

CB-21 Testimony

Good evening, Chair Rigby, Vice Chair Jung, and members Dr. Jones, Ms. Walsh, and Mr. Yungmann. My name is Kelly Klinefelter, and I am the president of Howard Progressive Project and a resident of District 4 in Columbia. At HPP, our central organizing principle is community. We envision a more just and equitable Howard County, a place where every person can grow to their fullest potential.

HPP would like to address four issues in the FY 2024 Budget:

First, we encourage you all to support the DISPARITY STUDY that County Executive Ball has included in the budget. HPP is proud to have worked arm in arm with the African American Coalition of Howard County to convene the Living Wage Coalition to advocate for the inclusion of the disparity study in this year's budget. Thank you, Dr. Ball, for making this long-held vision of the African American Coalition a reality and taking this important step toward equal economic opportunity for our business community.

Next, HPP would like to address the amount allocated to HCPSS in the FY24 budget. In short, next year's budget fails to meet the needs of our students. I'll be speaking to this more specifically later this evening, but I'll summarize it this way: I am a teacher. I've been a public school teacher since 1992. And when I saw this year's MSDE scoring of our HCPSS scores, I was deflated.

That's because here in Howard County – the richest county in MD and the sixth richest in the US – we have 12 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, and 3 high schools in the bottom 50% of all schools in the state of Maryland. Of these, three of our elementary schools and two of our middle schools are in the bottom third of all Maryland schools.

This should give us pause, because these numbers are our collective responsibility. They are our collective policy choices coming to fruition. In this community, where we claim to value education and our children, we make policy decisions that leave some students behind while we empower others to thrive.

Simply put, we have educators in schools who struggle every day to meet the needs of their students, and they don't have the time, the supports, the resources to do it. And this is because of the decisions we make as a community to continue with outmoded models of funding.

Third, HPP would like to applaud the funds allocated in the budget for affordable housing – all of it. Safe, quality, and stable housing is the bedrock of community, and it's the foundation of good education. As an HCPSS high school teacher this year, I taught many children who worked forty hours a week to help their families pay the rent. These kids would have loved to wrestle or cheer, to join clubs or the marching band. But they were thrust into adult life too early by the economic reality of our stratospheric housing market. I taught a young student who moved at least five times during the year, in and out of friends' homes because they and

their single parent couldn't find an affordable place to live. We need affordable housing in Howard County for the people who ALREADY LIVE HERE, for the kids who are in our school today.

Finally, HPP supports the new lakefront library as an inclusive educational space that promotes literacy and development for all – from our babies through our seniors.

Thank you for considering our testimony this evening, and we look forward to working with all of you in the future to work on building a more just a Howard County for all.

CR-69 Testimony

Good evening again, Chair Rigby, Vice Chair Jung, and members Dr. Jones, Ms. Walsh, and Mr. Yungmann. My name is Kelly Klinefelter, and I am the president of Howard Progressive Project and a resident of District 4 in Columbia.

The HPP board met on Facebook advocating for education equity in Howard County. It remains one of our organizing principles. And as a teacher myself, it animates my daily work. I want to outline for you just a few of our specific concerns with the SY 23-24 budget as it stands right now and just how starkly it leaves so many of our children behind:

- Our children with special education needs require services, especially post-pandemic . . . and we need special educators to provide those services. First, we clearly don't pay our special

educators enough as reflected in the 22 unfilled special educator positions as of May 1. Second, we are not adding the necessary positions the BOE asked for for SY 23-24. Are we really comfortable making policy that leaves our most vulnerable learners behind again this year?

Our budget also fails to meet the requirements of the MSDE Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

- The Blueprint requires us to fund workforce development – we're not doing that
- The Blueprint requires us to add math specialists to support our struggling learners – we're not doing that
- At a moment of unparalleled mental health challenges among our kids – and I can personally testify to this as a teacher, that our kids are struggling, and they're waiting on long lists to be seen by mental health professionals, and we are doing our very best in school every day to support them – the Blueprint requires us to add school counselors to reduce ratios per national guidelines of best practices – we're not doing that
- The Blueprint requires us to fund preK – and we are woefully behind on implementation. First, we're not expanding our existing half-day programs next year into full-day programs by failing to make necessary investments in staffing. Second, while the rehabilitation of Faulkner Ridge Elementary School will create 260 preK seats – or about 13 classrooms, we need to build about 110 total preK classrooms in HCPSS to be Blueprint compliant. And to be clear, this is failure on a massive scale. According to the *HCPSS 2022-23 Measures that Matter* report,

only 54% of 2021's Kindergartners were K ready and the report notes that "Students from middle to high income families are more than twice as likely to demonstrate readiness for kindergarten." and "Students eligible for ESOL and students identified for special education services, exhibit the most significant gaps in readiness." This is why the Blueprint mandates preK. And yet we make public policy choices to leave behind our most vulnerable children.

Every year that we don't increase revenue and prioritize funding to our public schools, we surrender the potential of students who don't get do-overs on their K-12 years.

Thank you for considering our testimony this evening, and we look forward to working with all of you in the future to work on more robust funding for our schools.