Strong Opposition to Expedited Bills 19-26 and 24-26

Good afternoon Council President Fani-Gonzalez, Vice President Balcombe, Councilmembers, and members of the community.

My name is Esther Wells and I am a lifelong resident of Montgomery County.

Exactly 168 years ago today, on June 16, 1858, Abraham Lincoln declared, *"A house divided against itself cannot stand."* While he spoke about a nation in crisis, that truth—rooted even earlier in Matthew 12:25—applies directly to where we are today.

Right now, Montgomery County is acting as a house divided against its own state.

I am here in strong opposition to **Expedited Bill 19-26** and **Expedited Bill 24-26**. These proposals would impose a sweeping moratorium—ranging from six months to two years—on building and grading permits for data centers.

Let me be clear: a multi-year pause is not thoughtful governance, it is a waste of time that signals a lack of leadership.

We already have examples from neighboring jurisdictions. We can see what works, what fails, and we can adopt better policies now. Delaying for two years does not make us smarter, it makes us less competitive.

And competitiveness matters—especially now.

Montgomery County is facing serious fiscal pressure. We cannot strengthen our financial position by passing legislation that ties the hands of the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation and weakens our ability to compete for private-sector investment.

These bills do exactly that.

They also directly conflict with the long-term strategy of the Maryland General Assembly. The state has been clear: our future depends on growing "lighthouse industries"—BioHealth, Cybersecurity, Aerospace, Defense, and Quantum Computing.

To support that vision, the state passed the **DECADE Act** to accelerate investment and streamline decision-making. And it passed the **Critical Infrastructure Streamlining Act of 2024** to fast-track the infrastructure that powers those industries—including data center support systems.

And this point matters:
Every single one of Montgomery County's 35 state delegates and senators voted unanimously in favor of that streamlining act.

They understood a basic reality—modern economic survival depends on high-data infrastructure.

These local bills undermine that unanimous effort.

These moratoriums broadly halt permitting, with no clear carve-out for smaller-scale or institutional data centers. That means we are not just stopping large projects—we are potentially blocking infrastructure that supports hospitals, research institutions, and secure government operations.

Montgomery County is home to NIH, the FDA, and NIST—some of the most important federal institutions in the country. These organizations, along with defense contractors and healthcare systems like Adventist HealthCare, rely on secure, compliant environments that often require regional proximity to ensure speed, reliability, and security.

By cutting off local capacity, we create risk—data vulnerability, higher latency, and reduced competitiveness in retaining and attracting federal presence.

We are also the third-largest life sciences hub in the nation,"DNA Alley." Our biotech companies depend on high-performance computing for genomic sequencing, clinical trials, and advanced analytics.

If we refuse to support that infrastructure here, those companies will not wait—they will go elsewhere.

And that leads to a critical question:

What happens when surrounding states, especially Virginia, or other jurisdictions in the PJM grid prioritize their own residents and corporations?

We will become dependent on external markets for critical infrastructure.
Our companies will face higher costs, reduced access—and many will relocate.

That is not economic development. That is economic self-sabotage.

Supporters argue these bills are about environmental concerns. But the Maryland General Assembly advanced infrastructure streamlining with full knowledge of our state's aggressive climate policies.

Even the Maryland Office of People's Counsel has made clear—the issue is not whether data centers should exist. The issue is ensuring they pay their fair share of grid costs—not imposing blanket bans that choke off local growth.

A house divided cannot stand—and right now, Montgomery County is choosing division over alignment, hesitation over leadership, and decline over competitiveness.

You cannot expect businesses, especially in life sciences, cybersecurity, and advanced computing—to wait while Montgomery County puts itself on pause.

They will not wait. They will not pause. They will go elsewhere. And when they do, they will take jobs, tax base, and long-term opportunity with them.

Make no mistake:
A six-month moratorium sends a signal.
A two-year moratorium sends a warning.
And together, they tell the market that Montgomery County is closed for business when it matters most.

We do not need more time. We do not need more studies. We already know what works. What we need is leadership.

Reject delay. Reject indecision. Reject these moratoriums.

Because if we don't, others will move forward without us. And once that momentum is lost, we don't just fall behind, we stay behind.

Reject delay. Show leadership.

Vote no on **Expedited Bill 19-26** and **Expedited Bill 24-26**.

Thank you.