



**Testimony before the Montgomery County Board of Education on
Monocacy Elementary School and the need for a Rural Schools Policy
November 11, 2010**

My name is Dolores Milmo, speaking on behalf of the Audubon Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States.. Our organization, headquartered in Chevy Chase and founded in 1897, has long worked to protect or region's natural treasures, including Montgomery's Agricultural Reserve. Audubon board members have included President Theodore Roosevelt, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, and Rachel Carson. These luminaries continue to inspire our efforts not only to protect environmental resources but also to educate children and adults about the wonders of nature. In Montgomery, we have partnered with MCPS bringing our award winning Green Kids program to numerous County schools. Our membership has been closely following the debate about Monocacy Elementary and we greatly appreciate the Board's wise decision to allow Monocacy to remain open. Audubon applauds the work of the Monocacy Roundtable group which outlines no-cost measures to ensure healthy enrollment in the County's rural schools. Those recommendations, most notably the recommendation "0" establishing a formal rural school policy, should be undertaken.

Over the years, we have testified before the County Council on the importance of schools serving the communities in the Agricultural Reserve. Time and again, we have been assured by council members, including Marilyn Praisner, Nancy Dacek, Mike Subin. Phil Andrews, Marc Elrich and others, that schools in the Reserve, including Poolesville, should not be held to the same enrollment standards found in more densely populated communities in the mid and down county.

The Reserve, established in 1980, is now a national model. Used in land use and planning textbooks across the nation, it is cited as one of the very best models of farm land and open space preservation in the country. This is primarily because of the zoning limitations of one residence for 25 acres, and because the Reserve is, by design, outside of the water/sewer envelope, thus further limiting density. The Reserve is not just about agriculture. It is also an important heritage and recreational area for thousands of area residents. Our hope is that the School

Board will continue to support this important and nationally acclaimed land use policy, as you have done by keeping Monocacy Elementary open.

We would ask you to take a next step toward protecting the Reserve and consider implementing a Rural Schools' Policy. This would formally codify what the Council has been saying for years in terms of enrollment standards in rural communities.

Often we encounter those who push for more development in the Reserve using the argument that "schools will be closed if the student population does not grow." They claim we need to change the zoning laws, or as in the case with Poolesville, "we need to annex in more farm land for residential development." Should these efforts succeed, the remaining farmland in the County would become so fragmented as to be lost to agriculture.

Audubon has partnered with other groups like Montgomery Countryside Alliance and Sugarloaf Citizens Association, to promote more sustainable, local food production for the Metro region. This initiative will not take hold if the Reserve falls to more residential development.

We urge you to take a look at the larger picture in terms of the importance of the Agricultural Reserve to the residents of Montgomery and as a food source metropolitan Washington. The County refers to the Reserve as one of its "jewels in the crown" along with its educational system. Please consider implementing a Rural Schools policy to keep it so for next generations.

Thank you,

Dolores Milmoie
Maryland Conservation Advocate
Audubon Naturalist Society