



**Howard County Citizens Association**

*Since 1961...*

*The Voice Of The People of Howard County*

**Testimony, CB64 – September 19, 2016**

**Lisa Markovitz**

**Vice President, Howard County Citizens Association**, speaking for our Board in support of Council Bill 64

The list is long as to why further review of the HCPSS budget was necessary, including concerns about calculations changing in the Fixed Charges Category, the appropriateness of Special Education budgeting, legal expenditures, etc. The fact that both State and County legislation were necessary to get mold remediation handled correctly, and public information acts reviewed, were bad enough, but the stories I have heard from first-hand sources of how the HCPSS leadership is stone-walling auditors, possibly thwarting document retrieval, and at a minimum clearly delaying producing requested items, all show how it is even sadder that this legislation is also necessary.

The taxpayers of Howard County fund the School System with the majority of the County Budget. We need to be assured the funds are expended appropriately. Transparency has never been the strong suit of current HCPSS leadership and it is appreciated that it has been forced where necessary. Citizens need fiscal responsibility with their tax funds, and also need reassurance that our excellent School System which benefits us all, is held to account so it can retain, or dare I say, regain, stellar status.

Recently, we have seen that costs have been cut to Instruction, classroom materials, and running of copiers, when the County Budget approved full-funding to Instruction. The way money is being chosen to be spent seems to continue to defy the mandated categories given. I know that many budget review items are for the past fiscal year and not this one, but maybe when you are next asked for a category transfer, there needs to be significant detailed review of whether they followed this year's approval details, or maybe the answer should just be no. Maybe warn them now that if they don't follow the category amounts approved in the budget, then transfers will not be allowed later. Warn them not to take money from Special Education or in-class Instruction to pay for pet projects elsewhere, or PR or legal expenses and then suddenly need to rearrange things later because they "cannot pay the bills". Let them know that won't be tolerated anymore. For now, thank you for the attempts to review what you can from the past.