



Democratic Socialists of America

Montgomery County, Maryland

April 9, 2024

Olivia Delaplaine
Takoma Park, MD 20912

Testimony on FY25 Montgomery County Operating Budget

My name is Olivia Delaplaine, I am a resident of Long Branch/Takoma Park in District 4. I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Montgomery County branch of Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America in support of funding for renter protections and holistic school supports for educators, school staff, and students in the FY25 county budget.

Montgomery County DSA has 450 due-paying members in the county, with our membership ranging from high school students, young adults, parents, and retirees, all dedicated to furthering social and economic justice in our county. We are a member organization of the MORE Network Housing Committee and Decriminalize Montgomery County Coalition.

We are supporting the following elements of the FY25 County Operating Budget:

Support the proposed funding to implement rent stabilization

- We are thrilled that the Council has passed historic rent stabilization that, once enacted, will protect thousands of renters from predatory rent increases. We were proud to be among the organizations working with the council to pass the legislation in 2023.
- The legislation will only be as successful as its implementation: the County Executive's proposed funding to create a new Rental Housing Division in DHCA and to add staff to the Office of Landlord Tenant Affairs is an important step to ensure the successful implementation of rent stabilization for landlords and tenants alike. *Please support the proposed funding for rent stabilization implementation!*

Support funding for homeless shelter capacity, eviction protection, and rental assistance

- We join our partners at Shepherd's Table and Jews United for Justice in supporting the *\$2.9 million in the draft FY25 budget to increase homeless shelter capacity as well as the \$2.6 million in additional funding to continue motel shelters.*
- We urge the Council to significantly increase the funding for the new Eviction Prevention Team, currently allocated at \$841,966. This team, whose members will come from the staff that gave out ERAP funds, is being reduced from 28 staff to 8 staff. As currently funded, this team will have neither the staffing nor the

resources to help residents who are facing eviction. *We urge the Council to increase funding for staffing and to provide dedicated funds to directly assist families at risk of eviction.*

Fully fund the proposed MCPS operating budget to honor union contracts and student needs:

- Earlier this year, the superintendent proposed an MCPS budget that would honor union contracts with educators and other school staff. However, the County Executive's draft FY25 budget falls short of fully funding the Superintendent's requested budget.
- We join our union partners representing educators and other school staff - MCEA and SEIU Local 500 - in asking the County Council to *fully fund 100% of the proposed MCPS operating budget to honor union contracts, adequately staff our schools, and support students' needs.*

Add funding to the proposed MCPS budget to restore previous years' staffing for restorative justice, including maintaining all current Restorative Justice Specialists, and all stipends for Restorative Justice Coaches in every school.

- Restorative Justice practices have been shown to reduce the rate of repeat offenses (including drug use and harassment) in over 80% of cases. And as of October 19, 2023, in these focus Restorative Justice schools there was a 41% decrease of Black suspensions. These are promising results when it comes to reducing racial disparities in school discipline. ([Source](#), p3)
- The schools' RJ Program needs time to grow and mature. Only 3% of MCPS schools have reached the level of "mature" implementation of restorative justice practices ([Source, p 3](#)). The RJ Program remains misunderstood and underappreciated, in part because of insufficient communication about the Program's effectiveness. But we know that these shortcomings can be fixed with County full funding and MCPS leadership's commitment to build accountable, supportive communities for our students to thrive and avoid being trapped in the schools-to-prison pipeline, as our local data have shown.
- Montgomery County DSA therefore joins our partners (Young People for Progress and the Decriminalize Montgomery County Campaign) in urging the Council to *add funding to the MCPS budget to maintain the current staffing and stipends for Restorative Justice Specialists and Coaches.*
- This funding is a proactive investment in student success, and has been proven to mitigate the need for high spending in reactive measures like referral to the juvenile justice system.

We urge the County Council to support the above funding requests to protect renters, students, and families in the county.

With appreciation,

Olivia Delaplaine

Chair, Montgomery County Democratic Socialists of America Branch Steering Committee