

JoShifrin_FY25Budget_Support
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MONTGOMERY COUNTY FY25 BUDGET TESTIMONY

My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of Bethesda in District I.

I am requesting that the County Council add funding to the proposed MCPS budget to restore the previous years' staffing for restorative justice, including 9 Restorative Justice Specialists and all stipends for Restorative Justice Coaches in all secondary schools.

Jewish tradition teaches that the only way to atone for a sin committed against a person is for the wrongdoer to understand their mistake and ask forgiveness of the person who was wronged (Mishnah Torah, Repentance 2:9). Removing a child from their community and from school and forcing them into the prison system does not help them understand their mistakes, and allows no room for repentance. It also does not allow the person who was wronged to see the wrongdoer being held accountable. A thriving, fully-funded Restorative Justice program in Montgomery County Schools would allow for repair, restoration, and a stronger community.

Each one of us deserves to feel physically and emotionally safe and secure in order to learn and grow as people. Our public schools are a reflection of our community: they contain students of various races, abilities, and genders each of whom mature at their own rate. Punitive discipline alienates and isolates students. Rather than improving their behavior, it can intensify and worsen their attitudes toward school. Continuing to implement a Restorative Justice program will enable our students to enjoy a more inclusive, stable, and positive environment that fosters understanding and better communication, and provides them the opportunity to repair harm. It offers a forum to both resolve conflicts and hold people accountable for their actions within the school community.

In schools around the country –e.g., Denver, San Francisco, Oakland, Minneapolis, and Chicago, among other cities– where Restorative Justice programs have been implemented, fewer students have been suspended, expelled, and/or referred to law enforcement and, at the same time, students and educators report a more supportive and stable learning environment, healthier relationships between students and teachers, and a reduction in racial disparities in school discipline.

I urge the County Council to support the above funding request.