

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Doneby Smith. I'm here on behalf of the Green Sanctuary of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring, a participating member of the Montgomery County Climate Coalition. While we support the Coalition's testimony generally, I wish to specifically urge the Council to include \$300,000 in the FY25 budget for public engagement on climate issues, rather than the \$130,000 that the Executive's budget has allocated and to reallocate an FTE to be dedicated to climate communications.

Respect for the interdependent web of existence is a core Unitarian Universalist principle, and I don't have to tell this Council that climate change is an emergency. However, there is only so much that can be done through legislation and regulation alone - all our residents must **be motivated** to make daily climate-smart choices. And in fact, the County has many programs addressing both mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change, implementing the Climate Action Plan directly or indirectly.

Surveys tell us that nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of our County residents think people should do more to address climate change. Unfortunately, too few residents are aware of all the county is doing, or how to avail themselves of some of those programs, or what they themselves can do to help solve the climate crisis.

Our research has revealed that the County's primary approach to engaging the public has been to offer information, which is necessary, **but studies show it is insufficient to motivate the behavior changes** that are needed.

What is needed for robust public engagement is, first, a visible campaign raising awareness, much like what was done for the Covid pandemic. In addition, we need a well-researched, tailored strategy that resonates with different population segments, removes barriers to action, highlights benefits, and **spurs them to action**.

There are evidence-based methods and tools to develop such an approach, involving research that includes focus groups, surveys, pilots, and evaluation. Following a well-vetted process produces better outcomes with a good return on investment - **but it requires resources upfront**. That is why we feel that the \$130,000 earmarked in the current budget will not be enough to produce the needed results.

Like so much around climate change, we can pay now to stand up a robust public engagement effort that motivates our county residents to act or we can pay later to deal with climate impacts for which our neighbors are ill-prepared.