

**Verbal Testimony of Save Our Silver Spring Schools
Before the Montgomery County Council
FY27 Capital Budget and FY27-32 Capital Improvements Program (CIP)
February 10, 2026**

Good afternoon. My name is Angie Kronenberg, and I am here today representing Save Our Silver Spring Schools – a group of hundreds of parents, residents, and community members that came together this fall to advocate for investment in Sligo Creek Elementary and Silver Spring International Middle School.

I'm here today not just as an advocate, but as a voice for the nearly two thousand children who walk into Sligo Creek and SSIMS every morning.

It has been over 25 years since MCPS first promised that it would renovate SSIMS, and over that time there have been many promises made that have been broken to fund a long overdue renewal for these schools. For too long they have been neglected to the detriment of their mission to educate students.

It is imperative that the County Council corrects the long-standing health and safety issues our students experience every day. This isn't about old paint. It's about fundamental safety:

- It's about Stairwell 7, a documented dangerous choke point where children have been repeatedly injured, yet it remains knowingly unaddressed.
- It's about the SSIMS band room and science labs, where the air is heavy with mold.
- It's about broken HVAC systems and failing gutters that make the classrooms where children learn unhealthy.

For two and a half decades, this community has been told "maybe next year." While other schools in this county celebrate ribbon-cuttings, our students have been forced to navigate a building that the Superintendent recently described as having reached the "end of its useful life." Yet, our children are legally required to spend seven hours a day there.

We are grateful the County Executive paused the plan to uproot our community. But a pause doesn't keep a child from being trampled in a stairwell between classes.

We are asking for \$60 million to finally address the most pressing health and safety issues MCPS has let grow unchecked. We are not asking for a state-of-the-art facility in this budget.

We are asking for a building that is functional and safe.

The longer MCPS waits to address these issues, the more expensive they will become. We have been told "next year" for more than 25 years. MCPS has known about these issues – including the horrific Stairwell 7 – for far too long.

Budgets are policy; they are our values. Our children are watching to see if you will value them in this budget.

Please, don't let something terrible happen in Stairwell 7 on your watch. Don't let another generation of Silver Spring students graduate from a building that MCPS knows is unsafe. Allocate the \$60 million to be spent in fiscal years 2027 and 2028 for SSIMS and Sligo Creek. Prove to our children that their health and safety is worth the investment.

Thank you.

A Community Rises Up to Demand Positive Change and Investment in Their Beloved Schools

As I contemplate how to properly convey how we arrived at this point, I must first implore you to review the over 70 email submissions to the County Council from teachers, students, parents, and community members that are in Attachment A.¹ These letters tell the story of need, of neglect, the number of years that PTA leaders and parents have begged for help to ensure their children are in a safe environment conducive to learning. They have joined SOSSS to respectfully request that the County Council do what MCPS has refused, and that is to make a major investment in our schools of \$60 million to address safety and health issues in fiscal years 2027 and 2028.

I too had a journey with these schools when my children attended them. From fall 2007 through spring of 2019, my two children attended SCES and SSIMS. During that time, SSIMS was already in desperate need of repairs. I was told investment is coming, it just takes time, and I thought this is a temporary situation because the district leaders have said we're in the queue for a major investment to correct all the issues any building would face after decades of use. Once my son graduated from SSIMS, I passed the advocacy torch for these schools to the new parents. But the calls from parents and community members about MCPS' plans to shutter our schools and turn them into holding schools had me rushing back to help. I knew MCPS' plans were not in the best interest of our students and our community. And I wondered, how did it come to this?

Imagine my surprise as I communicated with Doreen Paster, the first SCES PTA President—who was intimately involved in the planning and opening of both schools in the late 1990s. Her testimony is in Attachment A, and she lays out that at the time the buildings were being converted from Blair High School to SCES and SSIMS, SCES received investment to turn it into an elementary school; however, there wasn't money or time for SSIMS to be renovated, and MCPS said that they would make such an investment soon:

Further, I was very involved in the creation of these two schools and was the founding PTA president at SCES. At the time, it was made very clear to the community that while there was not sufficient time or funding to properly renovate/repair SSIMS just then, the plan was to make minimal fixes and then to prioritize the school for a fuller renovation in the near future. That was in the late 1990's, over a quarter century ago. The repairs were not done. The school didn't even get a proper name sign on it until last year.

