

Testimony of Sandra S. Landis
Montgomery County Chapter Leader for Start School Later
Montgomery County Council Budget Hearing
April 21, 2022

Good evening Council President Albornoz, Members of the County Council, and others here tonight.

My name is Sandra Landis, and I am the Montgomery County Chapter Leader of Start School Later (www.startschoolater.net), a national organization dedicated to ensuring school start times compatible with health, safety, education, and equity. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening.

I am here tonight, first, to applaud the action the County Council took this week to add \$8 Million in funding to establish wellness centers in every MCPS high school to help combat the teen mental health crisis. As we look for, and invest heavily in ways to address this, the importance of finding a way to establish healthy school bell times in this County for our teenagers should not be overlooked.

Establishing later bell times is fundamental to middle and high school students' mental and physical health and well-being. The National Sleep Foundation, [U.S. Surgeon General](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), as well as most medical groups in the country, [recommend](#) that secondary school start times begin no earlier than 8:30 a.m. due to biological changes that occur in adolescence when teens' need for sleep to support their emerging higher level brain functions increases, but their onset of sleep is delayed.

I am here tonight to encourage you to build on your recent action by also funding a comprehensive transportation study by an outside expert to evaluate all our transportation options in order to craft a cost-effective solution that could leverage our robust ride-on and metro bus assets, as well as our fleet of yellow school buses. By leveraging all our resources and by following the science, as we did in our response to COVID, we can better ensure the safety and wellbeing of our entire school community.

In this regard, I am echoing the request made by the MCCPTA Health and Wellness Committee, (copy attached) to you last month to allocate funds to conduct such a study.

I hope we can count on your leadership and activism to ensure that we are not building wellness centers with one hand to combat a problem that we are causing with the other, but rather that these centers will be used to address the needs of our teens and adolescents that can't be solved or avoided by allowing them the sleep they need.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PROVIDED FOR THE RECORD

(Not spoken in the interest of time)

Adolescents who get insufficient or poor quality sleep are more likely to report symptoms of depression, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts and attempts, irritability and impaired emotional regulation. If this isn't concerning enough, sleep deprivation is linked to two leading causes of death in adolescents: accidents (namely, [car crashes](#)) and [suicide](#) (Tefft, 2018; Lee et al.,

2012). Several studies demonstrate that adolescent crash rates not only increase significantly in earlier starting high schools, but also decline significantly after delays in school start times. Other research shows that later bell times help reduce aggression and gun violence. These are all problems that have touched us here in Montgomery County, more closely than any of us would have imagined. The good news, however, is that we can reverse some of this simply by implementing a bell time change.

Concerns about community impact are countered by experience from hundreds of schools that have delayed middle and high school bell times throughout the country. These experiences consistently show that community life adjusts to school hours, not vice versa, and reveal a myriad of feasible and affordable ways to delay middle and high school class times.