



SSJC ORAL TESTIMONY ON PROPOSED FY27 OPERATING BUDGET

April 7, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Donna DeGrasse, and I'm testifying for the Silver Spring Justice Coalition.

First I want to talk about the county's MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS RESPONSE.

We just learned that Jamal Thompson, an unarmed Black man having a mental health issue, died seven days after MCPD wrestled him to the ground, handcuffed him, and took him involuntarily to a hospital. No MCOT was called. This tragedy is an example of why MCOTs are critical to saving lives and need to be widely publicized.

This is just the latest example of how our County Government is failing our community. Many of you remember that at last year's HHS and Public Safety worksession, officials discussed the urgent need and collective desire for a cohesive mental and behavioral health crisis response system that provides a *health-centered, civilian-led* response, which calls for police involvement only when there is an imminent risk to . Thus, We urge the Council to:

- **First, Increase the number of Mobile Crisis Teams beyond the eight proposed by the Executive**

We calculate that almost 20 percent of all 9-1-1 calls – an average of more than 100 each day – could effectively use MCOTs.

- **Second, press the County's HR Department to move quickly to fill all MCOT vacancies.**

As emphasized by Council President Sayles last year, and as we learned recently, the County's HR department has not taken the necessary actions to fill 8 peer support specialist positions. Too many Crisis Center vacancies remain. That impedes the County's mental health crisis response. This has been a persistent problem.

- **Third, as stressed by the Office of Legislative Oversight, the budget should include money for a public campaign to increase awareness of our crisis response system.**

Regarding the P-A-B and A-C-C budget

The Council should fund the P-A-B's budget request for additional staff to analyze complaints, but only if and when the A-C-C provides the P-A-B with all necessary complaint documents.

Regarding the MCPD BUDGET

- **We Oppose Funding for the Drone First Responder Program** because, beyond a handful of stories about its success, the drone program remains unproven, and MCPD has yet to present the results of an independent analysis of the safety and effectiveness of this program. It is premature to fund its expansion before the initial pilot has been thoroughly, independently evaluated and vetted with the most-affected communities.