

November 13, 2014 Hearing
Montgomery County Board of Education Capital Improvements Program
Testimony of Jessica N Rowden, resident

As a resident of Aspen Hill, I wanted to voice my concern about the proposed plan to relocate the Alternative Education Programs from the Ewing Center to the old English Manor Elementary School on Bestor Drive. We moved to Aspen Hill just over a year ago, looking for a quiet, family friendly neighborhood to raise our young family. We have found a wonderful neighborhood and welcoming neighbors and have never been happier with our decision to move here. I don't want to see all of that change without any input from myself and other residents.

With regards to the proposed Ewing Center move, I urge the Board to consider first the impact of this proposal on the neighborhood residents prior to voting on a feasibility study. The needs of the residents and impact on the neighborhood were not a consideration when developing this proposal. Only cost and convenience of MCPS were taken into consideration. While I do understand any potential feasibility study would address some concerns, up to this point there has been no opportunity for community involvement or discussion in regards to this proposal. Residents of Aspen Hill were not even aware of this. Even the current tenant at the old elementary school, School for Tomorrow, wasn't even aware of this proposal until late Friday and found out through a resident, not their own MCPS contacts. It is extremely frustrating that the Board did not promote or communicate this proposed move sooner and we were given no information on this.

My concern is over the students enrolled in the AEP. I understand the AEP students are not able to thrive in traditional schooling and need an alternative. Many of these students just don't do well in those traditional settings. However, this student population also includes students who, according to the Ewing center website, have "behavior...problems" or have "involvement with controlled substances, serious bodily injury, and/or weapons." I feel that the Board has not fully explored or considered the impact of relocating the AEP students to the neighborhood. In the year since we have moved, we have seen Aspen Hill turn over with older residents moving out, and young families with infants and toddlers taking their places. This can be evidenced by the huge demand and subsequent increase in at home day cares in the neighborhood; there are at least 3 daycares within 4 blocks from the proposed site. That is the main reason I am very concerned about the proposed plan to relocate the AEP to this neighborhood.

What risk do these students pose to themselves, to our property and to our neighbors? Do these students have the potential to put my children and all the other young children at risk? With the young, very impressionable, children in this neighborhood, is this really best place to relocate this school? Aside from safety concerns, is this even the right location for the

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students? It is not near convenient public transportation. The metro is miles away and the bus routes are not that convenient. It is also not near any business center. Don't these students need easy access to vocational opportunities? What about property values in the neighborhood? What about all the other changes that this move would bring?

I do feel that every student in the county deserves the best education possible, and the AEP students are no different. But more discussion and exploration of this move needs to be done before this matter is voted on so quickly. I request that the Board delay the vote and consider other options aside from this one. Thank you.