



TESTIMONY

Montgomery County FY19 Recommend Operating Budget

DATE: April 11, 2018

BY: League of Women Voters of Montgomery County

This testimony is presented on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, a not-for-profit organization whose membership promotes good government through nonpartisan, grassroots volunteer work. We examine issues, educate citizens, register voters, and participate in advocacy. This year, we had unprecedented growth in our membership and increased interest and activism in the political process in Montgomery County.

We are grateful for the many hours of consideration in development of Montgomery County's FY19 Operating Budget so we can more readily meet growing challenges in our diverse community. We would like to commend the Council and Executive's grant programs, and we acknowledge -- from experience -- how valuable they are because the League has received funding to defray the cost of the Voters' Guide. We recognize the crucial role that county grants play in empowering not-for-profits to provide needed services to county residents.

While our comments on behalf of our membership focus on education and transportation, we also applaud --

1. Election services, including the expansion of early voting and outreach to encourage those eligible to become citizens,
2. Increased support for the creation and preservation of low- and moderate-income housing.

Education

1. Recognizing the importance of a strong educational system as a major contributor (1) to the ability of all our students to reach their full potential and (2) to the reputation of the county as an excellent place to live and work, the League strongly supports the budget requests of Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College.
2. We have just completed a study of early care and education - and of the potential of quality early care and a strong Pre-K program to ensure that children do not enter kindergarten with an achievement gap that they may never overcome. Our members reached consensus in support of expanding the pre-K program and providing full funding for the county's Working Parents Assistance program (in the DHHS budget), which enables low-income working parents to afford the before and after care necessary for their children to participate in Pre-K.



3. We have long supported programs in the MCPS that prepare students who are not college bound for careers in fields where there is demand for their skills. Therefore, we were particularly glad to see in the proposed MCPS budget increased funding for the pre-K program and for programs to prepare students for career opportunities in cybersecurity, public safety, emergency medical fields, fire safety, agricultural science, and aviation, as well as further exposure to computer science and coding.

4. We also applaud the expansion of the pilot program of dual language schools, an innovative approach both to closing the opportunity gap and to preparing MCPS students for success in an increasingly diverse world.

Transportation

1. We commend --
 - a. The new *Ride On* (Jan.'19) pilot neighborhood service from Olney into Rockville with smaller circulator buses that are more reasonable and flexible to operate along small neighborhood roads. With a new "app" to arrange for pickup, new riders will be attracted, and transit use in these areas might be revitalized. We hope the smaller buses will be used on many routes for their environmentally friendly ways since they will also be ADA accessible.

 - b. Starting in May 2018, providing new US 29 Ride On overlay service to alleviate traffic congestion is a good precursor to the BRT route.

 - c. Enhancing motion response lighting with the Passive Crosswalk Lighting Initiative along the Bel Pre Road corridor with five crosswalk locations should help promote safety.

 - d. Installing High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk beacons (HAWK) to further improve pedestrian safety while complying with the new state law is a good beginning for pedestrian safety improvements.

 - e. Promoting improvements in the parking lot districts that are good environmentally and also promote monetary savings. Having more plug-in spaces planned for future use, installing more indicators for vacant parking spaces is smart investing.



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2. We once again question citing building sidewalks as an accomplishment since what is being built is not accomplishing accessibility. The budget mentions that there have been only 23,768 linear feet of sidewalk completed. This translates into just 4.5 miles. Vision Zero needs more NEW sidewalk miles. If our county hopes to have more people use the new Bus Rapid Transit System, the new Purple Line, improved Ride On routes, we must build more sidewalk miles as a connection for the "last mile home."

Thank you for encouraging Montgomery County residents to participate in county decision-making.

Sincerely,

Nancy Bliss, President

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