

~~April 5, 2019~~ 8/17/23

Dear County Executive Elrich, Members of the County Council and Members of the MCPS Board of Education,

The Washington Post's explosive story published on ~~3/31/19~~, "~~A football locker room, a broomstick and a sex assault case roil a school~~", 8/11/23, "Many teachers said a principal sexually harassed them. He was promoted." documents with sickening detail the continued, abject failure of adults employed by MCPS to protect children. Sadly, what occurred is not surprising to many of us in the community. It was foreseeable and preventable.

Since 2012, I have advocated for changes to be made to protect our children from sexual violence of all forms in MCPS schools. Changes to weed out offenders knowingly left in the classroom, to fix the culture which protects the system not children, to hold those who fail to protect our children responsible.

In December 2017, I sat with a still new superintendent of schools, Jack Smith in his office (along with Andy Zuckerman and Josh Civins). I acknowledged he did not cause this problem but he did inherit it and it was now his responsibility to fix the issues. I shared the changes MCPS had made and most importantly shared what still needed to be done. I told him what the schools had committed to change was not being implemented and even if it were, it was insufficient to protect children. I told him he was getting incorrect information and bad advice from staff. I urged him to call in outsiders as the people who create a systemic culture of allowing and enabling abuse simply cannot be trusted to fix it. Jack Smith told me moving forward I should communicate concerns directly to him, he told me he had instructed staff he was to be informed of every single incident of sexual violence in the school system. He told me he would take personal responsibility for fixing the issues.

Time and a trail of victims have proven those statements to be false. Led by ~~Jack Smith~~ Monifa B. McKnight, MCPS has continued to superficially address the issue instead of taking real action and our children have paid the price. Adults who have failed to protect have been allowed to blithely move on in their lives with no fear of punishment and thus no motivation to change; this thanks in part to Maryland being 1 of only 2 states in the country who do not have criminal penalties for failure to report abuse.

If the continued harm of children, much less the subsequent negative press, will not make MCPS change, we are justified in asking what will force MCPS to change. What could possibly force those to whom we entrust our children to follow the law, to act ethically and morally or at very least with common sense? Only this, the county must act decisively and put in new leadership who put the safety of children first.

County residents need to see strong leadership and action once and for all on preventing abuse and holding enablers accountable. April is Child Abuse Prevention month; I look forward to the county taking concrete steps to protect our children. I call on you as the county executive to immediately take action to terminate the contract of ~~Jack Smith~~ Monifa B. McKnight and any and all other employees who knowingly chose to break the law, ignore policies and procedures and common sense which directly led to the harm of our children. I implore you to bring in independent investigators who will tell people what they don't want to hear and then listen to them and fix this problem once and for all. I would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Jennifer ~~Alvaro~~ Gross

Resident of Montgomery County

MCPS graduate

Parent of ~~current~~ recent MCPS ~~student~~ graduates

LCSW-C (MD & VA), Certified Sex Offender Treatment Provider (VA)