Dear Dr. Smith, Dr. Zuckerman, and Dr. Statham,

I am writing to you as the new chair of MCCPTA's Health and Safety Committee. We appreciate and commend your leadership in addressing school climate and safety issues in the newly released MCPS Interim School Safety and Security Report. You may know that MCCPTA's Health and Safety Committee established a new subcommittee on school climate and safety. The subcommittee, together with MCCPTA leaders, has examined the report in detail and we would like to offer our initial response to it in the hope that we can work together as you prepare the final version of the report and expand your concerns beyond high schools. I have appended our response at the end of this email. We will be distributing this response widely through MCCPTA Delegates and other forums.

Apart from School Climate and Safety, the Health and Safety Committee has two other subcommittees whose members are also eager to work with MCPS: Safe Technology and School Nutrition. The Safe Technology subcommittee is working on a number of issues, including MCPS's new cell phone policy and concerns over internet privacy. School Nutrition is looking forward to working with MCPS as all schools establish new Wellness teams in accordance with the 2017 Wellness Guidelines. We are also in the process of standing up subcommittees or work groups on Mental Health and Wellness, and Drug and Substance Abuse Prevention.

There are significant overlapping interests among our subcommittees, and my hope is that Health and Safety Committee members and MCPS officials will be able to identify partners and work together in our common goal of improved achievement and welfare for all MCPS students. Specifically, we would like to see if it is possible to establish a Health and Safety group that is similar to the Curriculum Committee group, which meets every six weeks. There may be further possibilities for the subcommittees building even closer relationships with relevant MCPS offices. I would be grateful if we set up some concrete next steps toward an MCPS-MCCPTA working group on health and safety issues. I list below the chairs of the various committees so they may be included on communication. As we add more, I will let you know.

School Climate and Safety: Gillian Huebner (gillianhuebner@gmail.com)
Safe Technology: Lisa Cline (lisajeane@aol.com) and Dr. Assya Pascalev (apascal2003@gmail.com)
School Nutrition: Lisa Mandell (lmandell22@gmail.com)

We welcome your support in our efforts to raise awareness for National Emotional Wellness Month in October. Health and Safety Committee member Tabatha Yeats-Lonske had a wonderful suggestion of printing out and posting "take-one" posters that will help students and staff feel more attentive toward themselves. She has offered several examples of posters, but I am including one here: https://i.pinimg.com/ originals/b2/61/54/ b26154ef27893c75d3bda9a83a28a8 23.jpg. We will be sending out an appeal to the PTA community to use these posters. This is an inexpensive and thoughtful way of encouraging a positive climate in our schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to present MCCPTA's Health and Safety Committee, its subcommittees, and some of our concerns. As a parent who will have kids in MCPS for the next eleven years, I look forward to a long and productive relationship.

Sincerely,

Sunil Dasgupta, Ph.D.
Chair, MCCPTA Health and Safety Committee

Comments on MCPS Interim Safety and Security Report:
In spring 2017, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) launched a comprehensive review of MCPS protocols, practices, and infrastructure related to the critical imperative of maintaining safe, orderly

learning environments for all students. The review is being spearheaded by the MCPS Department of School Safety and Security (DSSS), working in collaboration with school administrators and the Office of School Support and Improvement (OSSI).

As part of the comprehensive security review, MCPS is examining security procedures that are already in place to determine the appropriate next steps for individual schools and systemwide. The review began with MCPS's 25 high schools, and an interim report has been released summarizing the findings.

Driven by strong parent and community interest, the Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA) established a new subcommittee on School Climate and Safety as part of the Committee on Health and Safety. The purpose of the Subcommittee is to facilitate strategic engagement of MCPS parents and families on issues related to school climate and safety so that we work more effectively in partnership with MCPS on these matters.

The Subcommittee welcomes the increased, necessary, and systematic focus on safety and security in MCPS. We urge MCPS parents, students, and staff to carefully read the report and offer feedback as the comprehensive review continues and the final report is prepared. The Subcommittee on School Climate and Safety has offered the following initial feedback:

1. **We support the seven identified priority areas:** 1) Data-driven accountability for school safety and positive school culture as a system priority across MCPS; 2) Effective allocation, utilization, and management of school security personnel and other staff; 3) Technology infrastructure, including security cameras, and their use; 4) Facility enhancements to restrict or limit access to more isolated areas of school buildings and grounds; 5) Procedures and practices for supporting positive student behavior throughout the school day; 6) Systemwide prevention and early intervention programs; 7) Collaboration with law enforcement and other partner agencies.

