

Ms. Ramatou Bakari- expanding prek

Good evening Council President Friedson and members of the County Council.

My name is Ramatou Bakari. We live in Montgomery Village. I am a mother of six children, from age 2 to age 21. I currently have children in Neelsville Middle School, Watkins Mill High School and Montgomery College.

Tonight, I am here to talk about the need for affordable preK for our 3 and 4 year old children in Montgomery County.

For my family, preK has supported my children's education and development. It has also been important for me because it gives me the opportunity to go to work. I work as a financial analyst at Bank of America.

I want universal preK in Montgomery County because what we have right now is too complicated where different parts of government are not talking to each other and it is left to the parent to figure things out. Let me give you an example so you might understand better.

I am so grateful that because of the childcare subsidy program and the working parents program, my two youngest children- Fatima who is 3 years old and Amir who is 2 years old- are in a daycare center. But even with this help, I still have to come up with nearly \$1000 each month to pay for daycare.

Please also understand that to be able to secure the childcare subsidies has not been easy.

- My first application was denied because a letter from my employer stating my salary was not enough.
- Then I was told that the font on my pay stubs was too small to read so it was denied again.

It's a headache and it's very stressful to go through these bureaucratic requirements. And that's for someone like me who speaks English and is comfortable with computers. Imagine what it is like for those who cannot.

It's not just me. There are many others. I have a friend who only qualified for 20 hours of care for her 4 year old son and that was after she was rejected the first time and I had to help advocate for her. For the remaining 30 hours of work each week, my friend has to take her son to the hair salon where she works.

It is not easy to be middle class in Montgomery County. A universal preK program would make it easier- it means that if I get a promotion at my job, I don't have to spend time calculating whether I can afford to accept the promotion.

The first step to getting us to universal preK is to come up with one collective vision and plan for expansion.

Councilmembers, thank you for coming to our universal preK meeting on March 17. Can you please ensure that MCPS, HHS and Children's Opportunity Alliance work together to come up with an expansion plan with targets in the next six months?

Thank you.

