Good evening. My name is Shelby Bidwell, and I am the Vice President of the PTSA at Seneca Valley High School. I have 2 children in MCPS schools, a sophomore at Seneca Valley High School and a 6th grader at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School. I have been impressed with their education so far, and know it will be even better once the new building opens in the fall. We are looking forward to welcoming all new students to Seneca Valley High School next year. Seneca Valley is a great High School with fantastic teachers, staff, and a ton of school pride. We are #SVProud.

Boundary reassignment is not an easy task, and it is impossible to come up with a solution that will make everyone happy. When Dr. Smith’s recommendation was released, I was thrilled to see that a variation on Option 11a was chosen. This variation on Option 11a maintains walkers, works to decrease the disparity in poverty between Seneca Valley, Clarksburg and Northwest, and utilizes the buildings fairly well given the overcrowding that already exists at Clarksburg and Northwest.

One of the best things about MCPS is the dedication to providing the best education to all of the students in all of their schools. Knowing that poverty is linked with performance of all students, it is important to take the FARMS rates into consideration with this reassignment. The FARMS rate at Seneca Valley is at 39%, which is higher than both Clarksburg and Northwest. Option 11a takes this into consideration and helps to reduce the FARMS rate at Seneca Valley significantly, impacting all of the students at Seneca Valley.

While MCPS makes sure that classroom funding is comparable, there are many other ways our students are affected by a higher poverty school. A few examples include our PTSA and After Prom committee. We need funds to be able to do things like staff appreciation (because we have the best staff ever!) and After Prom (because we want our kids to be safe on Prom Night). We absolutely do the best with what we have, but our resources are not nearly as abundant as they are at other schools. When parents have to make the decision between putting a hot meal on the table and donating to the school, the hot meal will (and should) win every time. We are limited by the funds we are able to bring in from our local businesses, SVHS family-owned sponsors, and our parents. By decreasing the FARMS rate at Seneca Valley, we hope to be more successful in bringing in donations so we can continue to enrich our students high school experience without increasing the burden on the families who already donate so much of their time and money.

We all want what’s best for our kids, that’s a given. Sometimes a compromise must be made in order to do what is best for the majority of the students affected. In this case, the majority of the students will benefit from Dr. Smith’s recommendation. I believe that it best addresses geography, by maintaining walkers, demographics by decreasing the disparity in FARMS rates at our schools, and by utilizing the facilities in a way that decreases overcrowding at Northwest and Clarksburg High Schools and by filling up our new Seneca Valley High School to capacity.

I fully support Dr. Smith’s recommendation for the new Seneca Valley Boundaries. I am excited that the new school will bring in a lot of new students and increase the level of socioeconomic
and cultural diversity. I am hopeful that the members of the Board of Education will support Dr. Smith’s recommendation. Thank you for your time and consideration.