



Testimony of Payton O’Keefe
Montgomery College Performing Arts Student
Montgomery County Council
FY25 Capital Budget Hearing
February 6, 2024

Good evening, Council President Friedson, Council Vice President Stewart, and Members of the Montgomery County Council.

I am honored to speak to you tonight.

My name is Payton O’Keefe and I am a Montgomery College student pursuing a Performing Arts degree. I grew up here in Montgomery County not far from my family’s business, O’Keefe’s Apple Orchard, in Cloverly where I still live.

I came here this evening to thank you for supporting Montgomery College. And on behalf of the Performing Arts students, I ask that you please support MC’s capital budget and the renovation of the Theatre Arts building.

I have been involved in theater since I was a kid. In high school, my dream became clear: I want to become a professional musical theater performer. I knew I needed to pursue a college education, but the cost of a degree was overwhelming. Then I discovered Montgomery College’s amazing performing arts program and MC’s affordable tuition. I am on track to graduate in May with no debt! I plan to move right into musical theater professionally, pursuing my dream right here in the DMV’s theater industry.

MC’s performing arts program launches careers. I needed some growth before stepping into the professional world and MC has prepared me well with its terrific faculty. They have created a program that is diverse, welcoming, and supportive—we all want to see each other succeed. In the cut-throat world of theater, MC’s performing arts program is a family. It’s one of the only institutions where everyone, from techs to actors, all work together with support toward the same goal: a good production. It’s not about where you came from—it's about helping everyone reach their dreams.

The renovation of the Theatre Arts building will make this incredible program even better. The building needs some improvements. The Black Box, which is a space for movement classes and could be used for small performances, is small. A bigger Black Box or a second one would make a huge difference because we can’t have as many shows since we are limited in performance spaces. With more options of performance spaces, we could bring more people from the community to campus for shows. Additionally, better lighting in the arena theater and the Black Box will enhance our performances. Also, more spaces where small groups of students can study together would benefit all performing arts majors.

I can’t wait to graduate with my performing arts degree from MC in a few months so I can begin my theater career. Please support the renovation of the Theatre Arts building to help more residents, like me, succeed, earn a degree, and pursue their dream.

Thank you.