

**From:** [Chip Choquette](#)  
**To:** [wchearing](#)  
**Subject:** Comment in Support of School Budget Request  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 6, 2025 9:18:49 AM

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Dear Worcester County Commissioners,

I am writing as a concerned parent and resident to express my strong support for fully funding the Worcester County Board of Education's proposed budget.

Our schools have long been a point of pride in this county, known for their high quality and the dedication of their educators. To maintain these standards, it is essential that we invest in competitive teacher compensation, small class sizes, and the resources necessary to support student success.

My children have benefited greatly from the outstanding education provided in Worcester County, and I hope for that to continue. Please support the Board of Education's budget and continue to prioritize our schools and our children's future.

Sincerely,  
Chip Choquette  
Pocomoke City, MD

ROBERT L. HILLEGASS  
CASSANDRA I. HILLEGASS  
329 PIEDMONT COURT  
BERLIN, MD 21811-1691  
PHONE 410-208-3951  
EMAIL HILLEGASSR@AOL.COM

May 2, 2025

**FORWARDED VIA EMAIL**

Commissioners  
Worcester County Government Center  
1 West Market Street  
Room 1103  
Snow Hill, MD 21863

Dear Commissioners:


Thank you for your services and the opportunity to present my concerns regarding the known Nine-Million-Dollar Revenue shortfall within the Enterprise Funds. The Majority, five of the seven Commissioners, decided at the March 18 meeting to recover this cost by distributing it equally over the eleven water districts, as opposed to collecting the revenue from those water districts that contributed to the actual cost. I consider that to be inappropriate, unfair, and illegal additional costs of about \$1,280 dollars per person over the next 10 years. However, unless the Commissioners decide to do what is right at the May 6 meeting, I will leave that to the Courts to decide.

What we do not know for sure is how this happened. If I understand the situation correctly, the questionable accounting practices of the Enterprise Funds by the County Treasurer's Office went undetected until February 2024. The Commissioners were not informed of this Nine-Million-Dollar revenue shortfall until September 2024.

Why was Commissioner Bertino's motion and Commissioner Bunting's second for an audit at the April 1 meeting rejected? If I correctly understand, at the same meeting the Commissioners voted unanimously for a School Board audit. Why do you not want to audit the County Treasurer's Office to determine the root cause of that problem?

A logical question that any reasonable person would ask; what or who was responsible for creating this problem? Without a forensic audit it is impossible to know if the existing accounting procedures are adequate or were not being followed. Are these the only funds in the County Treasurer's office with improper accounting treatment? There are just too many unknowns. We need full disclosure. Without answers, the conspiracy folks will have a field day.

Sincerely,



Robert L Hillegass

**From:** [stiehl@mchsi.com](mailto:stiehl@mchsi.com)  
**To:** [wchearing](#)  
**Cc:** [Fred Stiehl](#)  
**Subject:** Comments for May 6 public hearing regarding County budget for FY 26  
**Date:** Monday, May 5, 2025 11:00:24 AM  
**Attachments:** [Public comments county FY26 proposed budget.docx](#)

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Please see the attached comments for inclusion in the record regarding the County budget hearing on May 6th.

Fred Stiehl  
50 Newport Drive  
Ocean Pines, MD 21811

# Comments for Public Hearing on FY 2026 County Budget

My name is Fred Stiehl, 50 Newport Drive ,Ocean Pines, MD 21811.

I am currently the Chair of the Ocean Pines Water and Wastewater Advisory Board. While my comments are directly related to the Enterprise Funds portion of the Budget, my comments have an impact on the general funds budget of the County.

Insofar as I can tell, the only budget that has been provided to the public – through written documents shared at the several recent public hearings regarding the Enterprise Zone budgets – is one that described 3 options for addressing a supposed budget deficit that several of the Enterprise Zones had created over an unspecified period of time. The County has remediated part of this deficit by providing a grant of almost \$3.0 Million to the Riddle Farm Enterprise Zone. The balance of the deficit (which apparently has been covered by a book loan from the County of approximately \$6.0 Million to the Enterprise Zones which incurred this debt) is to be repaid over a 5 or 10 year period by some or all of the Enterprise Zones, including some that have not contributed to this deficit.

