



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961... The Voice of the People of Howard County

Subject: **HCCA Testifies on the Budget**

Good evening County Executive Ball,

My name is Ryan Powers from Glenwood, and I'm representing the Howard County Citizens Association.

We'd like to thank you and your staff for listening to resident needs and concerns tonight, especially with their help during today's technical difficulties. We also appreciate the outreach this Fall asking us and other community groups about actions items we'd like to see from your administration. We'd like to especially thank Paul Thompson. We continue to believe open town halls are important. Without meaningful back and forth, residents are left out of the decision making process and kept in the dark. This public hearing on the budget is 1 of only 2 public hearings residents will be given to express their concerns and needs to you. We don't think this is enough to truly understand something as big as the budget. We are hoping you'll follow the lead of other County Executives and begin to hold town hall meetings in all districts in which there is actually a back and forth about the budget.

For example, what would it take for the Sheriff's Office to reach their goal of serving 80% of domestic violence or protection orders within 48 hrs? This has been a part of the budget for the past few years and is one of the only goals Howard County doesn't meet. It is a very admirable goal; we are unclear what's holding them back.

We need a frank community discussion early in this process about whether or not the Howard County School System will face a third year—three years in a row—of staff reductions, program cuts, and increases in class sizes. We want to recognize that your emergency bill providing 14.5M dollars in needed funding for the FY26 school year saved this year from being a disaster—but third grade strings was still cut, close to half of the elementary school gifted and talented teacher positions are gone, and the many paraeducators, secretaries, and media specialists firings resulted in less adults in school buildings.

A town hall is needed because parents, HCPSS, and students continue to have many questions. Do you intend to fund the HCPSS capital budget at 90.1M; 40M in additional GO bonds was planned for in the FY26 budget. Will you work with the Council to provide 37.99M in PayGo for school deferred maintenance in addition to the 90M already planned for? Why is the fund balance from school impact fees reaching 37.8 million instead of being spent on schools? All this money should be directed to the school system to improve infrastructure. There are 20 schools rated "functions unreliable" according to the Interagency Commission on School Construction. Our kids deserve better than leaking roofs, crowded hallways, rodents, mold, broken pipes, broken ceiling tiles, intemperate rooms, students without functioning cafeterias, nonfunctional bathrooms, and schools lacking safety features.

A Town Hall where you can look residents in the face and provide some sort of answers would go a long way in understanding the fiscal reality in Howard County. Council member Rigby called for just this sort of a conversation last year after another partially fulfilled school budget. It's time we begin to talk with one another instead of talking at each other.

Thank you,

Ryan Powers, HCCA board member