Ms. Paster further states:

This is just disgraceful. What kind of message do you think this sends to the students of these schools? Do you think they don't notice when they visit other schools that are in much better condition? Others can give more graphic accounts of the issues that threaten health and safety every day. How would you feel if your kids went here?

¹ Due to the size of the Attachments, they may be accessed here: [2.10.26 County Council Testimony and Attachments - Google Drive](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/21026CountyCouncilTestimonyandAttachments-GoogleDrive).

It's mind-boggling that I have to say this, but... the schools must be made safe. \$60M is the bare minimum required for student safety.

Please allocate this funding to ensure the health and safety of our students when they are at school.

That describes the beginning, and hopefully the end where the County Council does the right thing for the students and provides a \$60 million line item and conditions it upon MCPS assigning us a project manager to work with a committee of PTA presidents, our principals, and SOSSS, and completing the most basic work that is needed. Please see our letter dated January 29 as Attachment B that describes two paths for funding the work—an addition to the budget or alternatively transferring a portion of three line items in MCPS' budget to a line item specifically for SCES/SSIMS.

But there is a very important middle of the story that is absolutely necessary to fully understand that the County Council truly should be funding a complete renewal/renovation at this time. MCPS indicated such a renewal would cost \$240 million—which is approximately what a new elementary and middle school cost to build. Yet, MCPS after decades of promising us investment, has proposed to shutter our schools. This was dressed up as “investment in Silver Spring,” and we were told we would get a new SCES, our middle school students would be bused to two new larger middle schools—Eastern Middle and Sligo Middle, and our current school facilities would be used to hold other schools’ students during their renewals/rebuilds—potentially for up to two decades.

The cost of this plan? \$281 million. (Note: that's more than \$240 million to renew SCES and SSIMS.) And as a bonus? There would be no guarantees that SCES actually would be built in and for our neighborhood (only two potential sites in our catchment and one is a beloved park), and the school district plans to undertake a countywide elementary school boundary review so we may not actually be zoned for the new SCES. The other result? Our children would lose their walkable schools, and we would get dozens and dozens of buses into our two lane neighborhood streets for up to two decades as children from other areas are bused into our neighborhood, and our children are bused out. So much for Thrive 2050 or for that new Purple Line being used for the SSIMS students who currently take the Ride On buses. (Note: MCPS was heavily involved in making sure that we'd have the Purple Line stop in front of SSIMS so the children could use it. Of course, that didn't stop MCPS from arguing that their plan to shutter our schools also was about their new Purple Line safety concerns. Important note to MCPS: check the history of your prior positions before you make inane arguments.)

In response to this ill-conceived plan to shutter our schools that did not involve ANY community engagement, over a thousand people signed our petition to stop MCPS. Almost 200 people filed letters with MCPS and the Board of Education during its truncated process, and not one of our community members was granted permission to be heard on the day of the Board vote for the CIP. Nevertheless, two Board members were willing to make changes to the proposed CIP that would allow for more community engagement, and a number of council members were willing to weigh in that this is not how we conduct policymaking in Montgomery County. For that, we were

grateful, but it didn't change the outcome. MCPS' CIP, if funded as proposed, would turn SCES into a holding school in 2029 and SSIMS in 2030.²

But the surprises were not over. Just before the holidays we learned that MCPS was proposing to speed the process to make the legal determination to "close" SSIMS. Parents, teachers, and community members would have just a few months to try to persuade the Board that this premature decision would have negative consequences. It would make SSIMS a lame duck for the next four years (potentially driving teachers and students away from the school while it would still be operating as a neighborhood school), and the decision would be made before MCPS would even know whether the County Council would be willing to fund the closure of the schools (i.e., move the students to other schools). In response, SOSSS called for a delay of such a disastrous decision, and we were fortunate that a number of council members agreed with us and weighed in with the Board. In response, the Board voted against an early, truncated closure decision process for SSIMS. While there was relief, MCPS' proposed CIP was before the County Executive, and it was possible that he'd accept their plan and fund the closure of our beloved, walkable schools.

