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To: Members of the Howard County Council

Clearly this community is facing budget challenges. The fact remains: The presented budget will negatively impact children.

My school transferred 17 teachers last year. Enrollment did not drop THAT much. To add further insult, my school is slated to transfer 5 more teachers this year. We cannot sustain.

I am told that if funds are not restored, class sizes will increase, student course options will be limited, teachers will be teaching courses they have never taught before, and our "unparalleled education system", which has already lost luster, will suffer more than it already has. All of these impact our end product...our young people.

Negative Impacts:

1. At the lower academic levels, adding "just a few more students" can wreak havoc. Larger classes are simply not okay.
2. It is a true shame to edit Howard County's high school course options.
3. To be an effective teacher, I need time to prep and prepare, not spin my wheels learning curriculum standards for yet another course and searching for materials. I am slated to teach 4 courses next year, 3 of which are new-to-me. How effective can I possibly be?
4. County students continue to face, and present, increasing challenges. Pandemic impacts continue to wend their way through the grades. Many students are in crisis, or are on the cusp. Further, the current political climate scares them.


Those of you who have taught, but now administer, I say this respectfully...I don't think you realize what we're up against. Or worse, you do, and you are unable to respond.

Teaching has changed, and it continues to change. Immensely. Materials and activities that were great just a few years ago are now obsolete due in large part to students' very well-developed skills of AI cut-n-paste. As a Social Studies teacher, I can't facilitate a single lesson that is not readily available at their fingertips. AI does not support critical thinking skills; AI replaces them.

The morale at my school is already low. Staff are weary. Students feel it. Attendance is a problem. Our school community can only endure so much.

I asked AI: "*should howard county increase school funding*". AI's "critical thinking skills" said, "Yes, there is a strong argument..." (see the attached) You could have written it. Some of you did!

Please restore funds so as to limit class sizes. Please restore funds to give myself and my students the chance to actually teach and legitimately learn.

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**Yes, there is a strong argument for Howard County to increase school funding.** Particularly given the context of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and the needs of the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS). The Board of Education has requested a significant increase in funding, exceeding the county's projected available revenues.

**Arguments for Increased Funding:**

**State Blueprint:**

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future mandates increased funding for various initiatives aimed at improving equity and outcomes in schools statewide.

**HCPSS Needs:**

HCPSS has identified critical needs, including addressing safety concerns of student athletes, and implementing special education services.

**Maintaining Existing Services:**

The budget requests also include funding to maintain existing services and address systemic maintenance needs in schools.

**Prioritizing Education:**

Howard County Executive Calvin Ball has highlighted the importance of balancing the budget while prioritizing education and public safety.

**State Funding:**

Howard County is also working to secure and utilize state funding, such as the Enrollment Growth and Relocatable Classroom (EGRC) program, to support school construction.

**Maintenance of Effort (MOE):**

The State law requires counties to fund at least the same per-pupil amount as the previous year, with some additional state aid to cover the cost of negotiated agreements and other factors.

**Addressing Equity Gaps:**

Increased funding can help narrow the achievement gap between poor and non-poor students, as research suggests increased spending can improve outcomes, especially for low-income students.

**Potential Challenges and Considerations:**

**County's Fiscal Capacity:**

The county's budget faces constraints and may not be able to fully fund all requests, especially with limited one-time resources.

**Balancing Priorities:**

The county needs to balance funding for education with other critical services, such as public safety, infrastructure, and social services.

**Debt and Affordability:**

The county needs to maintain its AAA bond rating and manage debt responsibly, which may impact the ability to fund all capital projects.

**Uncertainty:**

The county is navigating a period of uncertainty at the state and federal levels, which may affect funding and revenue projections.

**Conclusion:**

While there are significant challenges, there is a strong case for Howard County to increase school funding, particularly to address the needs outlined in the State's Blueprint and within the local school system. Finding a balance between funding priorities, fiscal capacity, and the needs of the students is crucial, and requires collaboration between the County Executive, the Board of Education, the County Council, and other stakeholders.

Howard County Executive Calvin Ball Unveils Balanced Fiscal ...

Apr 21, 2025 — Howard County Executive Calvin Ball Unveils Balanced Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget Proposal: Prioritizing Education...

