

**Oral Testimony before the Montgomery County Council for the April 20, 2022
Hearing on Fiscal Year 2023 Operating Budget**

Council President Albornoz, Council Vice President Glass and Council Members:

My name is Paul Holmes, father of two MCPS graduates and a long-time resident of Silver Spring. For most of that time, I have been proud of Montgomery County's so-called "progressive" traditions. In recent years, however, that pride has been tempered as I also have learned more about MoCo's troubling racial history, including: our 3 lynchings; our deep roots in segregation at schools, lunch counters and swimming pools; our redlining, racial covenants and other discriminatory housing practices; and also, our police misconduct. Too often, our county's actions, ill-advised decisions and policies have belied our preferred "progressive" moniker.

Such is the case with several aspects of the proposed budget for 2023. I want to register my position on three budget items that have deep racial equity and justice overtones:

- First, I strongly oppose the \$5.5m proposal for a new MCPD Community Resources Bureau. I'm all for more funding for summer camps and increased opportunities for our youth, but we can do that better through increased investments in qualified organizations like Montgomery County's Recreation Department. The proposed Community Resources Bureau is not about increased opportunities for our youth. Rather, it is a high cost and blatant sales-job, designed to launder and conceal police misconduct and MCPD's aggressive opposition to transparency and accountability. That proposal follows the same playbook that Marlboro, Camel and Virginia Slims used; sponsoring sports, entertainment and cultural events to brighten the brands' images, even as their products were disabling people and killing them.
- Second, over the past two years the county has made an all-too-timid effort to expand use of Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams to assist those experiencing behavioral health crises. In the face of overwhelming and compelling evidence demonstrating the effectiveness, safety and substantial cost-savings of such approaches, so far, the county has delivered only 3 weekday-teams and only 1 evening and 1 weekend team. Predictably, that lack of follow-through has defaulted to responses by police who are ill-equipped and who continue to put at risk the lives and safety of people experiencing mental health crises. The County must redouble its efforts to urgently and dramatically expand Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams and provide real 24/7 coverage for the whole County.
- Third, for years, this council and the Board of Education have known about the egregious and persistent need for student support services in MCPS; nurses, mental health practitioners, social workers, counselors, and specialists trained in trauma and restorative

justice practices. The County Executive promised that armed police would not be in our schools and the BOE pledged to hire 50 social workers. Both have reneged on those promises. MCPS students are hurting right now. They need help now and we cannot afford to wait years to implement the Wellness Center plan. If Montgomery County is serious about strengthening student safety and academic performance, then we need to keep police out of schools and greatly increase our investments in the other proven, more effective and less harmful approaches to school safety. I support Councilmember Navarro's proposal to urgently upgrade those support services.

We can and must do better to support the people of Montgomery County and to earn the progressive reputation.

Thank you.