



November 6, 2023

Montgomery County Public Schools
Board of Education
850 Hungerford Drive
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: Testimony on Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) 2025-2030 Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

Good evening,

My name is Talisha Searcy, and I am the Mayor of the City of Takoma Park. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening. The city has a growing number of young families. The current population is about 18,000 but over 26 percent of the city's residents are under the age of 18. Moreover, nearly 7 percent of the city's population was under five years of age in 2022. As a result, the strain on the city's already stretched primary and secondary schools is felt by most households in the city.

Residents are served by three schools within the city's boundaries: Piney Branch Elementary School, Takoma Park Elementary School, and Takoma Park Middle School. Most high schoolers in Takoma Park attend Montgomery Blair High School. However, it is important to note that because of the city's location, families with young children also have children who attend nearby schools such as Rolling Terrace and Silver Spring International.

The CIP fails to address the short-term needs of Takoma Park's MCPS students. Piney Branch was built in 1973. To date it has not been revitalized nor received a major capital project. Piney Branch is the smallest school site in the entire County at 1.9 acres with no room for temporary class space in its current configuration. MCPS acknowledged in previous CIPs that the school has "current and projected overutilization" and needs "a comprehensive facility upgrade to address the aging infrastructure." However, MCPS has consistently delayed action. Planning for capital improvements for Piney Branch Elementary School began in 2017. But no construction funds were included in the adopted FY 2023–2028 CIP and the 2025-2030 CIP recommends that the project be postponed.

The Takoma Park Minor Master Plan Amendment may have implications for the long-term approach that MCPS must use to address school capacity needs associated with future development in Takoma Park. In the public hearing draft of the plan, county planners recommended that if MCPS builds a replacement elementary school on a different site, then the current site should be repurposed for public use. However, we can't deny that space is limited down county and identifying an alternate school site could take a long time to do. In the meantime, students must continue to attend an aging school in desperate need of repair.

The MCPS Board of Education first presented the CIP for Piney Branch Elementary School to the Takoma Park City Council in 2015 with an anticipated completion date of 2021. Under the newly proposed schedule, the school would not be completed by 2030. Long-term planning should not be an excuse for short-term inaction. Piney Branch

Elementary School renovation has been discussed long enough. MCPS must add construction funds for this school to the 2025-2030 CIP.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening and I appreciate all the work that you do to ensure that every student in Montgomery County receives a quality education. I look forward to working with you to improve the City of Takoma Park's schools.