Howard County

**Budgets - HCPSS**

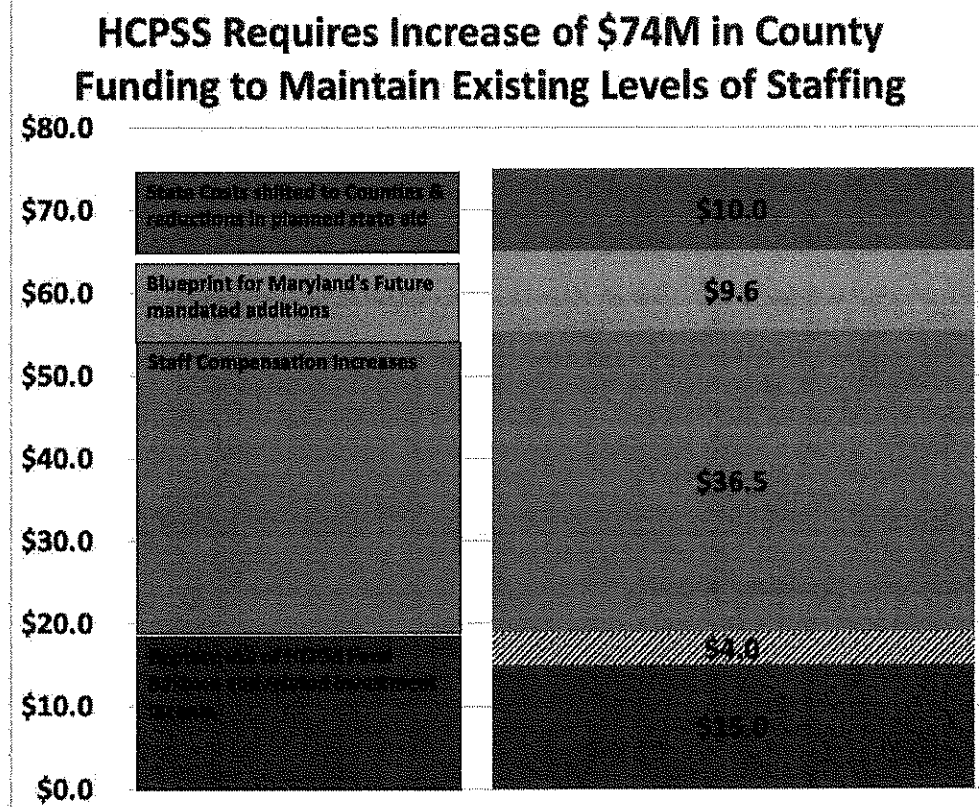
What is Maintenance of Effort (MOE)? The MOE law states that each county must appropriate an amount equal to or greater than its p...

HCPSS



Comments in Support of Increasing FY26 HCPSS Operating  
Budget- Anthony DeBella, April 30, 2025

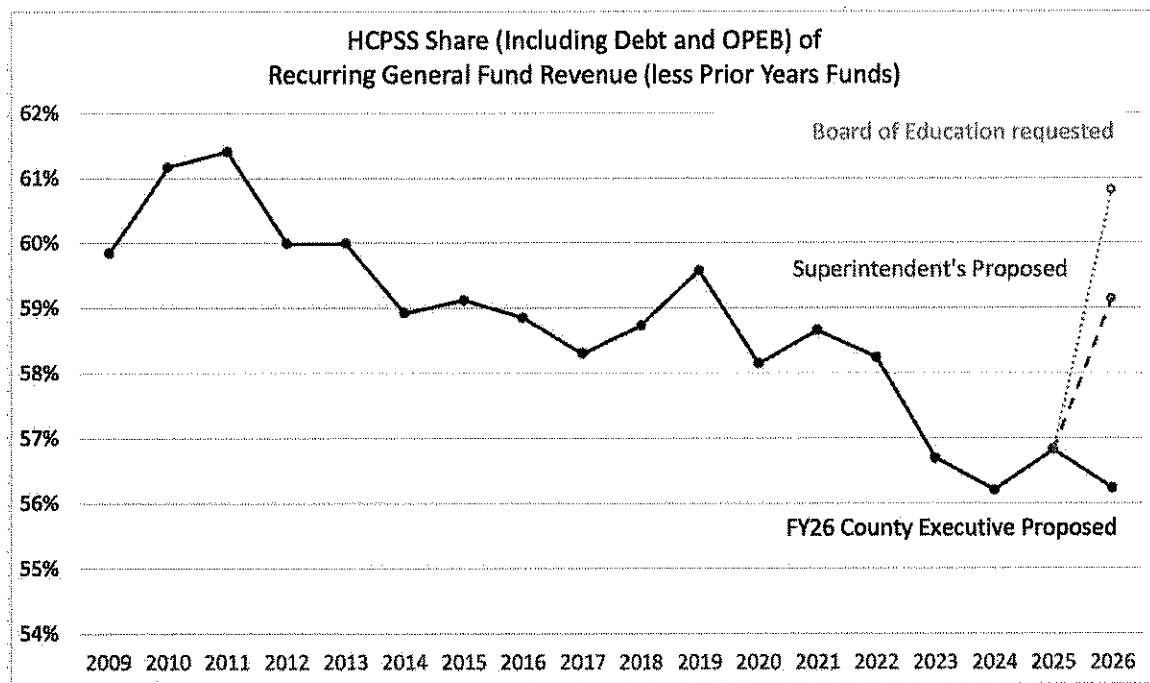
Budget decisions always evoke tough choices and balancing this year's ever growing needs against resources that never seem to grow as quickly makes this year no different. This year, an additional \$74M<sup>1</sup> are necessary to meet the same need for HCPSS as last year. The four major sources of that increased need are illustrated below



This is the very much UN-surprising result of the gradual reduction in the percentage of growing available resources allocated to education. The accepted measure of this balance of resources is the percentage of

