

April 9, 2026

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: Written Testimony on the FY27 Operating Budget by the Dickerson Area Facilities Implementation Group

Dear Members of the Council:

We are writing to you as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Dickerson Area Facilities Implementation Group, otherwise known as DAFIG. Composed of area residents and volunteers, DAFIG addresses community and environmental issues and concerns pertaining to the operations of Montgomery County's solid waste facilities located in the Dickerson area. These facilities include the [Resource Recovery Facility](#) (or RRF), the [Yard Trim Composting Facility](#), properties originally purchased for the Site 2 landfill, and property associated with the original Matthews Farm. DAFIG provides input to the [Environmental Management System](#). Our very specific role and experience with these facilities gives us unique insight regarding the proposed budget and the amount set aside to close the RRF — the incinerator—and transition to landfilling.

We urge the County Council to approve the plan to transition from the RRF and the associated budget request without delay.

The RRF has been under DAFIG's watchful eye for many years. As residents of the affected area, we have been given quarterly updates on the operations, maintenance foibles, tests, and emissions. Living close to the facility, we have borne the outsized health impacts of the emissions, overages, emergency pollution, and fires which have occurred there. Note that as residents, we are not offered any protective measures to safeguard our health or our children's health living in such a close proximity. We have repeatedly called the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to task for not investigating alternatives to the incinerator.

Just this last September, an annual emissions test revealed that the incinerator had been emitting double the permitted limit of dioxins and furans. These toxins are tragically deadly to human life. In December, we were alerted to a second breakdown which released 50 times the same toxic emissions. While the RRF operator, Reworld, has assured us that repairs have been completed and that a full investigation is underway, these emergencies have underscored what we all have known for some time: the aging incinerator is unsafe and is going to have more expensive unplanned and emergency breakdowns in the future. We should also note that the highly toxic ash from the incinerator is currently trucked to a landfill in Richmond, Virginia, to a community

which is majority minority. This is an environmental justice nightmare and a blot on our County's reputation.

The County Executive's FY2027 budget (for July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027) includes a plan to transition to landfilling and closing the incinerator by the end of 2026 / beginning of 2027.

We support this plan and urge the County Council to approve this budget request without delay.

At our DAFIG meeting in March, DEP shared with us the presentation they had offered to the public during their outreach sessions about the transition. However, several Council members have stated they can't move forward with the transition because they "need a comprehensive, objective, and thorough analysis of all waste disposal options before we should consider any fundamental changes to the system." The County has already spent a significant amount of money contracting with a company called Arcadis for such reports. The reports you ask for have already been created. In addition, the County Executive and DEP have also provided studies, analyses, data, and a detailed budget to justify closing the aging and polluting trash incinerator. **As a result of those studies and analyses, DEP advised the County Executive—and he concluded—that it is most reasonable and economical that our county's non-recyclable trash be transported to well-vetted, safe, and environmentally sound landfills in neighboring states until we can get rolling on our ultimate goal: adopting a Zero Waste infrastructure aimed at reducing our volume of trash, increasing recycling, and expanding our composting.**

DEP's assessment has shown that keeping the RRF going will cost essentially the same as expanding our Zero Waste infrastructure. As a County, we need to make a choice whether to continue to pollute our air, ignore the health of those of us who live here, and continue to send loads of ash to a minority community in Virginia, or put our weight behind a greener option that will leave us all better off in the end.

Some background on how DEP arrived at its plan may help illustrate the thought that went into the FY27 budget request. In September 2025, DEP took a giant step toward overhauling the county's trash management system. The County released an RFP to private companies to propose means, methods, and costs of disposing of our non-recyclable trash. Bids arrived in November and were evaluated in an established process that protects proprietary information. DEP compared costs and other factors connected with the current system and announced early this year that, in their judgment, the incinerator should be decommissioned and the County should transition to landfill for now while capacity is built for additional recycling and composting initiatives.

Much of that comparative analysis was shared with most of the County Council members in one-on-one briefings since the specifics of the proposals cannot be divulged publicly. In a March

article in *The Montgomery Banner*, Mary Anderson, a spokesperson for the County Executive, said that the incinerator would need \$17 million in repairs in the short term.

Reworld estimated last year that it could cost between \$50 to \$100 million to keep the swiftly aging out facility operating within regulations for another seven years. The County must give Reworld six-months' notice that its services are no longer needed. The cost of decommissioning the facility is around \$3 million. Under the County Executive's plan, that notice would be delivered in July.

Any further delay in transitioning away from burning our garbage is not in the best interests of County residents, and it is most definitely not in the best interests of those living in the communities adjacent to the incinerator. We respectfully reject the argument that another delay is, again, necessary.

We urge the County Council to avoid the sunk costs fallacy and not throw good money after bad when our health remains in the balance. Please approve the budget request and put our County on the path to Zero Waste.

Sincerely,

Linda Bergofsky, Chair DAFIG, and Erika Bucciantini, Vice-Chair DAFIG