2. **Student participation in identifying climate, security, and safety concerns and solutions is critical.** Student participation must be meaningful and ongoing, and extend beyond surveys. An institutional mechanism should be established to ensure that students are afforded ongoing opportunities to offer their perspectives on issues related to school climate and safety, thereby shaping the MCPS response, funding, allocations, and training. The MCCPTA Subcommittee on School Climate and Security welcomes further information on how students will be effectively engaged in this process moving forward.

3. **Staff participation in identifying climate, security, and safety concerns and solutions is critical.** The interim report notes that information was solicited from high school administrators and security staff. The MCCPTA Subcommittee on School Climate and Security believes that teachers must be more meaningfully engaged in identifying areas of concern as well as possible areas of intervention. Recommendation 5.1 notes the role teachers and administrators must play in monitoring hallways, bathrooms, etc. Given the critical role teachers play in ensuring positive school climate and safety, they must have a voice in how school climate and safety policies and responses are developed and implemented. This is particularly important in schools experiencing more serious climate and safety challenges, where teachers, staff and administrators would benefit from additional training, support and resources to address areas of concern.

4. **Family participation in identifying climate, safety and security concerns is critical.** To date, there has been no established mechanism for MCPS parents and families to raise concerns related to school climate, safety and security. The MCCPTA Subcommittee on School Climate and Security believes that parents and families are essential partners in this work and would welcome opportunities to participate in the comprehensive review and any future efforts.

5. **Data-driven accountability is critical.** The MCCPTA Subcommittee on School Climate and

Safety welcomes the priority focus on data and accountability on issues related to school safety and positive school climate. Recommendation 1.6 focuses on developing a "School Climate" dashboard to provide an online monitoring tool for school climate data, as well as critical safety data, including arrests, bullying and harassment, gang incidents, truancy and chronic absenteeism, and school discipline. The subcommittee recommends that the dashboard data be disaggregated by race and ethnicity, searchable across schools, and available more than annually. Such data-driven accountability is already occurring in many school systems, including in Rochester and Buffalo, NY. Another example includes Padres y Jovenes Unidos in Denver, CO, which issues a statewide report card.

6. **Prevention programs should be prioritized.** The interim report notes the importance of prevention in priority area 6. The MCCPTA Subcommittee on School Climate and Safety is concerned about the lack of a systemwide inventory of all school-sponsored prevention and early intervention programs currently operated by individual high schools. This demonstrates that prevention has not been prioritized to date. Prevention programs should effectively include students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and families, as well as local communities.

7. **Consider curricular development and changes to support positive school climate.** The report makes numerous references to positive school culture, but the priority areas and recommendations do not sufficiently explain how meaningful progress will be made in this area. Schools are often on their own when it comes to addressing school climate concerns. The lack of an inventory of programs related to prevention indicates that such programs are not a core part of the curriculum. Increasing incidents of hate and the regularity of school fights point to the need to address these issues more systematically, including with better support for teachers and staff in bringing best practices in developing positive school climate in the classroom. This should include classroom management techniques as well as consideration of how curriculum can be used to create space for dialogue on challenging issues. Positive school culture begins well before students reach high school. Evidence indicates that such programs should begin in early childhood and extend through the school years. The MCCPTA Subcommittee on School Climate and Safety would welcome further information regarding MCPS efforts to incorporate these issues into a curricular continuum through the K-12 school years.

8. **Attend to specific areas of concern.** The MCCPTA Subcommittee on School Climate and Safety notes the following areas of concern that were not addressed in the interim report:
    a. The report does not address the significant increase in incidents of discrimination and hate in MCPS, including but not limited to anti-immigrant sentiments, Islamophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, and discrimination against LGBTQ students. Such incidents have an extraordinarily negative effect on school climate and further jeopardize physical and emotional safety.
    b. The report does not address the threat of gun violence, which remains a primary concern for MCPS students, parents and families, staff, administrators, and school security personnel.
    c. The report does not address the MCPS cell phone policy, which remains an area of concern for some students, families, and staff given the connection to Internet-safety concerns, including cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate and exploitative content, and data theft or abuse.