<sup>1</sup> April 24 Update from Superintendent Bill Barnes notes that additional \$6M of State Funding will be available, reducing the necessary addition from \$80M to \$74M

available general revenue funds allocated toward that legally mandated need. In the past few years, general fund revenue has been significantly augmented by prior years funds made possible by consistent budget surpluses, which are NOT available for use for school system operating expenses. This year, Spending Affordability Advisory Commission has advised using less prior years funds. That is the only area of the county executive's proposed budget with significant reductions. Every other area of the proposed budget continues its steady growth enabled by growth in available recurring tax revenue. Consider the allocation to HCPSS including associated debt and OPEB relative to the recurring general fund revenues available for HCPSS, that is, the general fund budget without use of prior years funds not permitted for use in operating expenses. That analysis shows that despite the significant amount of new tax revenue allocated to public schools in the county executive's proposed budget, the proportion of available funds dedicated to HCPSS is still lower than at any time. Any apparent uptick in the proportion of general fund revenue dedicated to the schools is the result of decreasing use of prior funds by approximately \$100M. This trade off speaks volumes about the relative of priority of education relative to the other needs of the county.



During an economic downturn in 2011, the county executive's budget book comments cited funding reductions from state sources and how Howard County increased funding for education despite having to cut a corresponding amount from the rest of the county budget. Then, Howard County was forced to furlough employees, hold 200 county positions vacant, and close offices over the winter holidays. The measures proposed by the county executive for FY26 pale in comparison. The proposed level of funding for HCPSS for 2026 puts teachers and students at the forefront of county cost saving measures. Hardly the way to demonstrate education is a priority. Asking county employees to increase their contributions to their benefits merely asks them to make "almost" the same 15% cost share as HCPSS teachers (15 – 15.8%) already do.

General Fund investment income has greatly exceeded budgeted levels for the past three years<sup>2</sup> and that recurring revenue should be used to support current year education expenses rather than future PayGo. County Council should include revenue such that an additional \$10M in investment income<sup>3</sup> realized by the county can be used as the basis of restoring \$30M to HCPSS above the County Executive's proposal.

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<sup>2</sup> Howard County Investment Report from February 28, 2025 and the 2024 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report

<sup>3</sup> General fund balance on \$900M should yield about \$36M at benchmark interest rates (4%), but only \$22.5M is budgeted for FY26.

# County Council Budget Hearing

## HCEA Testimony

*April 30, 2025 – 5 mins*

Good evening members of the Council...

I'm Benjamin Schmitt, an Art Teacher for 25 years and currently the President of the Howard County Education Association, representing 6,300 hard-working members dedicated to our public school system. As the first union president to take office following the pandemic, I understand the unprecedented challenges our education community faces. During this time, we have seen the needs of our students grow exponentially year after year, placing impossible demands on educators and administrators alike.

I'm going to cut right to the chase: We're here in Council Chambers tonight because we're facing the exact same situation we did last year. The Board of Education finds itself staring down a \$27.7 million hole that it needs to fill, just to keep the lights on and honor its contractual commitments. If it cannot close that gap, the Board will have few options at its disposal to balance the budget including raising class sizes (again), reducing existing programs (again), laying off staff (again), or freezing pay increases (again). As with many other departments and programs, the cost of running the school system continues to outpace inflation.

That reality may be shocking, but it is completely unsurprising. Even though the school system receives additional dollars each year, the portion of the overall County budget that HCPSS receives has been on the decline since Ken Ulman was the county executive. Just think

sizes? Are **you** willing to freeze educator pay during a teacher shortage?

Times of uncertainty call for unity, and for strong leadership. School advocates will not be divided, and we will not allow our programs to be pitted against one another again. Even if you are concerned about the impact of the federal workforce, it would be a **grave** mistake to underfund the very school system that underpins the county's tax base. Please restore additional funding for the Board of Education's budget. Howard County cannot continue to state that education is a priority, while our educators, parents, and students face yearly chaos, and our Board is forced to cut services every year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raymond L. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.



# Howard County Council Testimony

Restore Full Funding to HCPSS

Good evening, Council members,

My name is Cat Carter, and I live in District 5. I am currently the VP of Advocacy for the PTA of Howard County, the PTA representative on the Operating Budget Review Committee OBRC, member of the Howard County Education Coalition, and Consumer Advocate on the State Board of Examiners of Optometry. I am speaking in my own capacity as a mom of five students of the Howard County Public School System.

I'm here tonight because I am deeply concerned about the proposed cuts to the Howard County Public School System. When budget pressures arise, our schools should not be the first place to face cuts. The school system should not be leading the way in service reductions. Education is a core public service, and maintaining its excellence must remain a top priority.

We know the county has been conservative in its revenue projections. Investment reports suggest there will be at least \$10 million more available than planned. That money should go toward the essential needs of our schools, not just to additional PAYGO projects.

