



4/17/26

The Honorable Natali Fani-González  
Council President  
Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear President Fani-González and Members of the Council:

I am writing on behalf of the Greater Olney Civic Association (GOCA), an umbrella homeowner and civic association organization representing over 30 homeowners and civic associations in the greater Olney community that collectively comprises over 80% of the households in the Olney Master Plan area.

We write at a difficult moment for Montgomery County. Many of the headwinds we face are beyond local control — federal workforce reductions have hit Maryland harder than any state in the nation, and our County hardest within Maryland. But meeting those challenges, and representing every resident while doing so, is the Council's responsibility.

We understand the Council cannot unilaterally rewrite the County Executive's proposal, but it can reject, reduce, and reshape it to reflect the times and the will of the people — not a wish list the County can no longer afford. Taxes are a legitimate instrument of governance but wielded without discipline they become corrosive. A county cannot become more affordable by becoming more expensive. This principle should be non-negotiable: taxes are a last resort, not a first one. No increase should be approved until the County has demonstrated it has done the harder work of cutting first.

The proposed FY27 budget contains many elements that merit the Council's careful scrutiny. We wish to address four that feel most out of step with the reality our residents are living.

**A property tax rate increase, in this year of all years.**

Montgomery County led the nation in federal job losses in 2025, with nearly 10,000 federal positions lost in the County alone — and more projected. The most recent three-year state reassessment showed an average 12.2% increase in property values, generating substantial additional property tax revenue for the County without any change in rate. To layer a 6.3-cent rate increase on top of that automatic revenue lift — in a year when so many of our neighbors have lost their livelihoods and are feeling the intense pressure of higher gas prices, groceries, and housing — lands heaviest on the working families least equipped to absorb it. It also runs directly against the County's own stated priorities: housing affordability, population retention, and the school enrollment trajectory both the Council and the Executive have publicly warned about. We ask the Council to resist any rate increase beyond the additional revenue the County will already receive from the effect of rising assessments.

**Compensation increases the County cannot afford.**

No one enjoys the prospect of denying raises to public servants who have earned them. But during a period of genuine fiscal strain, hiring freezes and compensation discipline are the accepted, textbook first response of local governments — applied well before taxpayers are asked to contribute more. The proposal before the

Council inverts that sequence. It asks residents — many of whom have lost their jobs or soon will — to fund compensation increases for County Government employees that outpace the County's own projected revenue growth. When the largest single cost in a budget grows faster than the revenue that funds it, year after year, the arithmetic eventually catches up with the politics. We ask the Council to apply compensation discipline across all agencies before accepting any tax increase, and to direct the reduction or elimination of services and programs that are unnecessary or ineffective.

**MCPS: a request that does not reflect the reality around it.**

Montgomery County Public Schools represents roughly 52 percent of the proposed budget. The Board of Education's requested increase is driven largely by compensation, with eligible employees seeing significant compound increases while the County raids reserves and raises taxes to balance the books. And it comes at the same time the Board and Superintendent are asking families across the system to wait their turn — in some cases another twelve years — before their school is renovated so their children can learn in a safe building. The contrast is stark: full compensation now, safe buildings later. We understand the capital and operating budgets are separate processes. But equity cannot be selectively applied: a system cannot ask its families to wait while asking them to pay more. That the Board and Superintendent appear unable — or unwilling — to apply to themselves the standard they apply to families is precisely why transparency can no longer be optional. We ask the Council to reduce MCPS funding below the Executive's recommendation to reflect declining enrollment, and to require clear reporting on how those funds are spent.

**The reserves drawdown — fiscal policy violated, and a gamble on timing.**

The County's own fiscal policy holds that excess reserves should be used for one-time, non-recurring needs. The proposed budget instead raids \$191 million in reserves to cover ongoing expenses, leaving unrestricted reserves dangerously close to the 10 percent policy floor. This is, by the County's own definition, the wrong use of reserves — and the timing makes it worse. Economic uncertainty is rising, with federal job losses continuing and federal funding streams contracting. Drawing the emergency fund down to the floor, for recurring obligations, when we are most likely to need it, is not fiscal policy. It is a gamble. We ask the Council to reject any use of reserves to fund ongoing expenses in FY27.

Taken together, these concerns are about one principle: fiscal discipline before fiscal pressure on residents. We ask the Council to hold that line now, before a one-year shortfall hardens into a multi-year structural crisis. Our goal is not to oppose everything — it is to ensure that shared sacrifice means what the phrase implies: a burden borne by the whole community, with no one, County or MCPS employees included, exempt from it.

We thank the Council for its service and for its careful consideration. We look forward to continued dialogue with Councilmember Luedtke and the four at-large Councilmembers on this and any other community issue.

Respectfully,



Curtis H. Chappell  
President, Greater Olney Civic Association

**CC:**

The Honorable Marc Elrich, County Executive  
Dr. Thomas Taylor, Superintendent, Montgomery County Public Schools  
Grace Rivera Oven, President, Montgomery County Board of Education