

Montgomery County Council

FY27 Capital Budget Hearing

Monday, February 9, 2026, at 1:30 p.m.

Testimony of Katie Hecklinger, Chief Executive Officer of BlackRock Center for the Arts and Montgomery College Alumna

Good afternoon, Councilmembers.

My name is Katie Hecklinger. I am a lifelong Montgomery County resident, a Germantown neighbor, and the Chief Executive Officer of BlackRock Center for the Arts. I'd like to begin by thanking Council President Natali Fani Gonzalez for her leadership, and to acknowledge BlackRock's own rockstar Vice President, Marilyn Balcombe, whose UpCounty advocacy continues to strengthen arts, education, and community.

I'm also an alum of Montgomery College, and I've spent my career—as an educator and nonprofit leader—deeply committed to arts, education, and community building in this region.

I am here today to ask for your support of Montgomery College's capital budget, particularly the Theatre Arts building, where performing arts students learn their craft to become the future theatre industry workforce.

The future of Germantown—and Montgomery County—depends on the choices we make today—especially how we invest in education and cultural institutions that serve as anchors for community life, workforce development, and civic identity. That's why I want to express my sincere appreciation for your continued support of Montgomery College, a critical partner in Germantown's present and its future.

When education and culture work together, communities become more connected, more resilient, and better prepared for growth. These institutions don't just enrich lives—they shape place, attract investment, and help communities evolve with intention.

That vision was echoed in the Montgomery Planning Germantown Sector Briefing earlier this week. Residents shared that they love living in Germantown. They value its diversity, access to parks and shopping, and cultural institutions like BlackRock and Montgomery College. And they expressed a desire to see what already exists stronger—safer, better connected, and more accessible—as Germantown continues to develop.

Fresh off the presses! Germantown has again been ranked the most ethnically diverse city in the United States. Planning for its future must honor that diversity, and investing in shared educational and cultural spaces is one of the most powerful ways to do so.

Our long-standing partnership with Montgomery College shows what this investment makes possible. I know firsthand how transformative a strong performing arts program can be, for students and for the

regional workforce they will one day lead. That's why I strongly urge your support of Montgomery College's capital budget, particularly the renovation of the Theatre Arts building. Modern, accessible facilities are essential to preparing students for successful careers as the set designers, producers, performers, sound and lighting technicians in the theater industry. This investment helps ensure Germantown remains a vibrant, connected, and competitive place to live, learn, work—and let's not forget—play.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to investing in Germantown's future through education, culture, and community. Together, we can ensure that the future is full of opportunity.

I respectfully ask for your continued and full support of Montgomery College's capital budget to help bring this future to life.

Thank you.