

**Setyana Bika - Testimony in Support of Restorative Justice for FY 25 County Council Budget Hearing (April 9)**

Hello, my name is Setyana Bika and I am a sophomore at Wheaton High School. I urge the County Council to add funding to the proposed MCPS budget, in order to maintain the Fiscal Year 2024 funding for restorative justice specialists and coach stipends, not cut it.

I initially didn't know anything about restorative justice, or RJ, but I began to learn more in my work to improve school climate with Young People for Progress. When I first heard about RJ, I was skeptical. I thought that if restorative justice isn't widely known, then it just wasn't important. But as I learned more, I realized I have been applying RJ practices, like personal accountability, into my academic life. I'd like to share some words about RJ from someone who also practices it at my school.

Last Wednesday, I had the opportunity to interview Wheaton High School's former restorative justice coach, Mr. Bolton. He taught in MCPS for 18 years and at Wheaton High School for 5 years as an Honors Biology teacher. He said that a school is like a sports team. All of us, the students and teachers as well as the players and coaches, have certain roles and expectations. However we can't work together efficiently if some of us get kicked out aka suspended from the team. It's important to create a culture of trust and open, honest communication to prevent misunderstandings and conflicts.

Restorative justice also requires a level of personal accountability. Continuing with the sports analogy, say you didn't stretch well during a warm-up, which may cause you to fall and get injured during the game. That should be on you, right? Although a player is ultimately responsible for what they do with their body, a good coach can spot a bad stretch as you are doing it and help you correct yourself. An ineffective coach wouldn't even notice the bad stretch, or even worse, notice and leave the problem unaddressed. If this was a problem in a classroom, the restorative justice coach could get all the parties together, the teachers, the students, and their parents, to better understand how they contributed to the unwanted outcome and how they can avoid it in the future. Restorative justice is the key to student self-sufficiency and agency—as they have the opportunity to proactively make a change with new understanding and a better relationship with their schools.

Teachers need restorative justice to advance racial justice at MCPS. We students need restorative justice to resolve conflicts and make school a place that we want to go to every day. We need you, the County Council, to fund RJ so that we can succeed. Please add funding to the proposed MCPS budget, so that we can keep the Fiscal Year 2024 funding for restorative justice specialists and coach stipends, not cut it. Thank you for your time.