

January 8, 2023

Hon. Marc Elrich  
County Executive  
Montgomery County Government  
Executive Office Building  
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor  
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: *Police Staffing and Morale in Montgomery County*

Dear County Executive Elrich,

As you may know, the Upcounty Citizens Advisory Board (“UCAB”) is one of the five regional citizens’ advisory boards created to hear from regional stakeholders and provide guidance to the County Executive.

The UCAB receives monthly briefings from the Police Commanders in Districts 1, 5, and 6, which collectively encompass the Upcounty area. These briefings include reports on specific incidents as well as broader trends in our region. During the conversations that stem from these briefings, UCAB members and members of the public have expressed their concerns regarding staffing, coverage, and morale issues within the Montgomery County Police Department (“MCPD”). As a result, we would like to raise some of those concerns to you.

MCPD faces severe staffing shortages and difficulties both in recruitment and staff retention.<sup>1</sup> Recent data provided to the County Council indicate that MCPD had 176 vacancies among sworn officers, a 14% vacancy rate, in September, 2023.<sup>2</sup> The number of vacancies has been increasing since 2022 and is projected to further increase to 19% by July 2025.<sup>3</sup> A key driver of these vacancies appears to be retirements of current officers, with 41% of the sworn officers currently eligible for retirement.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the County risks losing valuable experience and skills in our force without replenishment.

These staffing shortages contributed to the MCPD’s recent decision to reduce staff assigned to the cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg.<sup>5</sup> While we have great confidence in the professionalism and capabilities of municipal law enforcement, the decision to rely on city police officers as the primary responders may increase response times in those jurisdictions.

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<sup>1</sup> County Council staff briefing, MCPD Redeployment Plan, Sept. 27, 2023, at 5.

<sup>2</sup> County Council staff briefing, MCPD Redeployment Plan, Sept. 27, 2023, at 5.

<sup>3</sup> County Council staff briefing, MCPD Redeployment Plan, Sept. 27, 2023, at 5.

<sup>4</sup> County Council staff briefing, MCPD Redeployment Plan, Sept. 27, 2023, at 5.

<sup>5</sup> County Council staff briefing, MCPD Redeployment Plan, Sept. 27, 2023, at 2 and 5-6.

To ensure that Montgomery County continues to provide a safe and comfortable environment for all residents, the UCAB recommends that the County Executive take the following actions to increase staffing and improve morale within the MCPD:

First, we encourage the County Executive to focus on the recruitment of highly qualified officers who reside in and reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. To make this possible, we need a county police force that is attractive to our young adults financially and reputationally. We believe that better community outreach efforts, such as the National Night Out, coaching athletics, or student mentorship opportunities modelled after the cadet program, as well as public recognition (a PSA was suggested) of examples of good policing work done by County officers would boost popular engagement with law enforcement among the next generation of prospective recruits.

Second, we encourage the County Executive to review the pay and incentives for officers. Despite recent pay increases and hiring bonuses, MCPD pay relative to the cost of living in the County is insufficiently competitive with neighboring jurisdictions.<sup>6</sup> Officers have likewise informed us that retirement benefits disincentivize officers from remaining on the force later in their careers. We encourage the County Executive to review pay and retirement benefits to encourage officers to join and continue to serve in MCPD.

Finally, we encourage the County Executive to increase automated enforcement mechanisms to free up sworn officers to respond to more serious incidents. Such efforts may include expanding the drone pilot program that is currently underway in Silver Spring (potentially in Gaithersburg) and moving to cameras for certain minor traffic offenses.

It is the opinion of this Board and the residents it represents that the MCPD staffing issue undermines safety in the region and the ability of the Department to advance the worthy goals of transparency, accountability, and community-engagement that the County has laid out in recent years. Thank you for your consideration of this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Andrew Saundry  
Chair, Upcounty Citizens Advisory Board

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<sup>6</sup> Maryam Shahzad, *Police Applications Increase Since \$20K Bonus Announcement, Chief Says*, MyMCM (Mar. 16, 2023); Kevin Lewis, *Montgomery Co. exec proposes police department budget increase to help with recruitment*, WJLA (Mar. 25, 2022); [Police Officer - Requirements and Benefits](#), Montgomery County Department of Police.