

Budget Hearing April 8, 2026

Support Every Voice Supported: A Pilot Program for Adults Who Stutter

Good evening, Council President and Councilmembers.

My name is Elizabeth Escobar. I reside in Montgomery County. I am a person who stutters.

I am asking you tonight to support funding for Every Voice Supported, or EVS, a small Montgomery County pilot program for adults who stutter.

Many of us know someone who stutters. What we may not see is the shame, fear, and isolation that can live beneath the surface.

More than 3 million Americans stutter. Yet many adults who stutter still feel unseen, unsupported, or left to figure things out alone.

I first learned I was different in first grade. I was five years old when my parents were told that I stuttered.

I never liked the words stutter, disability, or speech disorder. They sounded like limits. I prefer to think of it as a speech difference, because my voice was never broken. People just did not always know how to listen.

Through Montgomery County Public Schools, I had an Individualized Education Plan, or IEP, and I received speech therapy. I am grateful for that support. But after childhood, there was no clear path for what came next.

A recent study found that 56 percent of adults who stutter reported at least one major episode of discrimination related to stuttering. Research also shows that adults who stutter often face social stigma, social devaluation, and mental health effects connected to those experiences.

Today, I volunteer with the National Stuttering Association Rockville Chapter, where people who stutter come together in a safe space to share their experiences. I hear many of the same stories again; being talked over, dismissed, underestimated, or made to feel small.

Becoming a mother made this even more real for me. I want a better world for my children, and for every person growing into adulthood who needs systems that make room for different ways of speaking.

Every Voice Supported would not have to be large to matter. It could begin as a small county pilot that offers support, guidance, connection, referrals, and a clear place to turn for adults who stutter in Montgomery County.

Sometimes what changes a life is not a huge program. Sometimes it is simply knowing you are not alone.

EVS would send a message that Montgomery County sees people who stutter, that our voices belong here, and that this county is willing to make room for different ways of speaking.

I respectfully ask you to support funding for Every Voice Supported.

Thank you.