for the educational needs of Montgomery County Students towards the expansion of full-day kindergarten, strengthening programs for our special education population, strengthening literacy programs for high school students to improve performance on High School Assessments, increasing translation services, adding ESOL parent community coordinators to increase parental involvement, and the hiring of staff to support the educational environment of our children.

MCCPTA supports full funding of the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act and the reintroduction of legislation that will fund the Geographic Cost of Education Index. During the 2006 session failed legislation to mandate the funding of GCEI resulted in a loss of $17 million dollars to Montgomery County Public Schools students. We join the chorus of public education advocates and organizations like the Maryland Association of Boards of Education and the ACLU of Maryland who have adopted positions supporting the funding of GCEI that provide increased State aid to counties like Montgomery County to ensure adequate funding for all Maryland Public School students by FY 2008.

As the delegation prepares for the upcoming 2007 session and the probability of the reintroduction of legislation regarding net taxable income we ask you to find workable remedies, like mandating the funding of GCEI, to offset the loss of public education funds associated with the adjusted date of wealth calculation and ensure that the needs of Montgomery County children continue to progress forward, while meeting the mandates outlined in the State Constitution and the Bridge to Excellence Act that ensure adequate and equitable funding for Maryland Public School Systems.

MCCPTA supports increased funding for school construction projects and permanently raising the annual state-wide baseline allocation of $250 million dollars that had been established by the Kopp task force report in 2003. With escalating prices for school construction materials in recent years funding allocations for school construction must be adjusted to keep pace with rising costs and ensure that modernization schedules remain unchanged. The Superintendent's recommended FY 2008 Capital Budget and amendments to the FY 2007-2012 Capital Improvements Program continues to build additions, modernize schools, and provide much-needed repairs and replacements to many of our outdated and overworked physical plants.

While it has been exciting to open five new schools this year for a total of eight new schools in the past three years, we have only completed four modernizations in the same three year period with none completed last year. Looking beyond the short term plan for more additions the modernization schedule is both too long and too slow. We are concerned that there is a one-to-six-year backlog of maintenance projects. And we are concerned that the current 48-year elementary modernization cycle, the 76-year middle school modernization cycle, and the 50-year high school modernization cycle makes it impossible to properly plan for school construction and life-cycle replacements.

MCCPTA supports facilities legislation that calls for continued funding of the Maryland Aging Schools Program and other initiatives that would direct funds to fill immediate systemic needs allowing flexible funding for repairs to older buildings.

In FY 2007 the Maryland Aging Schools Program provided $1.3 million dollars to Montgomery County. However, the backlog of MCPS maintenance projects totaling $40-50 million dollars for repairs and replacements means barely replacing major systems when needed, and leaves a minimum amount of funds for preventive maintenance in the budget. Schools awaiting modernization often endure substandard mechanical systems for many years, as it doesn't make sense to replace a HVAC system in a building that will be torn down in a few years. Unfortunately, as modernizations have been postponed, schools end up with band-aid repairs far too long and far too often.

MCCPTA supports legislation which raises portable classroom construction standards in which the design, construction, operating, and maintenance are cost-effective, enhance indoor air quality, and strengthen the protection of children. In recent years there have been incidents in Montgomery County and surrounding jurisdictions where portables were deemed unusable because they collapsed under the weight of snow, inadequate indoor air quality, and the failing health of students and staff.

In addition to raising portable construction standards legislation should require parental notification of environmental conditions and remedial actions, require appropriate and periodic testing and public notification of results of air, water, fungi, mold and other contaminants, and ensure that environmental site assessments of proposed sites are undertaken to evaluate health risks to children, youth and staff prior to installation.

MCCPTA supports legislation that implements necessary security measures for the safety of children and youth in school buildings and relocatable classrooms that include the mandatory registration of sex offenders. The recent ruling by the Maryland Court of Appeals last Wednesday which resulted in exempting homeless sex offenders from complying with the provision of the state sex offender registry leaves a gaping hole in the protection and safety of children and youth in the State of Maryland. We have contacted the State's Attorney's office, the State PTA and want to enlist your assistance to address this issue.

In closing, we appreciate the opportunity to raise these issues and welcome future dialogue. We urge you to continue to fund the educational needs of the country's 17th largest school district to ensure success for every student. We urge you to work with other delegations in Annapolis to increase the amount of school construction funding so that every student can attend classes in a school building or portable that is modern, safe and secure. We urge you to move quickly to secure laws that will keep our children protected and deter individuals who intend to do them harm.

Let the 2007 session of the Maryland General Assembly be remembered for providing the educational needs and protections needed by every child today and future generations to come.