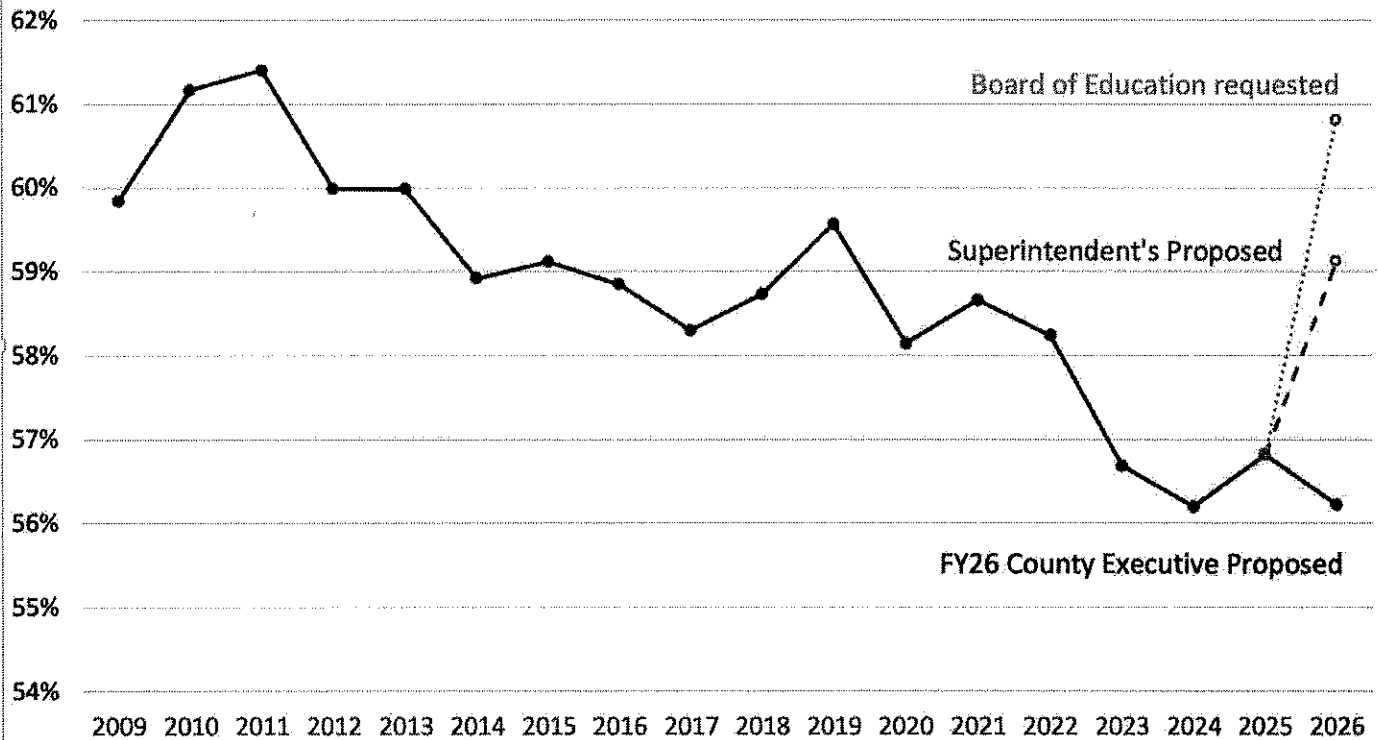
For years, HCPSS has been underfunded. This year, the school system needs at least \$80.6 million just to maintain the same level of services. Without it, we are looking at larger class sizes, cuts to programs, and staff layoffs — all of which will directly impact our students.

If you look at this chart, Howard County Public Schools System share of the recurring General Fund Revenue has dropped significantly over the years. I know you care about our students and schools. You have children, have served on PTAs, attended graduations...But every year you have voted on a budget that decreased the percentage of money schools get from it.