As a former teacher, County Executive Elrich quickly understood what it meant to build new wings that would create large middle schools in the East County to accommodate SSIMS' students. He was concerned that schools that are larger than MCPS' policy allows for is an issue, but more importantly, the negative impact it would have on students' educational outcomes.³ He rejected the plan to build a larger Eastern Middle and Sligo Middle Schools. (He is proposing to fund a rebuild of a much-needed new Eastern Middle School.) He also stated his objection to closing SSIMS without proper community engagement, and he rejected the plan to build a new SCES with the impending countywide elementary schools boundary review, noting that it should wait until the countywide elementary school boundary study is complete "so that all available options to balance enrollment across the system are understood and considered." He also stated his concern about "projects that increase capacity should be evaluated against

² To understand more fully our concerns with MCPS' plan, please see this column by Rebecca Aicher, a parent of SCES and SSIMS students, [Five Reasons MCPS's Plan for Silver Spring Doesn't Add Up - Montgomery Perspective](#); and this column by Mary Clare Glover, a parent of an SCES student, [Opinion: Closing downtown Silver Spring's neighborhood schools is a mistake](#). (Also provided in Attachment C.) MCPS has not addressed our concerns.

We also had SOSSS representatives request the various analyses one would expect MCPS to have conducted, such as traffic studies and holding school analysis. Responses directed us to the CIP and presentations of the CIP. No where does MCPS provide the type of planning analysis one would expect from a school district whose primary concern is the education of our children.

In Attachment D, I include communications from SSIMS PTSA concerning significant inaccuracies in the Facility Condition Assessment (FCA) and their request that MCPS amend the CIP and immediately address safety issues. Senior MCPS officials have yet to respond to the inaccuracies in their data, although they have indicated numerous times that they plan to do so. Indeed, in a call with me and other Save Our Silver Spring representatives on December 9, 2025, Dr. Taylor said that MCPS would respond to the correspondence and address the FCA inaccuracies.

³ Eastern Middle School would have the capacity of over 1500 students, while Sligo Middle School would have the capacity of over 1200 students.

declining enrollment projections.” Interestingly, he didn’t reject the four elementary schools’ proposed replacements in MCPS’ CIP (three of them contemplate increased capacity), but their funding for planning and design are 2028/2029, and construction in 2030/2031, and not early in the CIP like SCES. It’s possible these projects could be reevaluated in the next CIP review in two years. Unfortunately, the County Executive did not include any repairs for SCES and SSIMS at their current campus, and our wait for improvements continues.

MCPS also has not made any adjustments to its proposed budget to address our concerns. Indeed, when asked at the County Council’s Education & Culture Committee meeting on January 30 about the plans to fix Stairwell 7’s safety issues, MCPS made no commitment to address it and conceded that it has been a longstanding problem. We are quite concerned that without the County Council intervening and requiring MCPS to fund our schools and address the serious health and safety issues at SSIMS and SCES through its own \$60 million line item, MCPS will choose to further ignore our reasonable requests. While we would like to give MCPS and its leadership the benefit of the doubt, there has been an erosion of community trust due to the failure to engage with us in a manner that addresses the serious policy concerns we have raised to their closure proposal. Furthermore, just last week, the Superintendent announced his recommendation for the Woodward/Northwood boundary changes wherein SSIMS will experience a significant change in student enrollment from the loss of two elementary schools feeding into it—Forest Knolls and Rolling Terrace, with only a portion of Woodlin Elementary being added. As a result, the facility utilization for SSIMS is expected to decline from its current 81.2% to 55.8%.⁴ This is a much lower utilization rate than the options that were noticed for public comment. According to MCPS’ policies, utilization rates below 80% are considered underutilized and further exposes the school to future closure proposals. The message MCPS is sending is that the buildings are not worth saving, and they will not prioritize our schools for repair in this budget even though students are legally required to go to school there. Thus, we believe that the County Council must intervene to fund the necessary repairs.

In closing, I wanted to leave you with some quotes from the emails you have received over the last week asking for you to dedicate \$60 million to repair our schools, and also encourage you to read all of them in Attachment A.

- (1) My older son, now a 9th grader at Northwood High School, was once trampled in what was described as a ‘stampede’ by the school nurse in the now infamous Stairwell 7. Kids rushed down the stairs (a fight was breaking out), he fell backwards, and many kids ran over him. It was only thanks to a few friends that he managed to get back up. He came home with bruises in the shape of footprints on his torso. This is a cautionary tale for what might go wrong if a true emergency were to happen. Please consider allocating funds to fix the stairwell and address the other pressing issues the building is facing (including an HVAC replacement and mold remediation).

