



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Councilmembers Mercer Rigby, Jones, and Jung Call on Howard County Public School System to Develop Integration Plan

Ellicott City, MD (August 13, 2019) – Howard County Councilmembers Christiana Mercer Rigby, Dr. Opel Jones, and Deb Jung will introduce a council resolution in September calling on the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) to develop a county-wide integration plan to desegregate its schools. Currently, school district boundaries in Howard County are drawn in a manner that concentrate students participating in the Free and Reduced Meals program (FARMs) into certain elementary, middle, and high schools.

This socioeconomic and racial segregation in the school system is contributing to increasing achievement gaps and decreasing graduation rates for low-income students and students of color. Historic systems have created these achievements gaps and it is incumbent on the County to introduce new systems that foster necessary change.

"I'm extremely proud of this resolution because it recognizes the past and promotes a fair and balanced future for our Howard County Public School System students," said Dr. Jones. "We are working together to resolve the problematic and systematic inconsistencies that lower-income students face every day. This resolution helps to enhance, promote, and encourage a unified and socioeconomic blended education system for all."

"While we often claim to prioritize diversity and inclusion in Howard County, our school districts do not reflect the values of integration and community that we have built our county on," said Councilwoman Mercer Rigby. "For decades, Howard County public schools have become increasingly segregated by race and socioeconomic status. Redistricting is a civil rights issue here in Howard County, and it's time to take meaningful strides toward integration in our education system."

In the last three years alone, graduation rates for students participating in the FARM program have dropped from 83% to 78%, which is 17% lower than the graduation rates for non-FARM students. During the same time frame, FARM program students have become increasingly concentrated in the same elementary, middle, and high schools in Howard County. These disparities in student outcomes can be found in the Howard County Public School System's [2019 Feasibility Study](#) and [2019 Equity Report](#) presented to the Board of Education.

"As Chair of the Howard County Board of Education, capable of casting only one vote, I support this resolution that focuses on the socioeconomic and racial desegregation of Howard County Public Schools," said Mavis Ellis. "Many have called for equity, and it's the Board of Education's hard decisions that will make equity happen for all students in Howard County."

"There's a strength in diversity that benefits our community. Legislation and resolutions alone cannot solve socioeconomic challenges or promote true racial integration; however, they can provide platforms that allow us to correct past errors," said Candace Dodson-Reed, founder of the African American Community Roundtable of Howard County and education advocate. "I applaud Councilwoman Mercer Rigby's and Councilman Jones'

leadership and effort as they work with the community to ensure that each child in our public school system has everything they need to be successful.”

“Let’s reclaim Columbia’s dream of equal opportunity for all by rebalancing the socioeconomic and racial profiles of Howard County’s public schools,” said Councilwoman Jung. “We know what we have to do, and we know the time is now.”

Numerous academic studies indicate that diverse, integrated classrooms lead to better academic outcomes for all students, while increased segregation leads to greater achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color. While the school system undergoes its School Boundary Review Process, Councilmembers Mercer Rigby, Jones, and Jung call on HCPSS to comprehensively address the socioeconomic and racial segregation in Howard County Public Schools through a meaningful redistricting process.

The proposed resolution will be pre-filed on August 23, 2019 and will be introduced at the Council’s legislative session on Tuesday, September 3, 2019. Testimony will be accepted at the legislative public hearing on Monday, September 16, 2019. To sign up to testify, visit <https://apps.howardcountymd.gov/otestimony/>. If you would like to submit your testimony electronically, email councilmail@howardcountymd.gov.

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