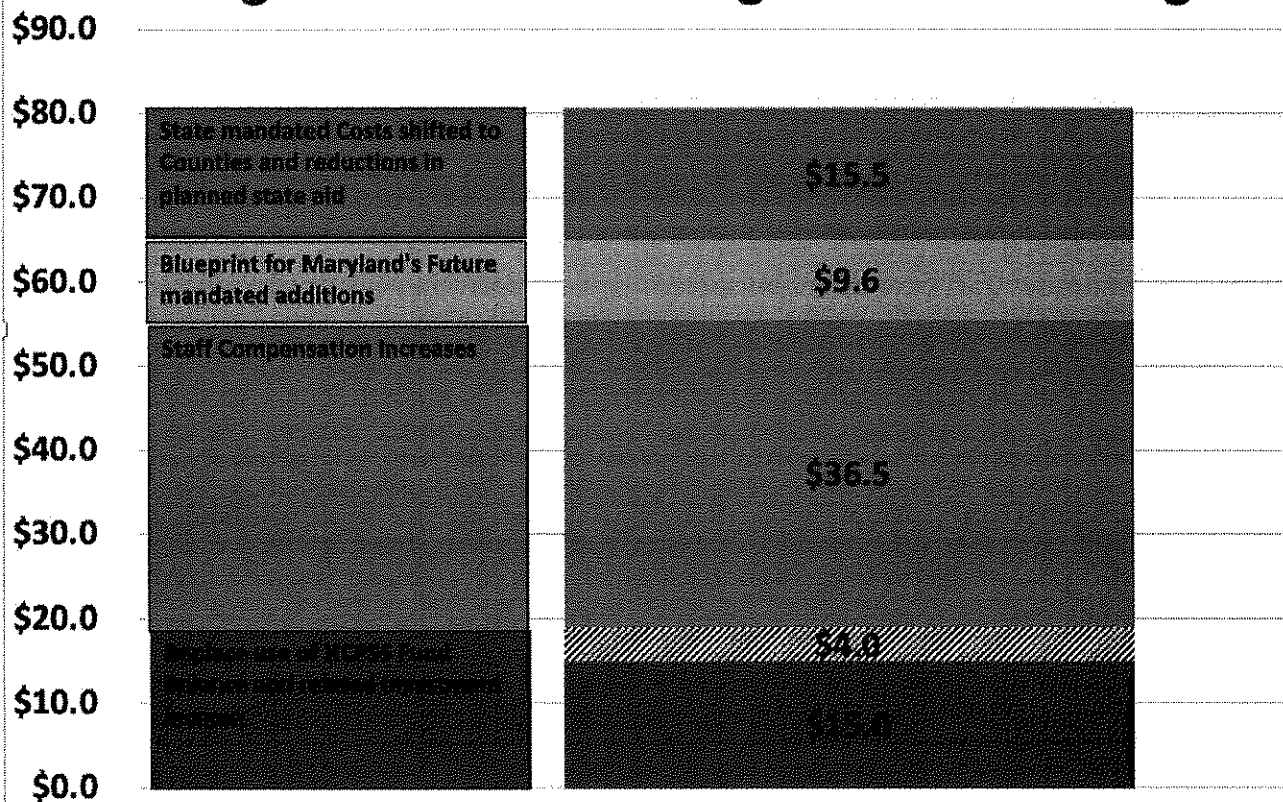
Libraries, parks, art museums, theaters, community centers and programs are amazing, but not every child will have parents who can take them to these places, but every child goes to school. One in 6 Howard County residents are students attending our public schools. These children will feel the impact if you do not fund our schools and continue this downward trend. That is your legacy, asking our schools to more with less. On behalf of our students, I am asking you change this trajectory and vote to fund our schools.

Thank you, Cat Carter

### HCPSS Share of Recurring General Fund Revenue



### HCPSS Requires Increase of \$80.6M in County Funding to Maintain Existing Levels of Staffing



4/30/25

Good evening, Council members,

Simon Sinek once said, "Working hard for something we don't care about is called stress. Working hard for something we love is called passion."

But what happens when those who are passionate — our educators — are pushed past the point of burnout, not because they lack heart, but because they lack support?

My name is Ginger Segala. I've had children in the Howard County Public School System since 2001. As I near the end of this chapter in my life with just one child left in the system, I stand before you not only as a parent, but as a resident who deeply values the well-being of our entire community.

February 2nd may be officially Groundhog Day, but here in Howard County, spring marks another repeating ritual — parents lining up to beg, once again, for adequate funding for our schools. It's demoralizing, it's predictable, and frankly, it's avoidable.

Yes, as Mr. Barnes noted in last night's Board of Education meeting, no generation has faced these fiscal challenges in quite the same way. But that doesn't absolve us of responsibility — it demands courage and clarity in our priorities.

I've lived long enough in this county to value all that it offers: our libraries, our trails and new pickle ball courts, our public safety, our cultural and recreational programs. They enrich us. But let me be clear: nothing is more vital than the strength and sustainability of our public education system.

We are at a tipping point.

I have seen the slow erosion caused by budget neglect: ballooning class sizes, shrinking student services, fewer arts and music opportunities, and a growing crisis in special education support.

Our educators are stretched thin. Our students — especially those who need the most — are falling through the cracks.

Last year's flash mob of student musicians — which I helped organize — was a joyful yet urgent call to protect what makes our schools exceptional. But joy alone won't sustain them. Budgets will. And this year's proposed allocation? It's not enough.

Not enough to meet rising costs. Not enough to reduce class sizes. Not enough to restore what's been lost or build what's now needed.

The truth is: every dollar you withhold from our schools now will cost us exponentially more in the future — in remediation, in inequity, in diminished community outcomes.

We must invest in our teachers. We must bolster special education. We must preserve the programs that ignite curiosity and keep students engaged. Education isn't a luxury line item — it's the engine of equity, of economic vitality, and of civic strength.

Stop asking our schools to "make do." That's not sustainable. That's not responsible. And that's not leadership.

It's time to reprioritize. Make education the priority.

Thank you.

Jennifer (Ginger) Segala

As you consider your funding for Howard County Public School System, I would like to lift up the role of the high school library media specialists. In past years when there have been budget cuts, our jobs/our roles are often looked as something that can be cut. However, we are the heart of the school and our role is essential for the success of any educational institution.

High school library media specialist create belonging: As our students face uncertainty, the library media specialists are a constant support in their lives. According to my administration, the media center and student services are the most requested places students ask to go to. Library media specialists create a space that is welcoming and supportive. From the books that we order and then, display to showcase ALL of our students --to the organization of space providing quiet and groupwork spaces ---to providing individual or small group educational instructional supports: we create a space of belonging that students gravitate to.

