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WDC Newsletter – December 1, 2023



President's Letter

Dear WDC Members,

soaring from 25% pre-pandemic to 66% in the 2021-2022 school year.

[Students who are chronically absent](#) from school are less likely to read on level by third grade, tend to score lower on standardized tests, and are more likely to be suspended in middle school. They are also at greater risk of dropping out of high school and can be at increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. And the problems can also spill over to their classmates. As teachers struggle to help students make up for lost time, their ability to meet the learning needs of all their students may be hindered.



In Baltimore City, 58% of students are chronically absent. [Montgomery County](#) fares better, with 27% of students chronically absent in the 2022-2023 school year, but that's still a significant increase from 20% four years earlier. As elsewhere, MCPS high school students were more likely to be chronically absent. MCPS reported that 36% of high school students were chronically absent in 2022-2023.

There are no simple answers to why kids are missing so much school. According to Attendance Works, a national nonprofit working on reducing chronic absence, "many of these absences, especially for younger students, are tied to health problems, such as asthma, diabetes, and oral and mental health issues. Other barriers, including the lack of a nearby school bus, a safe route to school, or food insecurity, make it difficult to go to school every day. In many cases, chronic absence goes unnoticed because schools are counting how many students show up every day rather than examining how many and which students miss so much school that they are falling behind."

For teenagers, it could be that they are prioritizing work over school to help their families. There also may be a [mental health issue](#). The [Maryland Department of Health, Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) states that about 40% of middle and high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless for at least two weeks or more within the past year. And researchers estimate hundreds of thousands of students lost caregivers during Covid-19 pandemic.

There is a tendency to equate chronic absenteeism and truancy and at times even use the words interchangeably. However, it's important to note that chronic absenteeism and truancy describe different aspects of absenteeism. Maryland students are considered chronically absent when they are out of school for at least 18 days, or 10%, of a school year. These absences may be excused, unexcused, or suspensions. Habitual truancy is defined as missing 38 unexcused days, or 20% of the school year, and can result in more punitive consequences for children and caregivers.

"Truancy and chronic absenteeism are a real problem, and has a direct impact on our schools, our communities, and learning for our students," former Montgomery County Executive Isiah "Ike" Leggett said, "...because when kids are out of school, when kids are not engaged in productive education, it creates a multitude of other social challenges that are not productive for the entire community."

Under the [Biden Administration](#), grant funds are available to resource interventions and supports. And states have until next school year to use remaining Emergency Relief funds set aside for P-12 schools in the American Rescue Plan that can be used toward academic recovery, school attendance and engagement, and other efforts.

In Maryland, [Community Schools](#), part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, work in collaboration with community partners, local governments, and other stakeholders to strengthen connections that will generate improved student outcomes. Schools receiving Concentration of Poverty Grants are designated Community Schools. The funding these schools receive through the Blueprint provides a wide array of wraparound services that enhance a student's ability to be successful and stay in school. Currently, in FY 2023, there are 454 community schools in Maryland receiving Concentration of Poverty Grants.

Mr. Leggett, who chairs the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Accountability and Implementation Board says, "Where you have truancy, counseling, behavior support, and some level of enforcement is helpful... You are not going to punish and enforce your way out of the truancy problem. It needs to be a more meaningful direct, hands-on approach to get this resolved."

While speaking at the WDC membership kickoff in September, State Senator Will Smith (D-20) agreed and spoke of wanting to be "radically inclusive," in addressing chronic absenteeism and truancy in Maryland schools. "We are going to have a briefing at the beginning of the [2024] session to talk about this. We are going to bring everyone from state's attorneys, public defenders, advocates, and people who are involved in schools to help us come up with solutions."

In August, MCPS launched its [Attendance Action Plan](#) to implement data-driven strategies to combat chronic absenteeism. Additionally, the plan will foster collaboration of "administrators, counselors, social workers, pupil personnel workers, parent community coordinators, school nurses, and attendance secretaries to support students and families in improving attendance."

Brenda Wolff, Montgomery County Board of Education (D-5) says it is critical for each school to create intentional structures to address chronic absenteeism with a coordinated, school-based approach.

In addition to implementing the Attendance Action Plan for chronic absenteeism, MCPS is addressing truancy by sending kids who are approaching chronic truancy status to the revamped Truancy Prevention Program (TPP) in the county's State's Attorney's office. The program hopes to identify the root causes of absenteeism with each student individually and find ways to overcome them. The idea is encouragement and relationship-building, not punishment.

