

**Testimony in Support of Montgomery County Public Libraries,
FY25 Operating Budget**

**Submitted by Frances Frost, President, Board of Trustees of
Friends of the Library, Montgomery County (FOLMC)**



Mission of FOLMC is to strengthen, promote, and champion Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) in cooperation with the work of the Montgomery County Library Board.

During National Library Week, April 7-13, 2024, we recognize that libraries are a place to connect with others, learn new skills, and to focus on what matters most.

Montgomery County boasts 22 library branches, including libraries for specific populations, like the Noyes Library for Children and the library at the Montgomery County correctional facility. We encourage that this county council fully support the County Executive’s proposed FY25 \$53.3 million budget for our county library system that will provide the financial backing to implement and expand initiatives to support MCPLs strategic plan to increase equity in access and opportunity.

“Ready Set Library” and ensure that our libraries are a place to connect, learn, and focus.

Ready Set Library

Fully funding the library budget will allow Montgomery County Public Libraries to continue to be a place to connect with others in our diverse county.

As our county continues to grow, it continues to become more diverse, as our over 1 million residents represent many racial groups, ethnicities, religions, and native languages. In 2020, 20.5% of county residents were Hispanic; over 18% were Black, over 15% were Asian; almost 41% were White, and other races made up 5.5%. Our libraries offer diverse materials to meet the needs and expectations of our residents, and this budget will continue to allow them to do so.

The proposed FY25 budget adds \$360,000 for World Languages collections, beginning with purchases in Spanish and Chinese. These resources are valuable to our county residents who are native speakers of these languages, but also those who are learning these languages in our schools, Montgomery College, and other opportunities in our community.

This budget includes an additional \$125,000 to provide more robust staff training and professional development opportunities to employees in direct support of the strategic plan.

The budget also includes support for effective outreach strategies. Intentional and effective outreach is key to promoting early literacy programs to families of our youngest residents and engaging residents in predominantly Spanish-speaking communities.

Each of these initiatives strengthens our residents' ability to connect to each other and further confirms the library as a place to build connections.

Ready Set Library

Fully funding the library budget will allow Montgomery County Public Libraries to continue to be a place to learn new skills.

The FY25 budget provides the needed resources to provide our youngest residents with more early literacy programs in English as well as other languages, preparing them for kindergarten and starting them on a path as lifelong readers and learners.

During the pandemic, libraries made strategic shifts to continue to provide reading, learning, and entertainment materials to all of us, as we were quarantined in our homes. Councilmember Jawando even started an on-line read-aloud program for our young people. Our libraries saw an increase in use of digital materials as library users looked for new ways to entertain and educate themselves. The proposed budget adds \$315,240 in the collection acquisitions budget to meet this continued demand for digital materials. This investment will allow county residents to continue to use the Hoopla platform to borrow e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines, e-music, and e-video. All for free.

Ready Set Library.

Fully funding the library budget will allow Montgomery County Public Libraries to be a place to focus on what matters.

In addition to a valuable resource for each and every county resident, libraries represent a freedom that so many of us enjoy. Freedom of access - to reading materials, learning resources, entertainment. Freedom to explore our world and expand our minds.

Today is recognized as the Right to Read Day by the American Library Association (ALA), as they denote the Monday of National Library Week. In its 2023 State of the Library, the ALA notes the unprecedented call for book bans and the assault on our freedom to read. *The Bluest Eye*, by Toni Morrison, one of my favorite books, remains consistent on the compiled list of banned books. There's probably a few books that each of you has read and enjoyed - a childhood favorite or on your bookshelf right now - that are also on this list. Our libraries continue to fight this fight, for us to have access to read books where we see ourselves, see our neighbors and see

our world, as it is and as it should be, allowing us to choose books for our children and families that reflect who we are and who we want to be.

The budget allows our professional librarian staff to continue this work, to allow them to focus on our freedom of reading, equity of access, and inclusiveness in our library system.

The proposed FY25 budget recommendations align with the goals of MCPL's strategic plan, designed to ensure Montgomery County residents can learn, grow, and thrive to their fullest potential.

On behalf of Friends of the Library Montgomery County, we encourage you to fully fund the FY25 \$53.3 million proposed budget for Montgomery County Public Libraries.

Ready. Set. Library!

Thank you for your time. Enjoy this National Library Week.