The three options briefly presented were 1) no rate change within each service area. 2) each service area being responsible for their own costs and thereby being self-supporting. 3) creating all one service area for budgetary purposes by combining all enterprise zones into one county wide zone and sharing costs among all ratepayers within the one zone.

I understand from the previously described hearings that the County has determined that option 3 is not feasible at this time. In my view, option 1 is also not feasible as it would do nothing to resolve the deficit that the County is carrying for certain Enterprise Zones/service areas. Option 2 seems the logical choice and most fair since it continues to allow management of the costs of operation of facilities within each service area for the benefit of the

ratepayers and also requires them to bear the burden of any increased costs for that operation.

Option 2 does, however, require the County to come up with a solution for both the need to eliminate the existing deficit and to ensure that it does not continue to create a further deficit in the future.

I am optimistic that the combination of planned improvements to failing treatment plants (e.g. Riddle Farm) and future improvements along with increased regionalization of wastewater flows from failed facilities to those that meet their permit limits will solve our known technical problems.

Nevertheless, the County has a current problem to solve the existing budget deficits. Since a proposal to have each service area cover the costs of operation as well as payment of incurred deficit is impractical for several of the smaller service areas, the County needs to provide an alternate solution.

I believe the most equitable and practical solution is for the County to pay this deficit from the general fund of the county either in this fiscal year or spread over the next 5 years. While this would require all citizens of the County to pay a small additional amount to maintain a safe and healthy environment in the County, it is the right thing to do.

As the County noted in its decision to provide a grant to the Riddle Farm ratepayers because they were not responsible for the failure of their treatment plant, I believe the same justification can and should be made for these other very small service area facilities. These treatment facilities have been operated by the county and there is no evidence at this time of any mismanagement by the ratepayers leading to these deficits. Certainly, the ratepayers should have been charged more for the operation of the treatment facilities, but it's doubtful that any reasonable, sustainable rate structure could have been developed to make these facilities self-sustaining. For this reason, I believe the County should follow the same pattern that it established with a grant to the Riddle Farm ratepayers and do the same to eliminate the deficit of these additional service areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer my recommendation to the Commissioners.

**From:** [Brian Carl](#)  
**To:** [wchearing](#)  
**Subject:** FY 2026 Proposed Budget  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 6, 2025 2:03:38 PM

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This is a duplicate of the message I sent to Karen Hammer at 1:59 PM.

To Worcester County Commissioners:

I want to start by saying, as a CFO with organizational budget responsibility for over two decades, I respect the budgetary decisions you are charged with in your duties as a County Commission. I know you are faced with many difficult decisions over the next several weeks.

Last year, property owners in the County without exemptions were faced with a double digit percentage increase in property tax that was used to fund a 11% increase in General Fund expenses in FY 2025. The FY 2026 proposed General Fund budget includes a 10% increase in expenditures.

Even if the current property tax rate of 0.845 is maintained for FY2026, county home owners without exemptions will once again face a double digit percentage increase in property tax to fund a double digit increase in General Fund expenditures for a second year in row. Trailing one year inflation nationally ranges from 2.5% to 2.7%. I respectfully request that you work with your departments to set a budget with an expenditure increase in FY 2026 that is closer to the current trailing inflation rate and lower proposed property tax rates so homeowners without exemptions do not face a double digit percentage increase for a second year in a row. In these uncertain economic times, households are having to manage their expenses and most are not able to fund a 10%+ increase in their expenses for two years in a row. Households are having to tighten their belts and the County should be doing the same thing.

Respectively,

Brian S. Carl

**From:** [Joan Bellet Roache](#)  
**To:** [wchearing](#)  
**Subject:** Testimony for May 6th Budget Hearing  
**Date:** Wednesday, April 30, 2025 9:06:51 AM  
**Attachments:** [Testimony for May 6 Budget Hearing.docx](#)

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## Testimony for May 6 Budget Hearing

### Support Full Funding for Worcester County Public Schools

Worcester County Public Schools (WCPS) consistently ranks among the top-performing school districts in Maryland. This success is a direct result of our dedicated educators, small class sizes, and a community that values education. Yet, despite these achievements, WCPS teachers remain the *lowest-paid* in the entire state. It's time to be fair to the County's largest group of employees—the very people who make our schools great.

