

January 16, 2024

The Honorable Marc Elrich
County Executive
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear County Executive Elrich:

Early literacy for kindergarten readiness. Teen readiness for college and career. Engaging fully in American society. Navigating the digital world. From our youngest citizens to adults, across racial and cultural groups, and economic strata, the Montgomery County Public Libraries FY2023-26 Strategic Plan places an intentional focus on Montgomery County residents, particularly those who live in the Equity Focus Areas, as defined by Montgomery Planning. As the Library Board and Friends of the Library Montgomery County (FOLMC), we support the funding of our county libraries for FY2025 to continue to implement MCPL Strategic Plan which was developed by the professional library staff with input from community stakeholders and was approved by you to make our libraries generally better known and increase access to the county libraries' resources in an effort to address issues impacting our county residents.

Improving kindergarten readiness is listed as the MCPL Strategic Plan's first goal. As you have pointed out many times, this is the county's biggest problem; it's a concern that disproportionately impacts our youngest residents who are English learners and in families of lower income. The data from the latest Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, reveals that on any given day, 42,000 of our 75,000 children under five are not getting the exposure to early literacy work that they need. Doing their part to address this issue, MCPL plans to increase participation in early learner and summer reading programs and increase the number and circulation of children's materials, particularly among English learners and lower-income communities in order to improve access and use of services and reading materials in Equity Focus Areas. As research makes clear, families reading with young children is a fundamental element of kindergarten readiness and MCPL supports it with thousands of early literacy programs and free access to millions of books every year.

MCPL's plans for expanding early literacy programs and access are clearly essential to kindergarten readiness in response to our county's increasing need. Given the disappointment many Council members expressed about kindergarten readiness in a hearing on November 2, 2023 we expect that they, too, will consider MCPL's requests seriously.

In addition to a focused kindergarten readiness outreach effort, the other goals of MCPL's Strategic Plan work together in a concerted effort to increase awareness and usage of public libraries and encourage life-long library use and will be supported by a broader marketing effort.

The intended outcomes of increasing library usage and diverse programming, materials, and resources include support for college and career planning, and educational attainment; increased employment, increased English proficiency and proficiency with technology and digital resources for specific segments of our county. For example, if residents come to the library because they can find publications in their own language, such as Spanish, Chinese, and Amharic, they will also find out about many of the resources the library provides, such as help with job searches, access to digital capabilities, children's programs, activities for teenagers, assistance in starting a business, the opportunity to get a high school diploma and the ability to borrow books, music, and movies—at no cost.

To sum up, we recommend that you support the full funding of MCPL for FY2025, in order to support:

- **Increased outreach to communities that need early literacy support,**
- **The establishment of a general marketing capability, and**
- **A significant increase in MCPL's foreign language collections.**

These enhancements to the Montgomery County Public Libraries will allow the strategic plan to continue to be implemented to improve the lifestyle, education, and livelihood of our county residents.

We appreciate your consideration. Thank you.

Frances M. Frost
President, Friends of the Library Montgomery County

Tim Lighter
Chair, Montgomery Country Library Board

cc: Montgomery County Council
Anita Vassallo, Director, Montgomery County Public Libraries
Jennifer Bryant, Director, Office of Management and Budget