

BUDGET TESTIMONY

I am Steve Schmal and I represent the Library Advisory Committee at the Chevy Chase Library.

First, I want to thank the Council for its action last year in providing the library system with \$2.5 million more than what the County Executive initially proposed (and \$1 million more than his revised proposal). For the Chevy Chase Library and three other libraries, this meant preserving them as full-service institutions. The library patrons were most grateful for this.

However, even with the Council's action, the library system's FY 2012 budget was less \$0.5 million than the previous year's and almost \$12 million less than the FY 2008 budget, which meant fewer staff and less money for books and other materials.

This year, for the first time in four years, the County Executive is proposing a budget increase – of \$2.7 million – for the library system. We applaud him for that and urge you to provide the funds he has proposed. It will be a step in the direction of returning the system to what it once was. But only a step. My home library, the Chevy Chase Library, will see little improvement. Funds for materials will increase slightly but there will be no additional staff and no additional hours. Only the five Tier One libraries will see staff and hour increases.

I think it is important to recognize what public libraries mean to our county. They are used by more residents than any other component of county government – more than the lovely county parks, more than the recreation centers, more than even the schools. And they serve all segments of the population – young and old, well-to-do and just-making it alike.

I would like to offer two vignettes to illustrate the kind of services the libraries provide. My fellow library volunteers and I have been gathering signatures on a county-wide petition in support of better library funding. Last week, a man approached one of us and asked if he might sign, proudly announcing that he was learning to read and write. He had been learning with a tutor, the sessions taking place at our library. He is on his way to his goals and soon will be able to use the library's collection with his new skills. Also last week, a man, his wife and their two sons – roughly four and five – approached us. With bicycle helmets in hand, they were about to head home after spending some time in our library's children's section. As he was signing our petition, the man pointed out that each evening, he and his wife read to their sons, because they feel reading is so important . . . and the books they use are library books. Please insure that these County residents and countless thousands of others have the library resources they need.

Thank you for your time and interest.