

Testimony of Chris Standing, AFSCME, Montgomery College
Montgomery County Council
FY22 Operating Budget Public Hearing
April 8, 2021
7:00 p.m.

Good Evening, County Council Members. My name is Chris Standing, and I am the president of AFSCME Local 2380 at Montgomery College. I would first like to thank our institution's president, Dr. Pollard, for insisting that the employees of Montgomery College did not have to endure layoffs, furloughs, or forced early retirements. Through the College's fiscal management, the staff has been weathering the COVID-19 pandemic without the fear of financial ruin.

The economic impact of the pandemic on the County and the State cannot go unnoticed. This year, prior to our annual negotiations, we understood when the Board of Trustees and the administration explained that there were not to be any wage increases for FY22. We negotiated in good faith and we agreed not to have a General Wage Increase or any increase in the Education Assistance Fund. The other two unions—AUUP and SEIU—negotiated similar agreements with Montgomery College. We learned later that raises were approved for County employees. Meanwhile, the County and the State responded to the Covid-19 pandemic by requiring the College to make further cuts in the College budget. What are we supposed to garner from these actions? Are the employees of Montgomery College the sacrificial lambs so others in the County can benefit? What has been the result of our budget is that we have tightened our belts. We have to deal with higher insurance premiums. We are locked into a non-mobile retirement fund, and we are straining to provide services to one of the most diverse community college student populations in the country. We are unable to replace staff who have left or retired, which means we are asked to do more with less.

Montgomery College does not judge its students by what area of the County or neighborhood they come from, who their parents are, or who they know. We care about the whole person. MC provides remedial courses and supports to bring our disadvantaged students

up to where they need to be to engage in educational rigor. We provide more than coursework—we help our students to develop skills and plans to succeed. We do what we can to level the playing field so students can achieve their goals. Once these students have established an educational foundation, they can pursue their dreams through the educational opportunities offered by the College. As a result, these students are able to earn higher wages, contribute more strongly to the economy, and contribute more fully to the County tax base.

Montgomery College plays a role in every corner of every neighborhood, affecting every family in the County. MC enriches the County in a myriad of ways. We provide our facilities for the community to use as well as for elementary, middle, and high school students to come experience educational opportunities through various events. Currently, my colleague and I are working with Montgomery Green to provide a research experience to high school students by looking at microplastics in County streams. We have also been working with a high school student and Bethesda Green to establish a butterfly garden on the Rockville Campus. I know other MC areas have interactions with the area schools, but I cannot do their work justice.

The members of AFSCME feel strongly that if we are tightening our belts, then we expect the County Council to send the same message to the rest of the County. The College continues to hold student tuition down. However, the cost should not be on the back of College employees. With stagnant wages and an increasing cost of living, we will run out of patience, especially as we see others receiving raises. As we work together to get past FY22, the Council should not expect that every time they need to find more money, they take it from the Montgomery College budget. Responding to regulations, meeting students' needs for succeeding in basic classes in math and English, engaging in mentorships, improving the student classroom learning experience, and implementing the logistics—all of this takes many hands. We are a non-profit educational facility that welcomes and transforms anyone who has a dream. Please do not interfere with their dreams. Please help us to help them by continuing to fully fund the needs of Montgomery College in the coming fiscal years.