Small class sizes are not just a nice-to-have; they are a proven factor in student achievement and a cornerstone of WCPS's success. Maintaining these class sizes requires proper staffing, which means we must offer competitive salaries to attract and retain quality teachers.

Let's also not forget: good schools are the number one reason families and businesses choose to relocate to Worcester County. Our schools are an investment in the future of this community—not just for students, but for economic growth and quality of life.

The school administration has crafted a reasonable, transparent budget that reflects the real needs of the district, and it has received unanimous support from all school board members. This is not a wish list—it's a responsible plan for sustaining excellence.

Commissioner Mitrecic, thank you for voicing your support of the WCPS budget request. I sincerely hope you—and your fellow commissioners—will vote for full funding this year. Doing so will help our schools focus on educating children instead of constantly trying to recover from past shortfalls.

Our students, our teachers, and our community deserve no less.

Joan Roache  
402 14th Street  
Ocean City, MD 21842  
443-944-6495

## Testimony for May 6 Budget Hearing

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**From:** [keri hutson](#)  
**To:** [wchearing](#); [Chip Bertino](#); [Caryn Abbott](#); [Diana Purnell](#); [Joseph Mitrecic](#); [Madison Bunting](#); [Ted Elder](#); [commissioners](#); [Eric Fiori](#)  
**Subject:** ACTION NEEDED Fully fund OUR schools  
**Date:** Monday, May 5, 2025 5:39:19 PM

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Worcester County Commissioners,  
My name is Keri Payne and I am a proud resident of Worcester County. Once again, I find myself, along with countless other teachers, staff, and parents- having to ask you to do what's right and fully fund our school budget.

It is incredibly frustrating that, year after year, we come before you to beg for funds that should be guaranteed, especially when the funding is available! OUR students deserve consistent support. Our educators deserve stability. Our community deserves schools that are equipped to meet the needs of every child! Fully funding the budget means we can retain excellent teachers, keep class sizes small, and offer programs and opportunities that help OUR students learn and thrive. We cannot expect our children to reach their full potential if we fail to provide them with a strong, well-rounded, supportive education. Cutting corners on education doesn't just hurt our students today but it weakens the future of Worcester County!

Please show your commitment to our students, educators, and families; show them that they matter and FULLY FUND the school budget. Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your service to Worcester County.

Keri Payne  
Ocean Pines, MD 21811

# **OCEAN PINES WATER AND WASTEWATER ADVISORY BOARD**

**1000 Shore Lane  
Ocean Pines, Maryland 21811**

May 2, 2025

The Honorable Theodore J. Elder  
President  
Worcester County Commissioners  
Government Center - Room 1103  
One West Market Street  
Snow Hill, Maryland  
21863

Re: Operating Budget FY 26 Ocean Pines Service Area

Dear Commissioner, Elder:

The Ocean Pines Water and Wastewater Advisory Board has been working with the County Staff and the Treasurer's Office to review and adjust an operating budget for FY 2026. In developing this budget, there are several issues that we have addressed, specifically:

- The Ocean Pines Treatment Plant will not meet the effluent requirements of our State NPDES permit to maintain the exemption of the Bay Restoration Fee unless the Department is able to obtain such an exemption from the state - reported by staff due to very cold weather in the first two months of this year. This request is under development.
- Throughout the term of my service on this Board, the ratepayers of the Ocean Pines service area (the Enterprise Zone) have consistently paid the charges set by the County to operate the Plant so as to meet the terms of its NPDES permit and to pay or reimburse the County for all costs incurred by this Plant. Any funds advanced by the County to cover capital costs or to meet unexpected fees imposed by the State have been fully factored into the quarterly rates required to be paid by the ratepayers. As a consequence, rates in the Ocean Pines service area have risen 8 times in the last 10 years.
- The members of the Advisory Board believe that the staff have consistently run the Plant in a professional and efficient manner. I raise the point to advise the Commissioners that the Ocean Pines ratepayers have exclusively born the burden of supporting this Plant throughout its many years of operation and upgrade to meet the requirements of the state and the ever growing service area. While the recently proposed "option 3", requiring Ocean Pines ratepayers to subsidize ratepayers of other Enterprise Zones to eliminate a county wide deficit, has been deemed not feasible, at this time, we want to go on record as opposing such a scheme should it again arise.

