

Community response to the Holton-Arms proposed expansion under CBA-1174-E.

Written testimony addressed to OZAH, Council Office Building, 100 Maryland Avenue, Room 200, Rockville, MD 20850, for the public hearings on November 17 and November 20, 2025.

Dear all,

We are writing to you in dismay regarding the proposed Holton-Arms expansion and the school's disastrous proposal to increase its student enrollment and construct a dedicated left-hand turn lane on Royal Dominion Drive (CBA-1174-E). We live on this road and use it every weekday (i) to take our son to his school, Bannockburn Elementary School (part of Montgomery County Public Schools), (ii) to wait with our son at his bus stop in our neighborhood, and (iii) to drive in and out of our community to go to work. We also regularly walk along Royal Dominion Drive to River Road to take the M82 bus.

Our community, Al Marah, has approximately 150 single-family homes and 22 townhomes in Bethesda, MD. Al Marah is situated just inside the 495 beltway, off River Road, and is directly across from Holton-Arms. Our community has not been consulted appropriately by the Holton-Arms school during their proposed expansion.

Our neighborhood has many small children including our own, and we regularly witness speeding cars endangering their safety as they cut through our neighborhood at high speed on weekday mornings to get to Holton-Arms. The safety of our neighborhood's children at their bus stop is placed at risk from the speeding traffic.

Currently, vehicles transporting Holton students and faculty/staff enter the neighborhood from River Road to Burdette and then turn left on Royal Dominion Drive at high speeds without stopping. Then they continue straight on Royal Dominion Drive to cross River Road and enter the Holton-Arms school. There is no stop sign at the intersection of Burdette Road and Royal

Dominion Drive. In addition, our neighborhood does not have sidewalks, and we frequently witness near-accidents involving speeding cars and sometimes with pedestrians near the corners of River Road and Burdette, and River Road and Royal Dominion Drive. We don't feel safe going for walks in our own neighborhood, even with the current enrollment of Holton-Arms.

In addition, there are four M82 public bus stops located at the corners of River Road and Royal Dominion Drive, as well as River Road and Burdette. We see pedestrians walking to and from these bus stops, and their safety is compromised during drop-off and pick-up times at the Holton-Arms school. We don't feel safe walking to take the public bus M82 during these times.

We are concerned that the situation will get worse if Holton-Arms is allowed to pursue its proposed expansion under CBA-1174-E (which would increase academic year enrollment from 670 to 870, increase summer camp enrollment from 665 to 970, and allow facility rentals to groups as large as 870).

The communication from the Holton-Arms administration indicated that they would notify their community to avoid cutting through our neighborhood on the way to school. However, rather than discouraging them from cutting through our community, their proposal to create a designated left-turn lane on our street would encourage Holton-Arms cars to cut through Al Marah, making it much more difficult for Al Marah residents to exit Al Marah. This would:

a) encourage and make it easier for Holton-Arms families and faculty/staff to cut through our neighborhood, thus exacerbating a safety hazard for our elderly residents and our children trying to get on or off Montgomery County School buses while Holton cars speed by,

b) make it more difficult for Al Marah residents to get to work or appointments by turning right from Royal Dominion Drive since we would be blocked in by the Holton-Arms cars trying to go straight to cross River Road into Holton-Arms, and

c) limit the 172 Al Marah families, our service providers, Montgomery County School buses, emergency responders and all Primary Day School cars to using one narrow entrance at Burdette into or out of our neighborhood during a long period of time while the Holton-sponsored construction occurred on the Al Marah side of Royal Dominion Drive!

Furthermore, the communication received from Holton-Arms stated that they are not willing to make any commitments to mandate busing, carpools, or other meaningful traffic mitigation strategies if they are allowed to increase academic year enrollment, summer camp enrollment, and/or facility rentals. Instead, Holton-Arms “hopes” that “education and incentives” will influence the Holton-Arms families’ willingness to use busing or carpools. “Hoping” is not a plan.

Unfortunately, once increased enrollment and rentals are approved, there is little we can do to limit traffic.

The Holton-Arms communication included that they think that mandatory busing is not appropriate for their student body, even though other local private schools use mandatory busing (e.g., The McLean School, The Potomac School, Rochambeau, The Field School, Georgetown Day School, St. Patrick's, The Lab School, etc.). Furthermore, Holton-Arms admitted that their planned efforts to incentivize (rather than require) students and faculty to reduce single-occupant car trips to Holton-Arms might take a long time and are not guaranteed to be successful.

As concerned residents of the Al Marah neighborhood who are directly harmed (together with our entire neighborhood) by the speeding cars cutting through our neighborhood and by the ever-increasing traffic gridlock in the area, we humbly request that you make recommendations to OPPOSE (i) the proposed Holton-Arms expansion and (ii) their proposal to designate a left turn lane on Royal Dominion Drive. A rejection of these ill-conceived proposals will help protect our children’s safety and our ability to go in and out of our neighborhood in a safe way.

Additionally, we believe that an independent traffic evaluation should be conducted, and the Al Marah community should be consulted in a transparent manner. If the expansion is approved by all stakeholders, then a phased implementation should be undertaken to evaluate the adverse impacts on our community. For example, we witness severe traffic jams on Royal Dominion Drive, and on River Road between Wilson Lane and the exits to the 495 beltway (primarily due to Holton-Arms), which are not reflected in the existing transportation report that accompanies the Holton-Arms public hearing.

In fact, even with the current academic and camp enrollments, Holton-Arms should be compelled to mandate busing and pay for license plate monitors and street signs to enforce a rule that prohibits Holton-Arms cars from using Al Marah as a cut-through. For example, the intersection of Royal Dominion Drive and River Road should allow only right or left turns, but not straight-through traffic. This is a strategy that has been used very successfully by other private schools (e.g. Rochambeau locally) as part of other schools' efforts to be good neighbors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steven Kolias', with a stylized, flowing script.

Steven Kolias

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Laura Maratou-Kolias', with a stylized, flowing script.

Laura Maratou-Kolias

November 10, 2025