

Hello my name is Jason Makstein and I run the blog Moderately MOCO but today I am testifying as a community advocate about various items in the operating budgets. My focus will be on education and public safety.

Education

The first education item I would like to speak on is the dissolution of the Darnestown ELC's autism program. According to a recent Moco360 opinion piece (<https://moco360.media/2024/04/06/opinion-cutting-mcps-autism-program-is-detrimental-mistake/>), It is the only program of its kind and offering children support not available in their home schools and this dissolution comes with a significant reduction in staff and a marked increase in the scope of the learning center's responsibilities. Now is not the time to reduce special services required by our most needy students who were also greatly impacted by the Covid closures.

My next comment is more of a general one, as MCPS has had issue after issue in central office with of course the Beidleman scandal (<https://moco360.media/2023/10/17/mcps-catch-up-what-we-know-about-the-beidleman-investigation/>), multiple cases of fraud in the transportation department (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/10/04/montgomery-schools-transportation-investigation-audit/>, <https://moco360.media/2022/03/11/investigation-continues-into-financial-improprieties-in-mcps-transportation-department/>, <https://wtop.com/montgomery-county/2021/11/financial-improprieties-probed-in-montgomery-co-schools-transportation-dept/>), issues with electric buses (<https://moco360.media/2023/10/18/after-purchase-of-diesel-vehicles-activists-worry-future-of-mcps-bus-electrification-is-on-fumes>, <https://wjla.com/features/i-team/school-bus-electric-buses-montgomery-county-public-schools-maryland-joe-biden-administration-mcps-highland-electric-fleets-transportation-fuel-epa-gas>), tons spent on lawsuits both on lawyer fees (<https://wtop.com/education/2024/01/montgomery-co-schools-spent-500-more-on-legal-fees-this-fiscal-year-report-says/>, <https://wjla.com/news/local/montgomery-county-public-schools-principal-joel-beidleman-investigation-law-firm-jackson-lewis-payments-legal-fees-report-board-of-education-parents-coalition-inspector-general-mcps>, <https://thenationaldesk.com/news/americas-news-now/maryland-school-district-spent-half-million-on-legal-fees-amid-content-harassments-suits-montgomery-county-public-schools-wilmerhale-crisis-in-the-classroom-joel-beidleman>) and settlements (<https://montgomeryperspective.com/2024/03/25/did-mcps-settle-with-beidleman/>, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2024/03/15/mcknight-separation-agreement-montgomery-county-schools/>), issues in the office of well being (<https://moderatelymoco.com/return-amidst-controversy-navigating-the-reinstatement-of-dana-edwards-to-mcps-chief-of-districtwide-services-and-support/>, <https://moderatelymoco.com/opinion-vanishing-acts-in-mcps-a-tale-of-leadership-lost-and-found/>, <https://moco360.media/2024/02/01/principals-administrators-depart-as-mcps-faces-cronyism-accountability-concerns/>), low levels of career and college readiness (<https://montgomeryperspective.com/2024/04/01/mcps-shocking-performance-on-college-and-career-readiness/>), and continued increased spending in central office and admin positions while teachers have to use their own money for school supplies, paper, printing and other issues.

What I would like to see is more money going directly to the programs and staff working directly with students and less waste in central office as well as more oversight over spending by the County Council to see what are the pros and cons of each expenditure and to figure out where the waste is and reduce that to spend more efficiently on the programs with the biggest impact.

With savings, we need to pay special needs staff and para educators that deal with our neediest students more. These areas are always lacking and that's because they are not paid enough based on the difficulty of their jobs. These positions also decrease stress on general education teachers and allow those classes to continue to function with less interruptions by properly serving our higher need students. It helps those higher need students and everyone else as well.

Lastly, talking with my Elementary Schools PTA leaders and those at other schools, they support increases in critical staff and mental health support. There is often a focus on these supports at the Middle and High School levels but Elementary students become Middle and High School students and when we talk about these issues the sooner we get to them and get the supports they need, the cheaper and better it is for them in the long run.

Public Safety

Moving onto public safety, by far the biggest issue is staffing (<https://montgomeryperspective.com/2024/03/18/the-police-staffing-bomb/>, <https://montgomeryperspective.com/2024/03/19/police-union-speaks-out-on-staffing-bomb/>).

What are we doing to prevent staffing issues in the short and long term and what else can be done?

One major thing that would help is an external staffing study to determine the best way to redeploy existing resources as well as how to improve staffing issues in the future. The council should support data driven steps for recruitment, retention, and redeployment. Additionally, a data driven and methodical look at civilianizing what can be civilianized since they can be hired quicker and probably cheaper.

911 call center staffing is a major issue. Cutting vacant positions is not wise when there are many documented issues that could be helped by staffing those positions and average call time is increasing (<https://montgomeryperspective.com/2023/04/19/police-critically-understaffed-as-crime-keeps-rising/>). We could use a workload analysis to see how many positions are truly needed before cutting so many.

Lastly, The Police Accountability Board could use a complaint dashboard so the community members and the police can see what's going on which would help with establishing trust, transparency, and accountability in that process.

Thank you for your time,

Jason Makstein