Given that there has been a fair amount of confusion regarding the Enterprise Zones budget deficits for the past several years, it is our recommendation that the county engage the services of an outside auditor to review and determine the extent of this deficit, when it was first known to county staff, the extent of the deficit each year and whether there are any procedures needed to mitigate such a deficit from developing in the future. This is not a proposal seeking to blame any person or action that took place in the past. Rather it is recommended so we can move forward with an understanding of the finances of the Enterprise Zones and to avoid any repetition of mistakes of the past. This may be seen as an extraordinary request from one Enterprise Zone's Advisory Board

to conduct an audit of all Enterprise Zone budgets. Nevertheless, since the County had recently proposed that the Ocean Pines Enterprise Zone take on the burden of supporting this anticipated deficit of other Enterprise Zones (markedly, not a deficit of our own zone), we believe this is a common sense and necessary step to allowing us to understand our obligations going forward.

We anticipate that the upcoming year will continue to be challenging, from a budget perspective, for the operation of the Plant. The continued costs of chemicals, the additional costs of new testing requirements from the State, the rise in utility costs and increased personnel costs, in particular, will cause an increase in spending. The Advisory Board has reviewed the proposed Enterprise Fund budget in detail, members of the Board have attended the County public hearings on the proposed Enterprise Zones' budgets, and a consensus of the Board agrees that the increase, proposed in these public hearings as Option 2 (each service area – self-supporting) by the County is necessary and appropriate to sustain the continued operation of the Plant. Since the Ocean Pines service area has built up a surplus in its account with the County due to the aforementioned rate increases over the years, it is our recommendation that there be no increase in rates for FY 2026 and that instead, whatever funds are needed be taken from this surplus. We recognize that the expenses for this Enterprise Zone cannot be finalized until the County hears from the state on its request for an exemption of the Bay Restoration Fee. If such an exemption is denied our recommendation may have to be modified. We have made remarkable progress in the past few years in working toward financial stability and as noted, the service area has been able to create a “rainy day” fund, recommended by the County, to assist in meeting any future unanticipated needs of the Plant.

We continue to be pleased with the general operation of the system and would like to commend all operating personnel for their efforts.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Frederick F. Stiehl".

Frederick F. Stiehl, Chairman  
Ocean Pines Water and Wastewater Advisory Board

# Ann Redding Coppinger

31 Fort Sumter South  
Berlin, Maryland 21811  
303-919-3039  
[annisretirednow@gmail.com](mailto:annisretirednow@gmail.com)

April 7, 2025

Worcester. County Commissioners  
Worcester County Government Center  
1 West Market Street  
Room 1103  
Snow Hill, Maryland 21863  
[commissioners@co.worcester.md.us](mailto:commissioners@co.worcester.md.us)

RE: Proposed 2026 Water/Wastewater Enterprise Funds Budget

Commissioners;

I oppose the budget plan presented on March 18, 2025. I live in Ocean Pines and I believe that it is not equitable to charge all 11 service areas the same rate. Ocean Pines is responsible for \$117 K of the shortfall, while other areas are responsible for over one million dollars.

Like many in Ocean Pines, I am retired and relying on a fixed income of my savings. The current economic climate requires me to monitor every expenditure. This situation has been building for a decade and I urge you all to come to an equitable solution for all areas, and to calculate future costs correctly.

I plan to learn the outcome on May 6th at 6PM.

Respectfully,

*Ann Redding Coppinger*

Dear Commissioners,  
 As indicated on the front of this card, I support funding the Worcester County Public Schools in full. We especially need to compensate teachers fairly, to compete with neighboring areas.

