

Teresa Sutherland  
[REDACTED]  
Annapolis, MD 21403

February 14, 2016

Dear Board Members:

I am Teresa Sutherland, and I am the parent of an exhausted 16 year old. I had hoped to testify before you on February 17, the day after my last day of employment as the Anne Arundel County Auditor, but I understand that unless there is an amendment to Dr. Arlotto's proposed budget on which I can speak, you will not be taking any public testimony on the budget. Therefore, I wish to share my comments on with you by way of this letter.

It was my job as the County Auditor to advise the County Council on the County Executive's proposed budget. In that capacity, I've watched your budget presentations and analyzed your budgets for 28 years – literally more than any human being on earth. I know your budget; I know the County's budget; I know the budget process; I know the budget laws; and I know every budget game there is.

After 28 years, I can tell you two things with certainty: (1) If, in fact, step increases for teachers and healthy, safe start times for all children were Dr. Arlotto's priorities, your priorities, the County Executive's priorities, and the County Council's priorities, both would be fully funded; and (2) it will take nothing less than a miracle for the Board of Education to get \$40 million of additional funding from the County next year.

I've reviewed the Superintendent's proposed budget, listened to his speech, and watched his budget presentation to you. One might think Dr. Arlotto's priorities are step increases, adding new programs and positions, and expanding existing programs, like Triple E. But those are not his priorities. His priorities are whatever he has reprogrammed \$13 million of savings for, and since that is not disclosed in the budget documents, you don't know whether those initiatives or programs are consistent with your priorities.

Dr. Arlotto said he will shift school start times only if there is broad community support to do so, a statement I found odd for two reasons. *First, that's not his decision to make; it's yours. You set the policy; he carries it out.*

*Second, starting high school later is a health and safety issue, and we don't make health and safety decisions by consensus or only when there is broad community support.* The Board didn't poll the community when they banned smoking on school property 20 years ago. They just did it because it was the right thing to do for our kids' health.

I appreciate Dr. Arlotto's attempt to get community feedback at the recent forums, and I know you got a lot of negative feedback. However, the survey was, in my opinion, incredibly biased. The only box to check in support of changing bell times was if you supported the schedules exactly as proposed. There was no way to indicate you supported starting high school later, but were concerned about the early elementary school or late middle school start and dismissal times. If someone designing the survey were biased in favor of changing start times, one might have presented the options below:

<b>I oppose the proposed changes to start and dismissal times because:</b>	
	I believe children can safely walk to and from school and the bus stops in the dark 1-2 hours before sunrise.
	I want to my child to be depressed and/or anxious.
	I want my child to be obese and/or have an eating disorder.
	I want to increase the chance that my child will drink alcohol, do drugs, and have teenage sex.
	I want to my teenager to drive drowsy.
	I want my child to be tardy and/or absent more often.
	I want to lower my child's test scores. They're too high.

The research is overwhelmingly conclusive that forcing our teens to get up in the 4, 5, or even 6 a.m. hour has negative effects on their health and on their academic performance, and we don't need research to know that kids walking to school or the bus stop 1-2 hours before sunrise simply is not safe.

I also want to ask you to do the right thing by our teachers. This year my son enrolled in AP Psych, and for only the third time in 12 years, he is excited about school. What sparked his excitement? Mr. Milk, the AP Psych teacher at Annapolis High who resigned last Friday. Mr. Milk testified before you that he would resign if you ratified the agreement negotiated by TAAAC and AACPS that eliminated the challenge school stipends, and he did. Why are you cutting teachers' pay when you have a \$13 million surplus this year? Please fund step increases and restore the challenge stipends.

Dr. Arlotto's vision is to increase learning potential and excitement at the elementary level by expanding Triple E. I hope *your* vision is to increase learning potential and excitement at *all* grade levels. Imagine the excitement and potential if the children arrived to school safely every day, well rested and awake, to be taught by highly qualified, well-compensated teachers.

Before you expand an existing program or add new programs or positions, you have an obligation to protect our children's health and safety, and you have the duty to pay the existing teachers appropriately. Don't lose more teachers like Mr. Milk. The \$13 million of savings Dr. Arlotto has reprogrammed for whatever his first priorities are plus the \$6 million you will get under maintenance of effort may well be enough to do both, especially if you use the routing software to refine the routes and cost estimates.

Just a reminder of how the budget laws work:

***If the County Executive cuts funding you have requested, the County Council can restore it. Yes, the Council may increase your budget over the amount the County Executive proposes, but ONLY if it's in your budget submission. If you don't ask for it, there's nothing they can do.***

The Board of Education missed the opportunity to receive funding to start high school later last year, a year in which the County Council unanimously passed a resolution encouraging you to start high school later, the County Executive said he supported later high school start times, and the Council left \$18 million unappropriated, letting it fall to fund balance. Don't miss the opportunity again. Don't wait until a child is killed or seriously injured walking or waiting in the dark, and if you don't think that could or would happen, check with Virginia Beach public schools. ***To do nothing is to do harm.***

Sincerely,

*Teresa Sutherland*

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