Tanya Primiani, parent

⁴ See Recommendation Data Tables at [SuperintendentRecWoodwardNorthwoodW](#).

(2) As a pediatric ER nurse, I am constantly worried about the myriad of unsafe conditions at SSIMS.

I was shocked to see water leaks and active mold growing in my daughter's science classroom during BTSN. I immediately reached out to Julie Morris with my findings and photos (attached below) - and concerns for asbestos as well as mold - and was dismissed.

My daughter witnessed the recent trampling incident at Stairwell 7 - this is after months and months of advocacy to correct the dangers. I led tours with BOE members Rita Montoya and Laura Stewart last April with concerns of this very thing.

Both of my children have also suffered through HVAC issues and the incompatible learning conditions. Both have had classes on the third floor during warm-weather months and have endured insufferable heat. My son routinely came home with the back of his shirt drenched after his afternoon class on the 3rd floor with no working AC.

Lora Elinoff, parent and Northwood Cluster representative

(3) My name is Natalia and I am a 6th grader at Silver Spring International Middle School. Silver Spring International Middle School means a lot to families in our community. Silver Spring International Middle School is a walking school for most kids and is near public transportation, which makes it easy for us. But there are some adjustments that need to be done to the school. The hallways are extremely crowded, and we are constantly getting pushed around. Additionally in Stairway Seven, there have been multiple occasions that kids have been pushed down or shoved into the walls because it's just too crowded. And sending us to Eastern and Takoma would just make those schools more crowded. Mold has also been found in the building and the school's furnace has not been running correctly, which has made some hallways 41°F. This has caused a pipe to burst in one of our hallways. So from you as our leaders of MCPS I'm asking you guys to include a \$60 million project line in the FY 2027-2032 CIP for Sligo Creek Elementary and Silver Spring International.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my voice and everything you do.
Natalia Torres-Rivera, SSIMS student

(4) My child's anxiety is worsened by the crowding in stairwell 7; In fact, the noise and jostling have at times made him reluctant to go to school. My child also skips lunch every single day and seeks refuge in the media center because the cafeteria is so crowded and loud. This obviously is harmful to his ability to focus and learn after lunch. We are also appalled by mold and HVAC issues in school.
Marcella Bombardieri, parent

(5) Since I am proud to work here and care deeply about our school community, I am profoundly worried by the physical conditions of our SSIMS building. I have long been documenting the conditions at the school, which include narrow halls & stairways that have led to multiple student injuries, soaring interior temperatures during the warmer months, and extreme temperature differences within the building which have led to moisture buildup and mold concerns.

Two of our stairwells are original to the 1934 building—which opened with 100 students—and are not designed to handle the traffic of our school's nearly 1000 students. At the bottom of Stairway 7 (originally a dead end, as the building only had one hallway, but now one of the major intersections within our school), the hall is so narrow (64 inches) that it cannot accommodate three people standing next to each other. I can touch both walls while standing in the middle of the hallway. This forces students to walk single file in order to have bi-directional student traffic. The stairway itself is also extremely narrow, and I myself know of a few students who have fallen and broken their legs due to crowding & pushing in the stairwell.

During the first few weeks of school, and again during May & June, we experience dangerously high temperatures in certain areas of the school building. In one instance, I experienced heat exhaustion while teaching because my own classroom climbed to 94 degrees while the outdoor temperature was 93 degrees. It is common for classrooms on the third floor to climb to 80 degrees and to sometimes exceed 85 degrees during these months. Although MCPS has worked on our HVAC systems, these problems recur every year.

It is not unusual for classrooms & hallways right next to each other to have temperature differences of 20 degrees or more due to the school's aged & overburdened HVAC infrastructure. During the high summer temperatures I mentioned earlier, Room 306B was at 86 degrees while an office across the hall (308) was at 69 degrees. As I write this email, another colleague's classroom is 67 degrees, but the hallway outside the room is 41 degrees. Earlier this week, the extreme cold within the building led to a burst pipe in that hallway which flooded a classroom and forced that class to relocate during this whole week. We do not know when that room will be usable again.