High school library media specialists also instructionally facilitate lifelong learning. Instructionally, library media specialists work collaboratively with other teachers to create instruction on information literacy, critical thinking, and digital citizenship. Our students urgently need instruction about how to consume what they see online. Throughout the year, we work with classes across content areas on how to responsibly and ethically use and evaluate social media and AI. These are skills that are essential to empower future-ready learners. This is in addition to our instruction that supports traditional information literacy supporting research projects and instruction supporting the infusion of educational technology into the curriculum. Let me emphasize that we support and deliver this instruction to ALL content areas.

High school library media specialists support the entire school community with their expertise in collection development. High school library media specialists across the county use their knowledge of the student community in their schools to purchase reading materials that appeal to student interests and support their school's curricular needs. We collaborate with teachers across content areas to purchase and curate materials to support their specific instructional needs. Additionally, high school library media specialists work with the students and teachers to develop opportunities for our students to engage with reading that meets their interests and their reading level. By tailoring our collection to our students, we are able to help more students reinvest in reading for pleasure which in turn develops their reading competency...an important skill if we truly want to send our students into the world future-ready.

High School Library media specialists also partner with and support all teachers through what might be best called instructional enhancement. We are uniquely poised to research

and implement current best practices around digital tools and information literacy so that teachers can focus on their curricular goals.

We do all of this and more with a staff of only two high school library media specialists. Think about. There are only two library media specialists that support each high school community. Our role is essential, our support is essential, our expertise is essential...we are essential.

Good evening. My name is Jhonna Seifert.  
I'm a current parent, resident, and teacher in Howard County.

To quote John Dewey, ***"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."***

This speaks volumes. Education makes anything possible.

With education, we are able to find our talents & pursue our dreams.

I know schools are an expense and as much as I love finding a good sale or coupon, that isn't going to work for our school system.

Isn't our future generation worth the full ticket price?!

What message are we sending to our students if we are not fully funding their schools? That they're not enough?

We need students IN school. Data shows that Attendance is the key to student success.

What makes kids want to come to school?!

Guess what? It's not the tests they take or the papers they write  
...

They come to school for the connections, belonging, to feel safe & loved.

They come to school for the interactive engaging hands on programs that GT & the arts offer.

They come to school to have authentic learning experiences.  
They come to school to socialize in meaningful ways.

We need kids to LOVE school. Kids love to come to school when they have an opportunity to shine through a GT seminar showcase that is open to anyone in grade 2 - 8. OR a fine arts programs open to anyone in grades 3 - 8.

We need to provide the opportunities for kids to enjoy school.

Data shows that when people enjoy things, they want to continue it & stick with it. And we need our students to stay in school!

How do we do this ...

- more teachers
- smaller class sizes
- various programs of interest & ability
- less standarized tests

We need all the programs that HCPSS offers to get these kids to school.

Let's be innovators ... let's fully fund the HCPSS budget and see where it takes us!



We need more resources to serve our under represented student populations.

COMAR (Code of MD regulations) mandates Primary Talent Development lessons to all Pre K - 2nd graders. This is how we find our under represented students.

We are currently providing GT services to ALL K - 2 students & will continue to expand our GT programing. This is how we find those underserved students.

We offer GT opportunities open to ALL students grades 2 - 8. While we also need to accommodate for students who are already at high levels.

We also need the resources to serve our twice exceptional students, which there are many. These are our students with high intellectual abilities alongside with a learning disability or other exceptionality.

Your legacy from your time as a council member for this great county can be one that does what is right for our youth.

Let your legacy shine by fully funding the HCPSS budget.

Your decisions you make here have a lasting impact on the education of our children.

The decisions you make here in this room will be your legacy that everyone will remember.

I believe you all care about the kids and future of this county.

I sincerely hope you put our children and their future first.

Our students are worth it!

Like John Dewey said, ***"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."***

Extra if time -

I'm one of the lucky ones. I've lived in Howard County for over 40 years. My husband grew up in Montgomery County, but we decided to raise our family in Howard County because of the fabulous the schools.

We need more people to run our schools. So we can have smaller class sizes, then we are able to properly build relationships, provide grades and feedback in a timely manner, plan and create hands-on diverse and engaging lessons, conference and call families, showcase work, plan field trips, - the list does not end.

Save money on electcioty motion sensor lights

**LED Lighting and Motion Sensors:**

**Smart Thermostats and HVAC Systems:**



HOWARD COUNTY  
LIBRARY SYSTEM

*Learn. Grow. Connect.*

**Howard County Council's Operating Budget Hearing  
April 30, 2025**

**Testimony in support of Howard County Library System**

*Liz Banach*

*Chair, Howard County Library System Board of Trustees*

Good evening, Chair Walsh, Vice Chair Jones, and members of the County Council. I am Liz Banach, Chair of Howard County Library System's Board of Trustees. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of our library system and how our strategic plan aligns with the County Executive's budget priorities.