Thank you, resident of Newark, MD, Anne Harrison

CONSTITUENT NAME



WORCESTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

1 W. MARKET STREET  
 SNOW HILL, MD 21863

ATTENTION:

COMMISSIONER BERTINO  
 COMMISSIONER BUNTING  
 COMMISSIONER FIORI  
 COMMISSIONER ABBOTT  
 COMMISSIONER PURNELL  
 COMMISSIONER ELDER  
 COMMISSIONER MITRECIC

Dear Commissioners, BALTIMORE  
 As a retired assistant teacher, substitute and mother of a student that attended Worcester County schools, I know the importance of a great, amazing school system. Please don't let us back slide. Our children are our future. They have to be ready for the future. Please fund our budget.

CONSTITUENT NAME

Duggan Jimmons, SES



WORCESTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

1 W. MARKET STREET  
 SNOW HILL, MD 21863

ATTENTION:

COMMISSIONER BERTINO  
 COMMISSIONER BUNTING  
 COMMISSIONER FIORI  
 COMMISSIONER ABBOTT  
 COMMISSIONER PURNELL  
 COMMISSIONER ELDER  
 COMMISSIONER MITRECIC

APR 17 REC'D

Our future  
leaders rely on  
a fair, equitable  
educational  
system.

Kim McCarty

CONSTITUENT NAME:  
[REDACTED]



WORCESTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

1 W. MARKET STREET  
SNOW HILL, MD 21863

ATTENTION:

COMMISSIONER BERTINO

COMMISSIONER BERTINO

COMMISSIONER BERTINO

COMMISSIONER BERTINO

COMMISSIONER BERTINO

COMMISSIONER BERTINO

COMMISSIONER BERTINO

COMMISSIONER BERTINO

As a taxpayer, parent  
and retired educator, I  
fully expect, require  
and demand that you  
fully fund the  
Education budget!  
Ted Elder & Karen  
Abbott, this includes  
you! Thank a teacher  
for being able to read  
this card!

Paula Witt

CONSTITUENT NAME  
[REDACTED]

BALTIMORE MD 21

19 APR 2025



WORCESTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

1 W. MARKET STREET  
SNOW HILL, MD 21863

ATTENTION:  
COMMISSIONER BERTINO  
COMMISSIONER BUNTING  
COMMISSIONER FIORI  
COMMISSIONER ABBOTT  
COMMISSIONER PURNELL  
COMMISSIONER ELDER  
COMMISSIONER MITRECIC



Dear Commissioner Bertino,  
I'm asking you to  
support funding the  
2026 WCPS budget  
in FULL.

I support fully-funded  
public school and  
will VOTE in 2026!

LAURAS.  
PM 2 12 MD 212



WORCESTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
1 W. MARKET STREET  
SNOW HILL, MD 21863

ATTENTION:  
COMMISSIONER BERTINO  
COMMISSIONER BURNING  
COMMISSIONER EIGHT  
COMMISSIONER HERRICK  
COMMISSIONER KORNELL  
COMMISSIONER MAYER  
COMMISSIONER MURPHY

Dear Commissioner Bertino  
I'M ASKING YOU  
TO SUPPORT FUNDING  
THE 2026 WCPS  
BUDGET IN FULL.

By  
LAURAS.  
CONSTITUENT NAME



WORCESTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
1 W. MARKET STREET  
SNOW HILL, MD 21863

ATTENTION:  
COMMISSIONER BERTINO  
COMMISSIONER BURNING  
COMMISSIONER EIGHT  
COMMISSIONER HERRICK  
COMMISSIONER KORNELL  
COMMISSIONER MAYER  
COMMISSIONER MURPHY



Please  
Support our  
teachers

By  
Supporting our  
schools.

CONSTITUENT NAME

L.P.

BALTIMORE MD 21201

2 MAY 2025

RECEIVED

MAY 08 2025

WORCESTER COUNTY



WORCESTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

1 W. MARKET STREET  
SNOW HILL, MD 21863

ATTENTION:  
COMMISSIONER BERTINO  
COMMISSIONER BUNTING  
COMMISSIONER FIORI  
COMMISSIONER ABBOTT  
COMMISSIONER PURNELL  
COMMISSIONER ELDER  
COMMISSIONER MITRECIC