Gretchen Winch, teacher at SSIMS

(6) My office and classrooms are near what we call “Stairwell 7.” I cannot tell you how many times I have worried for the safety of students and staff traveling down or up that overcrowded stairway. We frequently have leaks in the building. Just this week our special education office flooded from the snow runoff.

Jaime Goldman, teacher at SSIMS

(7) I remember stairwell issues at SSIMS **from 20 years ago** that had to be addressed by rerouting and one-way-ing students... When I heard about Stairwell

7 recently I thought "That couldn't possibly be the same issue that my now 30-something kids had to deal with, could it?"

Why have these schools not gotten the attention they deserve... for decades?!?
Now is the time to step up and make these buildings safe for our students.
Kyle O'Connor, community member and former school parent

(8) My 7th grade daughter has shared horrifying stories of what it is like to try to move through Stairwell 7. Just days before the December incident she spoke to me about being yelled at, pushed, elbowed, and nearly falling. She said the kids can't help it, "it's crowded and everyone is just trying to get to class." I've also heard from teachers and kids about the leaking roof and mold in the band room and science wing. These students should be conducting experiments, not wondering if their health is an MCPS experiment!

Stairwell 7 at SSIMS needs to be fixed, and it can be fixed over the summer with a funding commitment and oversight from the County Council. Investing in proper HVAC solutions are crucial for the health of students and staff, and these solutions can be implemented with the County Council's direction.

Superintendent Taylor has refused to commit to investing in the health and safety upgrades needed at SSIMS and SCES for the current students and any future students. The students and staff deserve a safe place to go to school where they don't have to worry about being trampled in a stairwell.

Rebecca Aicher, parent and Northwood Cluster Representative

(9) I can say from direct recent experience that Sligo Creek ES is in desperate need of a new HVAC system. The second floor, in particular, can be uncomfortably warm in August-October and April-June. Teachers bring in their own fans, which are loud and don't bring much relief in terms of temperature or air quality. I have been hearing about the HVAC problem at SCES since 2019, and I'm astounded that it hasn't been addressed. I know from my own two children that it is difficult to learn in these hot and stuffy upstairs classrooms.

I am active in the SSIMS PTSA and have been a SSIMS parent since 2022, when my older son, now a high school freshman, started middle school. I remember that, in January 2023, there was a crowd surge at SSIMS that resulted in several students being injured in Stairwell 7. This was the last straw for many parents and the incident kicked off an advocacy campaign that resulted in new leadership at the school and a new gymnasium addition project. At the time, there was also money allotted for a second round of future renovations to SSIMS that was supposed to include a new Linkages to Learning space, new science classrooms, and some preliminary designs for an improved Stairwell 7. Unfortunately, as we learned in June 2025, the second round of renovations fell through.

Last month, there was another crowd surge incident at SSIMS resulting, again, in students being injured in Stairwell 7. It is hard to believe that I am going through this again, three years later, with my younger son. So much PTSA energy goes into advocating for badly needed safety improvements to our school that never get funded.

In October 2025, the MCPS Superintendent announced his plans to close SSIMS in 2030 and convert it into a holding school. He called the school "scary," "dangerous," "untenable," and he has also described SSIMS as a Frankenstein in other public presentations. First off, this kind of public pronouncement has a negative effect on our children. Their school is deemed "dangerous," but MCPS also seems to think that it is good enough for them, since even if SSIMS were to close in 2030, all of the kids who are currently enrolled (and some future cohorts, too) would have to attend school every single day in a "scary" building. This makes no sense. The Superintendent's logic makes no sense. SSIMS needs to be renovated and made safer, over the summer, for the students who attend SSIMS now.

The school has an amazing principal, a wonderful staff, and terrific students and parents. It enjoys the support of the surrounding community. It is a model of what Montgomery County should be in terms of diversity, walkability, partnerships, and infrastructure. The school has managed to excel in many ways despite years of neglect. But SSIMS should not continue to exist in a state of constant existential struggle.

Please keep SSIMS open, please keep Sligo Creek in place, and please include a \$60 million project line in the FY27-32 CIP for urgent repairs at both schools.

Thank you for your service to our community and our MCPS students.
Kelly McCullough, parent