

Grace and Glenn Richards respectfully submit this statement urging the County Council to provide full funding for the Montgomery County Park Police. The Park Police are indispensable to the safety, vitality, and resilience of our County's extensive park system. Their mission—protecting visitors, safeguarding natural resources, supporting community events, and engaging residents in prevention-focused policing—directly advances County priorities for public safety, equity, environmental stewardship, and quality of life. Sustained and sufficient funding is essential to maintain core services, expand proven prevention initiatives, and meet rising demand across a growing and heavily utilized park network.

Background

We have lived in Montgomery County for 39 years, most recently in Boyds, where our backyard is the spectacular Black Hill Regional Park. Both of us are Park Police volunteers (and have been for more than 15 years) and we regularly visit the parks and interact with the Park Police.

Our volunteer work with the Park Police is varied. Grace will often patrol the parks on horseback, assisting park visitors with information and regularly reminding patrons to keep their dogs on leashes. The Park Police mounted unit is a critical component of the force, getting to places cars cannot, and participating in parades, school events and other places where horses are highly visible in crowded areas.

Glenn patrols the park trails on foot, frequently clearing trails of debris and notifying maintenance when there are trees blocking trail access.

We both volunteer at widely attended park events, including the 4th of July fireworks at South Germantown, the Garden of Lights at Brookside Gardens, and the Color and Kites Festival at Black Hill, among others. At these events we provide patrons with parking and other general assistance and provide the Park Police extra sets of eyes and ears to deal with the eventual crisis, including lost children or ill or injured patrons. We coordinate closely with the Park Police including regular communications until the events are concluded. We also attend monthly volunteer meetings where we learn about upcoming details requiring volunteers or have special presentations concerning a variety of topics from snakes to gang identification.

In our experience, the members of the Park Police are everything that is right about law enforcement: committed, helpful, respectful, supportive, diligent, friendly and inclusive. We are so fortunate to have them in our community.

We understand that the Council has difficult decisions to make, as there are many critical programs that require funding. However, the parks are integral to the fabric of Montgomery County and, in our opinion, why people love living here.

Here are other reasons to support full funding for the Park Police:

The Park Police Are Critical to Public Safety in Parks and Greenways

Montgomery County's parks draw thousands of visits annually, creating a unique public safety environment that differs from traditional urban or suburban policing. Park Police officers are specifically trained for the geography, patterns of use, and resource-protection mandates that define park settings. Their presence deters crime and disorder in high-traffic areas such as trailheads, playgrounds, athletic fields, and lakefronts; enables rapid, terrain-informed responses to incidents in areas not readily accessible by patrol cars; and

provides specialized capabilities for search and rescue, bike patrol, mounted and ATV operations, lifeboats, and crowd management in open spaces.

Full funding will ensure adequate staffing to maintain visible patrols during peak hours and seasons; fund specialized training for de-escalation in outdoor settings; and sustain the equipment and communications platforms necessary for timely, coordinated responses across large and sometimes remote parklands.

Support for Community Events and County Priorities

The Park Police are integral to the safe execution of community events—cultural festivals, youth sports tournaments, concerts, charity runs, and nature education gatherings—held on park property throughout the year. Their support includes site safety assessments; traffic and pedestrian flow; protection of critical habitat areas near event sites; and on-site presence that is community-facing and service-oriented. This work enables broad public participation, facilitates access to recreation, and supports local economic activity connected to park-based events.

Stable funding is necessary to cover event operations, overtime associated with peak-event calendars, and coordination with Parks staff, volunteer groups, and partner agencies to ensure events remain safe and environmentally responsible.

Preservation of Natural Resources and Environmental Stewardship

Park Police serve a practical role in protecting natural resources from illegal dumping, vandalism, poaching, off-trail damage, and encroachments. Their enforcement and education efforts prevent harm to sensitive habitats, waterways, and restoration sites, and they collaborate with natural resource managers to monitor high-priority areas and respond quickly to reports of damage. The resulting deterrence protects significant public investments in stream restoration, forest conservation, invasive species control, and trail rehabilitation.

Full funding supports targeted patrols in at-risk areas; evidence collection and case support for resource-related offenses; and sustained outreach that pairs enforcement with education, signage, and stewardship partnerships.

Community Engagement and Crime Prevention

The Park Police employ a community-oriented model that prioritizes visibility, relationships, and prevention. Officers regularly interact with families, youth, seniors, and immigrant communities who use parks as accessible and trusted public spaces. These touchpoints build familiarity and trust, increase reporting of concerns, and support early problem-solving before issues escalate. Focused engagement also advances County equity goals by ensuring that parks remain safe and welcoming for all residents.

Prevention programming—trail safety briefings, bike safety programs, at-risk youth outreach, and community watch coordination tailored for park users—reduces opportunity for crime, supports pro-social activities, and channels residents into recreational and educational resources. Consistent funding is necessary to maintain these programs, collect and analyze data to refine strategies, and expand outreach to underserved areas and times of day when risks are higher.

Operational Needs Requiring Full Funding

To sustain and scale these outcomes, the Park Police require stable, full funding for:

1. **Staffing and Coverage:** Maintaining authorized positions; recruiting and retaining officers; and ensuring coverage during peak visitation, evenings, weekends, and special events.
2. **Training and Equipment:** Scenario-based de-escalation, mental health response in outdoor settings, resource-protection enforcement, first aid/trauma response, and specialized equipment such as bikes, ATVs, lifeboats, radios, and rescue gear suitable for trail, woodland and water environments.
3. **Data, Technology, and Communications:** Trail and park mapping tools, crime analysis specific to park environments, interoperable communications with County public safety agencies, and public-facing information platforms for safety updates and event coordination.
4. **Community Programming and Outreach:** Continuation and expansion of prevention programs, youth engagement, multilingual outreach, and collaboration with friends groups, PTAs, civic associations, and nonprofits.
5. **Interagency Coordination:** Support for joint operations and mutual aid with Montgomery County Police, Fire and park staff to ensure seamless responses to incidents, severe weather impacts, and large-scale events.

Conclusion and Call to Action

Montgomery County's parks are among our most valued public assets—places where residents gather, exercise, celebrate culture, and connect with nature. The Park Police are essential to safeguarding those spaces and the people who rely on them. We respectfully urge the Council to:

- a) Fully fund the Montgomery County Park Police at levels sufficient to maintain authorized staffing, sustain core patrol and event operations, and support specialized training and equipment tailored to park environments;
- b) Provide dedicated resources for community engagement and prevention programming, including youth-focused initiatives and multilingual outreach; and
- c) Invest in technology, data systems, and interagency coordination necessary for efficient, transparent, and accountable operations across our extensive park network.

Full funding will ensure the Park Police can continue delivering safe, welcoming, and well-protected parks that reflect the best of Montgomery County. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to public safety, environmental stewardship, and vibrant community life.

Respectfully submitted,

Grace and Glenn Richards

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