As Tonya mentioned in her testimony last week, libraries are uniquely situated to **prepare children for kindergarten** because before young ones ever step foot in school, they attend classes in libraries. The number of words heard by a child during the first three years of life can dramatically affect language development, so our instructors teach classes for infants, toddlers, and their parents and caregivers mapped to common language standards. Students who lag behind their peers in kindergarten are challenged to catch up – and that gap often grows throughout their K-12 career.

**For teens**, their middle and high school years are critical for social and emotional development. At the library, our teen specialists work with teens to plan activities like Teen Live, which attracts hundreds of students who come to the library where they connect with others, build community, enhance their social skills, and feel a sense of belonging.

**Emerging adults** face a variety of challenges, including employment, financial literacy, physical and mental health, and social isolation. In April we hosted the Maryland Emerging Adults Summit which focused on how libraries can support 18- to 25-year-olds as they navigate early adulthood. As engines of opportunity, public libraries provide free access to job training, financial literacy classes, mental health resources, technology, and social connections. We also create safe spaces for young adults to build the skills and confidence they need to navigate adulthood successfully.

Through our **Project Literacy** initiative, we provide workforce development skills to help residents thrive. One of those residents is Martin, a successful small business owner who immigrated to the United States as a teen. He put his own formal education on hold to focus on his family and his landscaping business. After supporting his children through college and being inspired by his wife earning her master's degree, Martin decided to prioritize his own education. He entered our National External Diploma Program and worked tirelessly to earn his diploma in just six months.

For people with special needs, **Beyond Words** is a series of monthly classes planned in collaboration with teens and adults and their caregivers. The classes consist of stations tailored to different abilities. Stations feature motor skills, arts and crafts, cognitive skills, movement, and sensory activities. At first offered only at our Miller Branch, Beyond Words expanded to our East Columbia Branch due to demand.

Our **Global Neighbors** series celebrates our county's diversity and highlights the rich cultural heritage of our neighbors' home countries to foster better understanding of each other and help everyone in the community feel seen, heard, and celebrated. Through short presentations, food, displays, and

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entertainment, attendees increase their understanding and appreciation of others' cultures. Our next Global Neighbors event is this coming Sunday afternoon at our Miller Branch from 2 to 4 pm. We invite you to join us.

These are just a sampling of the many ways we are working to realize our vision to create an inclusive, connected community where everyone feels they belong and where our county's residents thrive. This is the basis for our work, and we ask you to invest in our entire community – from babies to seniors - by fully funding the County Executive's budget request.

Respectfully submitted,  
Liz Banach

Good Evening Council Members,

My name is Ryan Powers from Glenwood. Today I am speaking only for myself and no other group.

I am concerned that Howard County has dug itself a hole with the lack of funding for HCPSS that it will never be able to get out of unless the council takes concrete steps today to fix what is broken.

Since 2018, the share of county budget that HCPSS receives has gone down 6.4%, and a lot more if you consider only the recurring funds available to the school system. That's an almost 7% reduction to a crucial county service where the needs of constituents have only increased. 16% more special education students, 40% more students experiencing poverty. With the deleterious effects of inflation and increased student needs and services, HCPSS is like the Red Queen with Alice in Wonderland, running furiously just to stay in the same place. We need to switch gears and stop talking about flat enrollment when we see Blueprint mandates for preK aren't accounted for. Gateway isn't factored in yet. And you know that CB18-2025 will add 600-1000 new students as fast as builders can build. Nothing is "stagnant" in the school system. We need to recognize the needs of the present and plan for the future.

I am concerned about a runaway feedback loop where we don't plan for the needs of the school system and wreck the pride of our county. In this scenario, you approve the drastic cuts to HCPSS that it needed to maintain same-level services. When the BOE tries to raise its head above water next year with another reasonable budget it is again not funded because now the problem is so deep it's even easier to call it "surprising", "unattainable", and "unaffordable". I'm quoting the words of our County Executive in his memo to the BOE this year justifying service cuts. Social media posts and letters then convince other residents to essentially "let them eat cake" with a budget that doesn't get the job done. The cycle of program cuts and increasing class sizes continues for the third year in a row and soon we can't even pretend HCPSS is a leading school system anymore, can we?

We can't ignore the reality that HCPSS has more needs than are being fulfilled in the County Executive's budget proposal. Scrutinize the BOE budget, find efficiencies, and hold them accountable for fiscal responsibility. But that should also involve Howard County holding meetings with the community so that you can hear their concerns and inform them of a better way. It should be a conversation; posting on facebook doesn't do it.

Finally, you have been presented with data showing that it's reasonable to assume at least 10 million more in investment income. The SAAC has also had an historically conservative record underestimating new county revenue. We shouldn't let that money become Pay Go that doesn't prioritize the educational duties of Howard County.

Thank you for your time today,  
Ryan Powers, Glenwood, MD

Good evening Council Members,

My name is Susan Pennington and I am asking the Council to fully fund the budget at the amount requested by the Board of Education and not at the reduced amount proposed by County Executive Calvin Ball. I was born, raised, and educated in Howard County and have been a social studies teacher in the county for 22 years, teaching all levels including on grade level, honors, AP, and ELL classes. I have seen firsthand how our schools have changed as the percentage of county funds for schools has decreased over the years.

