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Dear County Executive Ball and County Council Members

As you work together with the Board of Education to close the gap for the HCPSS FY26 Operating Budget, understand that students, parents, and all county residents rely upon maintaining the excellence of Howard County schools many people move here for.

We would like to respond County Executive Ball's memo sent on May 8th which suggested HCPSS use their budget in a different way so that more than 222 positions won't be cut from the FY26 school budget. We appreciate the need for transparency and dialogue in order to use County funds more efficiently and we emphasize the County's role in obtaining the necessary funding to avoid a second year of class size increase, program cuts, and extensive firings.

We agree on the following steps for HCPSS:

- HCPSS should use the health fund surplus as long as county guarantees future support if required
- HCPSS General Fund Balance should be used if greater than 1% recommended balance specified by HCPSS policy
- HCPSS investment income may be available, although likely less than last year due to less funds available for investment

We urge the county to continue partnering with HCPSS by doing the following:

- Increase County conservative estimate of investment income and direct surplus to HCPSS.
- Review County salary growth (27% since 2018, compared to teachers 17%) and reduce if needed to allow HCPSS teachers to catch up to other county colleagues.
- Consider the recent history of record surplus revenue, and Pay Go funds being used repeatedly for some programs. Current investment fund report notes that fund balance is approximately \$200M above expected level for FY25. Whether through additional revenue or additional sacrifice, we expect that support for HCPSS will allow for continuance of current programs and staffing levels.

We must balance fiscal responsibility for the future and our children's educational needs today. Drawing down the surplus health fund balances increases shortage risks in the future which the county will have to cover. HCPSS General fund balance dropping below 1% risks requiring additional appropriations like the county is voting on this month (5.5M to HCPSS to cover unexpected additional cost in CR88-2025).

No one can predict the future – but overly conservative estimates of investment income come at its own opportunity cost. Costs like increased class sizes for the second year in a row, 48% reduction in Elementary school gifted and talented program, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade strings. Teachers can't withstand another increase in workload. Students can't withstand losing even more teachers from each school and some classrooms cannot physically fit one more desk in the room.

We ask the County to prioritize residents' commitment to their own educational needs.

Thank you,

[ Sign Name & Address Here ]