



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Testimony**

**Michael Knapp, Chair, Board of Trustees**

**Montgomery College**

**FY23 Operating Budget**

**April 21, 2022**

My name is Mike Knapp. I serve as the Chair of the Board of Trustees at Montgomery College.

As the College celebrates its 75th anniversary, the Board is excited to have Dr. Jermaine F. Williams, our new president, at the helm to launch MC forward to the next 75 years.

Dr. Williams impressed the Board of Trustees with his passion for the mission and his commitment to educational excellence. He has focused his energies on improving access for students, as well as completion and post-completion success. He has paid special attention to mitigating social inequities for historically underrepresented people. His impressive record of leadership and achievement drew the Board to him as a leader who would fit the needs of the College in this critical moment.

This is a critical moment—the moment we begin to move beyond crisis management and find our new normal. It is also the moment for MC to reflect on its 75-year history and determine what that legacy portends for the years ahead.

As we begin to emerge from COVID, holding tuition flat for a third straight year is an imperative. We remain in unprecedented times and continue to make unprecedented decisions like not increasing tuition for three straight years, in an effort to support the communities we serve and send a strong message to residents that postsecondary education is within their grasp.

We also ask you to send a message to our faculty and staff who are key to launching MC past crisis mode and into the future. They remained agile, resilient, and mission-focused throughout this entire crisis. *Please recognize and appreciate them for this commitment and with a modest investment of \$3.8 million to help cover the costs of pay raises.* These funds are included in the County Executive's recommended FY23 operating budget.

I would note that as the Board has consistently done, we balanced the need for fiscal caution with the need to support our employees.

As a result, the planned pay raises for our employees are affordable and sustainable—*an average 3.5 percent total wage adjustment is quite modest by all comparisons.*

*Notwithstanding the decisions of other agencies,* MC employees received no addition to their base pay this year.

The Board is grateful to our labor organizations—AAUP, AFSCME and SEIU. Their members are committed educators and public servants who

sacrificed pay increases for this year. In doing so, our employees helped the College keep tuition flat this year.

That is why we seek your support for FY23 pay increases. Our employees earned this investment given their hard work and commitment to our mission no matter the circumstances. Without a second thought, they consistently put students first.

The College absorbed the costs of the FY21 pay raises, which were also modest.

Additionally, our requests for county support over the last several years have been quite spare. In fact, through conservative spending, fiscally prudent labor agreements, and other expenditure controls for wages, the College has been able to weather the fiscal impacts of enrollment volatility without the assistance of the County—all while not increasing tuition during these difficult times.

Additionally, we ask the Council to approve funding totaling \$3.3 million as recommended in the County Executive's proposed budget to stand up the MC East County Education Center. *An investment by the County to advance this initiative is imperative.*

The Council has long championed a College presence in the eastern region of the county, which exemplifies your deep commitment to access. You know the College can serve as an anchor institution for this underserved region.

Working as partners in this endeavor, we can open doors to opportunity, enrich the life of the community, and expand the College's capabilities to deliver the skilled talent the economy needs.

With the appropriation of \$3.3 million from the County, we can move forward with the Education Center and finally take this overdue first step, which the Council long desired, to make MC's presence in the East County a reality.

Please keep in mind that your investment in East County and our employees is an investment in our students—this budget keeps tuition flat for a third year in row.

I would like to offer an observation as I conclude. It is clear to me that to put the consequences of the pandemic in our rearview mirror and launch the next 75 years with a renewed commitment to our open-access mission, *we must come to a collective understanding of the root of the changing priorities and/or needs of Montgomery residents for postsecondary education.* Your help in such an effort would be most welcome.

That said, while we have more to learn, *we do know too many low income students are turning away from postsecondary education.*

As a result, the Board and Dr. Williams are firmly resolved to address enrollment challenges—to stabilize the College's revenues and, most importantly, to open MC's doors far wider to advance access to knowledge, facilitate upward economic mobility, and ensure all residents are included in the County's knowledge economy while closing workforce gaps.

With your help, the College's FY23 budget is a start on this effort. It preserves tuition at its current level, stands up an East County Education Center, and invests in excellence through our most valuable asset—the faculty and staff.

Finally, there is no better way to launch MC's next 75 years than with Dr. Williams at the helm leading the expansion into the East County.

Thank you and thank you to the outgoing members of the Council, especially Councilmembers Rice and Navarro. All of you have changed lives with your commitment to Montgomery College.