

April 7, 2024

Testimony to Montgomery County Council

Re: Proposed FY25 Operating Budget

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC), through its various study committees, offers comments on the following aspects of the FY25 Operating Budget for Montgomery County:

Economic Development

- **The LWVMC supports developing a deep and diverse talent pool to further our economic development.** The current budget proposal appears to have a viable focus on ensuring that county residents acquire skills needed to succeed in the 21st century economy.
- **We approve the additional funding for WorkSource Montgomery to support the Summer RISE youth program and the programming at Montgomery County Correctional Facility** to help provide successful reentry opportunities for former inmates. We also applaud the funding for the new partnership between BioHub Maryland at Montgomery County and the Maryland Tech Council to train the county's workforce at a state-of-the-art and multifunctional facility.

Education

- **The LWVMC is pleased to see that the budget includes full funding of Montgomery College's request.** This is particularly important in view of the proposed reduced state funding for community colleges – and the crucial role that Montgomery College plays in making college affordable to our residents and in workforce training.
- **The League continues to strongly support the Blueprint for Maryland's Future** and its emphasis on strengthening and expanding high quality early childcare and Pre-K programs so that all children arrive in kindergarten ready to be successful learners. We also support programs that prepare students who are not college bound for careers in fields where there is demand for their skills and opportunity for advancement. Thus, we are very glad that this budget provides a significant increase in the funding for MCPS to enable its continued progress in implementing the Blueprint.

Housing

- As the number of households living in rental housing continues to grow, **the League is pleased to support the new Rental Housing Division** being created within DHCA to work with the Office of Landlord Tenant Affairs and focus on rental housing issues.
- **We support the addition of more housing code inspectors and the substantial increase in the number of their anticipated visits.** We continue to support the Housing Initiative Fund. As always, we wish you could increase its funding.

Parks

- **Data generated by Park and Planning is money well spent** as long as Montgomery County uses this information constructively. We hope to see it used to better understand the ages of our residents, what their living patterns are, where our students live, etc., before making decisions.

Parking

- **The League agrees that parking is an important tool for achieving public objectives of economic development and transportation management.** Parking policy requires a careful balance of rates and parking supply to encourage the use of the most efficient and economical transportation modes available; increasing as well as eliminating parking in specific places makes sense.
- **Adding security cameras in parking garages is an important investment** in security to make people more comfortable using garages.
- **The LWVMC appreciates the proposal to place solar panels on parking garages in the county;** we believe solar investments should be made.
- **Please note that residential parking times vary within neighborhoods** in addition to across neighborhoods. Consistency may make use and enforcement more efficient.

Transit

- **The LWVMC believes in the importance of transit and is pleased that the county is investing more in it.**
- **We support raising the salaries of transit drivers as part of this investment** and we look forward to seeing the reimagined changes that will be made to RideOn routes. Perhaps the county could increase the amount of advertising inside and outside our buses to raise more revenue.

- **We appreciate the careful examination MCDOT gives to every grant opportunity.**
The many grants MCDOT has applied for help reduce costs, which benefits the CIP budget in addition to the operating budget.

Transportation

- **The LWVMC would like to see traffic studies completed at a higher rate than 90%.** Not completing these studies in a timely manner adds to their cost.
- **As noted in the budget, the number of serious crashes in the county has increased.** We would like to see more time and effort spent on reversing that trend, perhaps with targeted enforcement.
- **The linear feet of sidewalks completed has dropped** from 37,000 to 25,000, which is the wrong direction if the county hopes to increase safety; as we become more urbanized, we should be adding more new sidewalks.
- **We applaud the number of street trees planted** and their survival rate; this helps improve our air and environment.
- **The LWVMC supports having more, not fewer, speed cameras, red light cameras and bus cameras.** The cameras work to make all of us safer as well as generating revenue.

Susan Albertine, President