

## **Junee Kim - Testimony in Support of Restorative Justice for FY 25 County Council Budget Hearing (April 8)**

Good evening to the county council. I am Junee Kim, the co-president at Watkins Mill for the sophomore class council and President for Young People for Progress. I am here to ask for the council to add funding to the proposed budget, so that the extra funding is used to maintain the current restorative justice coach stipends.

I would like to begin by sharing my experience with restorative justice. RJ is a set of culture-shifting practices that allow students to repair harm and improve relationships through better communication.

Last year, we had repeated conflicts between our teacher and us, the students. This issue caused so much tension that both the students and the teacher were mentally exhausted after every class. To resolve this issue, our teacher decided to implement restorative justice circles every Monday so that we could share our voices. We had two restorative justice coaches to help rekindle the relationship between the students and the teacher. If our teacher tried to handle this situation by herself, it wouldn't have been effective because the neutrality in RJ circles allows for an unbiased perspective that can help guide the conversation. Also, without these restorative justice circles, our problem would've snowballed into a much more serious problem that would have impeded our ability to learn.

Restorative Justice was the key to resolving this conflict because it addressed the root of the problem: that students felt mistreated and that the teacher felt disrespected. This approach took away the need for short-term, punitive punishments such as suspensions and detentions, which do not address the underlying problem. We were able to come to a more effective and lasting solution.

Restorative justice is proven to decrease the school-to-prison pipeline as well. The Maryland Commission on School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices found that schools in Maryland are too reliant on a "zero tolerance" policy<sup>1</sup>. This policy can make the school environment worse and might even hurt students. So why is it that MCPS is cutting funds on something that helps combat the reliance on zero tolerance policies? The Commission found that this policy affects students of color and students with disabilities more than others, leading to an increased number of these students being removed from school and entering the criminal justice system.

Investing in RJ positions is not just a matter of improving the school environment; it's about enhancing the educational experience for our students. It's about acknowledging that every student deserves a safe space to learn and grow, free from the fear of bias or discrimination. I strongly urge the council to add extra funding to maintain restorative justice coach stipends, **not** cut them. This is not just an investment in our schools, but an investment in our future. Thank you for your time and consideration. Have a wonderful evening.

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<sup>1</sup> *Report to the Maryland Governor and General Assembly pursuant to House Bill 1287 (2017) Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices.*  
<https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/AAEEBB/CommissionSchoolPrisonPipeline.pdf>  
(2017)