

Fw: Audit of education spending in Howard County

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To: CouncilMail

As a life-long Howard County resident/taxpayer and retired Howard County teacher/team leader for 38 years, I am writing in support of Councilman Calvin Ball's call for an audit of education spending in the county and creation of a committee to oversee the system's budget. This transparency into the budget is much needed for all to understand why, despite an increase above last year's allocation of money to the education system's budget, the Superintendent and Board of Education feels a need for deep cuts in this year's budget items.

For the second year in a row, retired teachers, as well as current teachers, find their health benefits among the first items to be deeply cut in the first round of cuts made by the Superintendent and the Board of Education. This year it is a \$39 million cut! To retired teachers, many of whom are on fixed incomes and depend on the health benefits promised them when they signed their contracts many years ago, such a cut is devastating. These benefits are, at the least, the fulfillment of a promise and, at most, often needed to receive life and death medical treatments!

Howard County is one of the wealthiest counties in the country with a premier educational system. This educational system's ranking is due to the dedicated teachers who have given their expertise and professional lives to create and implement the programs of which the children of Howard County are recipients, yet it is the health benefits of these very teachers which is in jeopardy for the second year in a row!

I attended the Board of Education's meeting on May 31st at 8:00AM when they voted for the cuts in the current budget. Despite the objections of two board members who said they felt unprepared to vote due to the lack of information and the speed with which this vote was being required, the Superintendent insisted that the budget must be passed that day. At the beginning of the presentation of the proposed cuts, the statement was made that salaries of \$100,000 or more were not among the recommended cuts because they would be considered if and when another round of cuts became necessary! I know of no teacher who has ever received this kind of salary, yet it is the teacher's health benefits which are immediately cut. I was equally appalled at the fact that once approximately half of the line items for cuts had been passed after rather lengthy discussion, when it was time to vote on cuts to the teacher's health benefits and the rest of the important items, the Superintendent announced that voting needed to be sped up because she and some Board members had to attend two upcoming commencement exercises that day. It was then that the remainder of the line items were presented with very limited or no discussion and quickly passed by most members of the Board.

If the Howard County education system's budget is being properly handled and still needs to be increased beyond the current level to prevent these deep cuts in such important items, then there should be no objections to an audit of the education spending in Howard County and the creation of a committee to oversee this budget to assure transparency thus showing the real need for larger monetary allocation from the county. Please vote in the AFFIRMATIVE for Councilman Ball's proposed legislation!

Respectfully,

Gail L. Burgtorf
Resident and retired Howard County teacher