

Testimony on the FY27 Operating Budget for Montgomery Council  
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April 7, 2027

I am Chuck Copeland a minister at Hosanna Worship Center in Poolesville and a proud resident of Martinsburg, a black community along Whites Ferry Road. It is one of at least six others that are located throughout the Western County which encompasses approximately 60% of the land area of the Agricultural Reserve.

My family's roots go all the way back to when many of them were enslaved on a farm literally two miles from where I live today. The black communities in our area were thriving centers of agriculture contributing significantly to the legacy of farming in the Ag Reserve. Martinsburg itself is the only remaining black community we know of in Montgomery County that still features the three main structures that were the center of most black communities, including a school, a church, founded by my relatives, and a charity hall or community hall, which offered loans, insurance, and other financial assistance because blacks could not get such help when the community was founded.

I have been a part of the Fair Access Committee for several years and one of the reasons I joined was because I understand the legacy of inequity that afflicts our area. It historically affected many in the black community especially hard when it came to things like education. Black communities like Martinsburg and Jerusalem had to build their own schools in order to provide access to education for many black kids. Healthcare outcomes in our area have been very poor in part because public transportation is so inadequate that many cannot get to routine medical visits. We have no community center even though in the 1970s the county promised to build one. This means we have no county supported programming for after school activities for our kids. Fortunately, local citizens in the Town of Poolesville have stepped up to help support volunteer programs for our seniors led by Poolesville Seniors. Even so, the county denied grants to our seniors group a few years ago. While it has provided some funding since then, the levels of support provided do not keep pace with the need, making it much harder for them to offer robust programming opportunities.

Our community has stepped up in so many ways to help address the many shortcomings in county support that we see. Fortunately, groups like WUMCO have, with strong community support, been able to help address some of the healthcare problems and shortcomings we have. Helping Hands, a local volunteer group, has helped rebuild the houses of many in our area who live in houses that are in very poor shape.

Thanks to Fair Access, the Town of Poolesville and our community, we have made progress in addressing some of these inequities. But after more than 40 years of ignoring the many needs in our area, the progress to me has been frustratingly slow and sometimes it is one step forward, only to fall back a step later on as with the county grants to Poolesville Seniors. We still do not have a community center, we do not have adequate access to healthcare for many, we do not have good public, transportation options. White's Ferry, our "main street", remains closed and the public interest has been completely ignored while allowing two wealthy landowners to snub our community.

I love the Poolesville area community because it tries to do so much and there are so many good people working to redress obvious inequities. We've had a good partnership with the County Council. But I cannot be satisfied while I still see so many inequities facing so many people in our area, an area including our black communities that has suffered inequitable treatment by the county for decades. We have to address these problems and while I know budget resources are stretched, we have waited too long to put our area on par with the rest of the county when it comes to services, programs and facilities. This is not new spending as Link Hoewing has said, it is "catch up" spending that should have been committed long ago.

Please don't allow these many inequities to continue unaddressed.