

Mary Kathryn Crawford
Resident of Olney, MD
Montgomery County Resident since 2011

Regarding: FY25 Operation Budget

My name is Mary Kathryn (Kate) Crawford and I am a concerned Montgomery County Resident, mother of two daughters, and a life-long athlete. This testimony is to ask that you **fully fund the Montgomery County Recreation Department's Budget and provide additional funds to the Recreation Department so that they may support the expansion of youth sport.**

Youth and high school sport formed my identity as a child and adolescent. I participated in sport year round, earning 11 varsity letters, all-county honors, and multiple championships during my high school career. However, it is not the win-loss records or accolades that I remember from these experiences, but rather the sense of pride, life-long friendships, functional body orientation, mental resilience, and personal confidence that I developed as a result of experiences that have been the most important outcomes of sport participation for me. As a mother of two girls, I hope that they too develop a love of sport participation and are afforded these same opportunities for personal development.

In addition to my personal experience as a sport participant, I hold a Bachelor's degree in Kinesiology, a Master's Degree in Sport Psychology, and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration, Student Affairs, and International Education Policy. I also am a Certified Wellness Practitioner, with expertise in physical activity, sleep, and mental health. I work in higher education, specifically in the field of collegiate recreation, and have dedicated my career to providing sport and recreation opportunities to young adults. My research expertise lies in the benefits of sport participation for developing a sense of belonging, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and identity development, particularly for young women and non-binary individuals. I was also selected to serve on the Montgomery County Sports Advisory Committee and have been heavily invested in efforts to better understand the state of sport participation in our County for the last 11 months.

I am concerned that the state of youth sport in our County (and country) is not currently meeting the needs of all youth in our community, and strongly believe that more funding is needed to ensure every county resident has access to safe high quality sport and recreation experiences. Through personal, professional, and volunteer experience, I have come to understand both the value of sport participation and the ways in which we are falling short of serving residents, particularly youth, in our County. Further, it is widely accepted (US Surgeon

General, 2021) that we are facing a growing mental health epidemic in our County, particularly among children and young adults. Anxiety and depression are the two most common diagnoses among youth in this country. While there are many avenues to addressing mental health, a recent research study (Singh, et al., 2023) highlights the value of physical activity in combating symptoms of mental illness. According to the comprehensive meta-analysis, exercise is 1.5 times more effective than medication and talk therapy in treating symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Combining the benefits of exercise in combating mental health with the known benefits of sport in building a sense of belonging, among other pro-social outcomes, Montgomery County Recreation is uniquely situated to serve County residents in their personal journey towards well-being. Further enhanced sport opportunities, has the potential to improve mental health outcomes among County residents, reduced juvenile delinquency especially in cases related to mental health, and enhanced community cohesion. However, the Recreation department simply cannot provide adequate service to the residents of this county if they are not fully funded and cannot count on consistency in funding from year to year.

I firmly believe that investing in youth sports programs through the Montgomery County Recreation Department is not only a sound financial decision but also a moral imperative. By fully funding the proposed Recreation budget and allocating additional resources, we can ensure that every child in our community has access to the life-changing benefits of sports participation. Together, let's build a healthier, happier future for Montgomery County's youth.

If you have questions regarding this testimony, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at [REDACTED] or my cell at [REDACTED]

Sincerely
Mary Kathryn Crawford

Citations:

US Surgeon General's Advisory (2021). Protecting Youth Mental Health. [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf)

Singh B, Olds T, Curtis R, et al. Effectiveness of physical activity interventions for improving depression, anxiety and distress: an overview of systematic reviews British Journal of Sports Medicine 2023;57:1203-1209. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2022-106195>