



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

MEMORANDUM

August 28, 2018

TO: Dr. Jack R. Smith, Superintendent, Montgomery County Public Schools
Dr. Travis Gayles, County Health Officer & Chief of Public Health Services
Uma Ahluwalia, Director, Department of Health & Human Services

FROM: George Leventhal, Chair, Health & Human Services Committee *George*
Jill Ortman-Fouse, Montgomery County Board of Education Member *Jill Ortman-Fouse*

SUBJECT: Contraceptives in Montgomery County Public Schools

With a new school year fast approaching, we are writing to request more information regarding the recently announced plans for distribution of contraceptives at high school wellness centers, the feasibility of expanding access to additional schools, a copy of the sexually transmitted infections (STIs) student education plan, and timeline to increase access to testing and treatment for STIS.

As you are already aware, the latest health data indicate that several STIs are on the rise in Montgomery County among our youth. Cases of chlamydia, syphilis and gonorrhea rose sharply from 2016 to 2017 for individuals between the ages of 15 and 29, and Montgomery County's increases are significantly higher than the Maryland state average.

We understand that the county's Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) intends to offer condoms to students at the four school-based wellness centers as part of a comprehensive strategy to address this public health crisis. However, we would like to see access expanded beyond these four schools to all high schools in the county as has been done in Baltimore City and Dorchester County. In addition, we would appreciate the assistance of your respective agencies in assessing the feasibility of extending this resource to middle schools, either through targeted distribution or by making them generally available at all middle schools.

We recognize the sensitivities surrounding issues related to sexual health and making contraceptives available at schools. For this reason, we feel it is important for HHS and Montgomery County Public Schools to allay the concerns of parents, teachers and students who may have reservations about the introduction of condoms into schools. There is a perception among some that the provision of condoms in schools will lead to increased

sexual activity among youth. The relationship between the availability of condoms and sexual behavior has been extensively studied over the last few decades, and the overwhelming majority of data suggest that the opposite is true. Studies have shown that when condoms are provided in conjunction with education on the prevention of STIs, it leads to a decrease in the initiation of sexual activity and, more broadly, leads to positive health outcomes, particularly among high-risk groups.¹ We believe students and parents should be educated on the recent surge in STI cases, risk behaviors and why the distribution of condoms is both a prudent and necessary precaution to prevent the spread of these infections. Accordingly, we would like to better understand the interagency strategy to inform students and parents of the risk of STIs and the ramifications if we don't take immediate, concrete measures to address this now.

As stewards of children, we have a moral obligation to create an environment that meets not only their educational, but their physical and medical needs as well. Parents entrust the county to nurture their children's minds and bodies, and we would be doing them a disservice if we did not make every effort to provide these sexual health resources to every adolescent in the county. Untreated STIs can lead to serious long-term health consequences, especially for adolescents and young women. We acknowledge there are practical, as well as fiscal, challenges associated with greatly expanding access to condoms across the school system and are committed to working through them with you to ensure that we stop this alarming health trend in its tracks.

Thank you for your consideration of our views and for any additional details you can provide regarding the rollout of this new public health initiative.

GL:JOF

cc:

Members of the Montgomery County Council
Members of the Montgomery County Board of Education
Dr. Maria Navarro, Chief Academic Officer, MCPS
Dr. Kimberly Statham, Deputy Superintendent OSSI, MCPS
Dr. Andrew Zuckerman, COO, MCPS
Joshua Civin, General Counsel, MCPS
Dr. Henry Johnson, Chief of Staff, MCPS
Roland Ikheloa, Chief of Staff/Ombudsman, MCPS
Suzann King, Staff Assistant, Board Governance & Operations, MCPS
Danielle Susskind, Staff Assistant, Government Affairs & Community Outreach, MCPS
Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst, Montgomery County Council

¹ Wang, T., Lurie, M., Govindasamy, D., & Mathews, C. (2018). The Effects of School-Based Condom Availability Programs (CAPs) on Condom Acquisition, Use and Sexual Behavior: A Systematic Review. *AIDS and Behavior*, 22(1), 308–320. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-017-1787-5>