The 10-week program currently serves 19 middle schools and one high school, with about 10 students per school. The program sees truancy prosecution as a last resort and depends instead on employees of the state's attorney's office, school counselors, and volunteer mentors who meet with the students as part of the team.

former school board members. Plans to expand the program to an additional six middle schools next spring will require more people to step up and volunteer their time.

To learn more about TPP, [CLICK HERE](#). To sign up to be a volunteer mentor, [CLICK HERE](#). For more information about WDC advocacy on this issue please email [Cynthia Rubenstein](#).

Before I close, I want to share an important upcoming event—WDC and the Asbury Democratic Club have a D-6 candidate breakfast meet-and-greet planned at Asbury Methodist Village from 8:30 to 11:00 am on Saturday, December 16. Registration is open and details are available below and on our website. This free breakfast event will be a great opportunity to hear from all the candidates directly and raise constituent interest. Please register and spread the word.

WDC is also offering a one-day discounted WDC annual membership on December 16 for \$25/person, which would make a fabulous gift for a friend or a great opportunity to renew your own membership. At WDC we continue to bring you important events, presentations, community dialogues, and advocacy efforts, year-round, and your contributions via your membership help to sustain the work we do and make us stronger.

As we wrap up 2023, please also consider making an additional donation to help us continue to amplify critical issues and voices. We cannot do this work without your support.

We are all in this together!

Stay Strong. Stay Focused. Stay United.

Tazeen Ahmad
President

Advocacy Corner

by Melissa Bender and Cynthia Rubenstein, Co-Chairs, Advocacy Committee
December 1, 2023

The 2024 Maryland legislative session is just around the corner! In mid-November, the Montgomery County State Delegation held their annual joint priorities hearing to listen to grassroots organizations and community members about the issues they should prioritize moving into the legislative session. WDC was proud to present our [2024 legislative priorities platform](#) at the hearing, and we're grateful to all of our Advocacy Committee members for helping us to identify the issues we'll be focusing on in the upcoming year. If you weren't able to watch the joint hearing live—and see WDC President Tazeen Ahmad presenting our agenda—you can watch the recording [here](#).

areas: 1) Advancing Democracy in Maryland, 2) Affordable Housing, 3) Aging, 4) Children and Youth, 5) Criminal Justice Reform, 6) Encouraging an Equal Rights Amendment Resolution, 7) Environment, 8) Healthcare, 9) Immigration, 10) Reproductive Healthcare and Justice, and 11) Working Families and Economic Security. Each of these 11 priorities has been carefully developed using a lens of racial, social, environmental, and economic equity.

Want to learn more about WDC's 2024 priorities and get involved to make change happen? You can see all of our priorities on the WDC website [here](#). Additionally, our Advocacy Committee Co-chairs will be providing virtual training sessions in early-mid January to help club members sharpen our skills early in the legislative session. See upcoming newsletters about when those sessions will take place. If you have questions or want to learn more, please feel free to reach out to Advocacy Co-Chairs Melissa Bender and Cynthia Rubenstein at advocacy@womensdemocraticclub.org.

DON'T ABANDON US
ADDRESSING YOUTH
CRIME AND TRAUMA
A FILM SCREENING
AND PANEL DISCUSSION

WED
DECEMBER 6
2023
7 PM

Don't Abandon Us highlights the lived experiences of Roszetta Timmons and Alonzo Turner-Bey, who spent decades serving prison sentences assigned to them as children.

FREE TICKET REQUIRED

JOIN US FOR A PANEL DISCUSSION MODERATED BY **ALONZO TURNER-BEY** ABOUT KIDS, THE JUSTICE SYSTEM, AND WHY WHAT'S BEST FOR KIDS IS ALSO BEST FOR PUBLIC SAFETY.

AT SILVER SPRING UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
8900 GEORGIA AVE. SILVER SPRING, MD 20910
OR
JOIN US **VIRTUALLY ON ZOOM**
RSVP AT
DONTABANDONUSFILM.EVENTBRITE.COM

ADVANCE MARYLAND
KIDS ARE KIDS
MARYLAND YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION
JUSTICE POLICY INSTITUTE

WDC's Advocacy Committee encourages you to attend the screening of the Justice Policy Institute's short film *Don't Abandon Us: Addressing Youth Crime and Trauma* on Wed.,

Don't Abandon Us examines the lives of two people who spent decades serving prison sentences they received as children. Alonzo Turner-Bey spent 31 years in adult prisons until his release in 2020 under the Justice Restoration Act. The Maryland Youth Justice Coalition (MYJC) and The Justice Policy Institute are co-hosts.

RSVP is required. Reserve your tickets [HERE](#).

