

League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC) Testimony to the Montgomery County Council

Re: the proposed FY 23 operating budget

April 15, 2022

The LWVMC through its study committees has comments on three aspects of the county's next operating budget:

Agriculture

- The LWVMC agriculture study committee is pleased to see that a senior engineering position has been added to the Office of Agriculture staff to focus on soil conservation and water quality protection.
- The reinstatement of the Agricultural Business Development Specialist position is also a positive step for agriculture in the county as we address climate change in a variety of ways.

Education

- The LWVMC is very glad to see that the County Executive has recommended funding almost the entire Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) budget request. As always, we are particularly supportive of programs for "at risk" students, and we recognize that now this includes many of our students who are still struggling with learning loss caused by distance-learning during COVID as well as other emotional and social challenges.
- The LWVMC is also pleased to see that MCPS continues to expand options to ensure that our students graduate from high school prepared for college or qualified for entry-level jobs in fields that offer opportunities for advancement and self-sufficiency.
- The LWVMC is delighted by the Council's creation of the new entity to coordinate early childhood care and education, and we support the funding for it.

Transportation

- The LWVMC transportation committee appreciates the support expressed in the budget for some funding for Ride-On Buses. We believe that in order to address equity concerns, local buses should remain free at least until after the new reimagining study is complete. For our upcoming elections, we have been

Testimony Re: the proposed FY 23 operating budget (cont.)

coordinating with Montgomery County Department of Transportation over bus access to Early Voting Centers. Keeping the bus free makes voting more accessible to resident voters, which we believe is a social justice issue.

- The LWVMC recognizes that many funds directly impacting and affecting residents who travel via transit, car, bike or as pedestrians are incorporated into both the capital and operating budget under Vision Zero. Everything the county does to improve the way roads and sidewalks are built and used is important. We recognize that beyond busing, which is part of the education budget, the county also should encourage safely walking and biking to school. It truly is up to the county to set this priority.
- The county also must wisely spend the money in the budget's General Services section and we therefore commend the county for consolidating more employees into county-owned buildings rather than rented or leased ones. We strongly support the county placing agencies and employees in every publicly-owned space that is near transit to encourage its use. Co-accommodation is dollars wisely spent.

Nancy Bliss & Vicky Stella, co-presidents