

**Clare Song - Testimony in Support of Restorative Justice for FY 25 County Council Budget Hearing (April 8)**

Hello members of the County Council, my name is Clare Song and I am currently a sophomore attending Clarksburg High School. I am here to tell you that we need to add money to MCPS' proposed budget in order to maintain funding for restorative justice coaches. I have seen how important it is in schools. It may be a difficult budget year for the County, but in the end, we all want better, healthier students, and we can have it today if you vote for this proposal.

Two years ago, when I was in eighth grade, I was in my Global Humanities class. There were many in-class assignments and tests. There was one specifically where I was sitting next to my friend, and we started playing around and goofing off. The teacher then suspected us for cheating and gave us both a zero on the assignment, with no given chance to explain what really happened. How was this fair? Would he have believed us if we were given a chance to say that we weren't cheating? Defeated and hopeless, we had to take the zero despite the fact that we did not cheat. I know some of my friends who have had similar experiences. And I know we all know other students have as well. All of which faced consequences that frankly were not fair.

Restorative justice is a mindset and philosophy towards positive and inclusive school culture and focus on relationship building. If the teacher used a restorative justice approach, he could have given us a warning first, or again, asked us why we were behaving that way. Restorative justice coaches are necessary because they help implement these practices with teachers, students, and administration at the school level. This dedicated professional has the capacity to rethink and implement new systems for our school. With their help, I think we would have been able to find some solutions and both my friend and I could have a stronger say in our actions.

You, as members of the Council, face a choice today. We can leave things the way they are, or invest in a better way. I hope today you take the time to think through all of the students who could benefit from a different approach, led by a caring professional, as well as rethink our systems that we know aren't exactly right. Please add money to MCPS' proposed budget so that we can keep the same level of funding for our restorative justice coaches. Thank you.