WDC Events



MONTGOMERY
COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S
DEMOCRATIC CLUB

The WDC and Asbury Democratic Club invite you—
District 6 Candidates Breakfast Meet & Greet
Saturday, December 16
Arrive at 8:30 a.m.
Meet & Greet from 9–11 a.m.
Rosborough Center Community Room
Asbury Methodist Village
Enter at 301 Odendhal Ave., Gaithersburg

REGISTER online at:
bit.ly/d6-meet-and-greet
or call: 202-415-9169
or email: events@womensdemocraticclub.org



**Candidates Confirmed
for Meet & Greet**

- April Delaney
- Destiny Drake-West
- George Gluck
- Geoffrey Grammer
- Ashwani Jain
- Lesley Lopez
- Joel Rubin
- Laurie-Anne Sayles
- Joe Vogel



Saturday, December 16, 9-11 a.m.

Asbury Methodist Village, Gaithersburg MD

To register, [CLICK HERE](#).

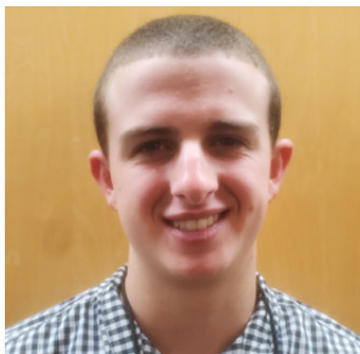
The program will start promptly at 9:00 a.m.



Please join DoTheMostGood, Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club, Indivisible Montgomery, and Greater Silver Spring Democratic Club for a Dancing in December party on December 10, 2:30 - 5:00 p.m. Enjoy yourself, connect with friends, and dance! Our featured speaker is MD Comptroller, Brooke Lierman. Please join us!

To RSVP, click [HERE](#).

County Democratic Party News



Congratulations to **William Roberts** (left), who was elected by the MCDCC to fill the District 15 vacancy on November 14! We also extend congratulations to MCDCC's new student members: **Will Fermaglich** (center) and **Victoria Rodriguez** (right).



Be an Active Democrat!



Democratic National Convention Bootcamp

Saturday, December 16, 10:00 a.m. - Noon

Rockville, MD (address provided upon registration)

Click [HERE](https://bit.ly/DNCdelegate23) to register.



Be a Precinct Leader for 2024!

In preparation for the 2024 elections, the Montgomery County Democratic Party is recruiting new volunteers to represent and engage our diverse communities.

No prior experience is needed, but volunteers must be registered Democrats.

Being a precinct leader is an important way to connect with your neighbors, serve your local community, support the Democratic Party and get out the vote!

Learn more and apply [HERE](https://bit.ly/DNCdelegate23).

For questions, contact Shruti Bhatnagar and Sarah Brand-Wiita, Co-Chairs, Precinct Organization Committee for the Montgomery County Democratic Party, at precinct@mcdcc.org.

WDC Membership



If you haven't already done so, renew online [here](#). You may also mail your \$35.00 annual dues (\$25 for members 35 years old or younger) payable to "WDC" and mail to: WDC, PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827.

By renewing your membership, you are building community and political muscle with other Democratic members, clubs, and allies to elect Democrats and support progressive Democratic policy goals. WDC is excited to work with each of you, as we advocate for our WDC priorities, and present our Speakers Programs, Community Education Panels, social events, and service projects. Join us!

A graphic for the "HELP ME" service. It features a laptop with a red "HELP ME" button on the screen. A person's hands are shown typing on the keyboard. The background is a pattern of colorful hands. Text on the left reads: "Did you forget your password? Are you having trouble registering for an event? Logging into MyWDC? Renewing your membership? Have you changed your address? Email? Phone number? WDC HAS A NEW WEB HELP SERVICE FOR MEMBERS. When you click on HELP ME on the WDC website, you will receive a form to complete. Please give us as much information as possible so we can fix the problem. Response time will typically be within a day."

The Events Committee needs members to support its programs and events this year. If you are interested, please send an email to lavontte.gardner@gmail.com.

WDC needs you! Can you help us in one of these positions? Not sure what a position entails? Come try it out—no obligation!

- Membership Co-Chair
- Events Committee Member
- Finance Committee Member
- Advocacy Committee Members

Interested? To learn more, please contact [Tazeen Ahmad](#) and make sure to use the subject line: "Volunteering with WDC."

WDC Resources

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[YouTube speakers & events](#)

[HELP ME](#)

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WDC social media & email
Contact us [Here](#).

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HELP ME

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).



Calendars:

WDC • [Community](#) • WNDC_ • MCDCC_ • [MDDEMS](#)

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[Join Our Members Only Facebook Group](#)