The budget cuts last year were devastating to our programs. My school surplused 15 teachers, while WE HAD NO CORRESPONDING REDUCTION IN STUDENT POPULATION. My department alone lost 2.5 positions, or the equivalent of 12 class sections. This situation was created by two measures: the increase in class sizes and the increase in the minimum number of students necessary to run a class. My department alone lost 3 AP sections and 8 elective sections. We face more cuts to our program if the minimum class size is not reduced or the class size maximum grows. If you do not fully fund the requested budget, we will be faced with these draconian measures once again.

This is detrimental to the faculty members and the school as a whole but, it is a greater disservice to our students. The lack of class sections means that students are not given the opportunity to pursue, or discover, their passion. It also means that we have zero chance to build our elective classes, the nonrequired classes the students choose to take because they are curious and interested, not because the state requires it. These actions are crushing student's curiosity. In addition, at a time in our nation's history when it is essential that we educate students to seek answers and make good choices for themselves, we are failing to provide the arena in which students would learn and test these skills.

We have already been advised that our ELL paras will be reduced at a time when our English language learner population is increasing. If the budget is not fully funded, we will lose more valuable support positions. . These positions are vital to our students and teachers, particularly in light of the increased class sizes. Teachers are challenged with meeting their students needs, whether or not they have a 504 or IEP due to class size. Many classes needing support do not receive any as there are not enough, once again a disservice to our students.

Howard County has long been a magnet for people, domestically and internationally, because of our school system. If we continue down this path and remove those things that enable our students to discover new horizons, what will we be left with? We will be the

nameless, faceless people found in the 1984 Mac computer commercial, devoid of any individuality or spark. That is not a county I wish for anyone.

Please fully fund our budget and the promise of a world class education.

Thank you

Susan Pennington

5033 Lake Circle West, Columbia, Maryland 21044

443-562-6961

## FY26 OPERATING BUDGET – PUBLIC TESTIMONY – EDUCATION

Good evening members of the Council,

I am Terri Marcus, President of the PTA Council of Howard County, and I am testifying tonight on behalf of the thousands of PTA members in the county.

As a voice for parents, teachers, and students, I am here to simply ask you to restore as much funding as possible to the school system to bring it as close as possible to the Board of Education's requested budget. It is very discouraging to have to be here once again with our hands out asking for money, especially when I think we all started off the year feeling kind of hopeful because we finally had the school board submit a budget that more truly reflects what the actual needs of the school system are. I want to emphasize that this is still a step in the right direction, even if we know full funding is likely unattainable in any particular year.

After Mr. Barnes' presentation to the school board last night, we know HCPSS needs at a minimum, \$29.2 million, just to cover existing services, such as employee compensation and benefits and to meet existing service commitments. Finding this \$29.2 million should be job #1. If that's possible, why stop there? Restoring a full \$54.3 million will allow the school system to meet their "other priorities". These "other priorities" are not luxuries. They are things like adding security and special education positions, math and reading teachers and specialists, middle school principals, and athletic trainers. Any number between \$29.2 and \$54.3 million would obviously allow some of these priorities to become reality. It is to every citizen's benefit, whether you have a student or not, that HCPSS retains its reputation as an excellent school system.

Just like you as council members, PTA representatives don't get to pick and choose specific spending priorities that benefit one group over another, but there is one thing we can advocate for – and that is to provide enough funding that we can avoid another across-the-board class size increase at any grade level. We just did this last year. It is hugely detrimental to all the students and to staff. Mr. Barnes very reluctantly made mention of class size increases last night, but he



made it clear that it is once again a very real possibility. Programming and staffing cuts could also very well be on the chopping block again.

The county executive's proposed budget informs us that of the \$1.187 billion dollar budget for HCPSS, \$801.5 million of that will come from the county with the remainder coming from various other sources. The county is to provide \$39.3 million above MOE, \$1.5 million in one-time PAYGO funding, and \$6.7 million in employee pension costs that were dumped on the county from the state. Dr. Ball's budget mentions that the funding growth to HCPSS "accounts for approximately 55% of all new county General Fund revenue growth this fiscal year." <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/2025-04/Fiscal%20Year%202026%20Proposed%20Operating%20Budget%20Book%200.pdf>

My question is: Why only 55%? Where is the other 45% going? What is the argument for it not going to the school system? That \$801.5 million going to HCPSS of the total \$2.3 billion county operating budget means that HCPSS is receiving only 34.85% of the total operating budget. That percentage seems low if education is, in fact, a priority for the county.

As your work sessions progress from the capital budget to the operating budget side of things – we would also urge you to uphold the medical principle to at least do no harm. Do not pass any new legislation that creates exemptions or undercuts funding to the school system. Do not set yourselves up for even tougher decisions in the future by reducing the amount of revenue available to meet the school board's requests year after year.

We know that all of you value education. We have seen your work in previous years to restore funding to the school system when possible. Please continue to demonstrate that commitment to your youngest and most vulnerable constituents and to their families who pay a lot to keep this whole system going. So, I wish you all good luck and just ask that you keep all the students and parents and teachers in mind when making the tough decisions ahead.

Thank you.