Dear Board of Education Members;

My name is Christine DuBose and I am one of people that will be speaking at the Wednesday evening Boundary Study Meeting. I have 3 children within your school system; two boys, grades 10 and 11, and a daughter currently in 8th grade. I know many, likely all in the MCPS value time and family as huge priorities. I am no different, my kids are my world however my situation is different than most.

My family moved here 4 years ago because of my husband’s job. We initially rented in Rockville, MD so we could get to know the area and decide where we fit best as individuals but also as a family of 5. Ultimately, we chose Clarksburg, specifically Cabin Branch, and the top factors in that choice were the schools our children would attend as we wanted our kid’s schools to be close to home but also, we wanted a diverse community. Clarksburg itself is very diverse but living in Cabin Branch we have been astonished at just how many different cultures are living here. In our block alone every single family is from a different country in the world. This community has people from all over the globe and this is exactly what we had hoped for. It is a wonderful area with people willing to help others at any time of day. We are proud to say this of our neighborhood.

I am positive you all know that this area the roads, traffic and commuting are struggles every single day. Most deal with long and dangerous commutes daily and just want to get home, enjoy time with our children and together as a family. As parents we are very involved with our children including their schools and with mine being so close in age, they have always been extremely close, love being together and are very loving but also protective of each other.

After the superintendent’s recommendation, I was extremely disappointed to say the least. There were numerous things that just did not quite make sense to me and when first brought up it seemed this zoning was to reduce overcrowding, specifically at the high schools. It now seems it has taken a turn and an entire new agenda became priority. Instead of original options being narrowed down, more options kept being added creating more controversy and confusion.

I am sure you are aware that of all those that took the survey, almost ¾ (over 71%) said that geography was the top factor. I noted also that in some order option 9 was one mentioned by all as well, yet when asked to at least put option 9 back on the table for review it was a no. I am respectfully and kindly asking that option 9 be considered again as it was presented or with a few changes.

The superintendent’s recommendation is going to negatively impact many families. For me personally my older two boys would be allowed to stay at Clarksburg High School but my daughter (currently in 8th grade) would now have to go to Seneca. From what I have read Seneca Valley will have some incredible features and programs, so this is not at all a school issue.

As a very involved parent I want all my kids to be in the same school together. The older boys, and even their friends, are very upset that their little sister would be forced to a school without them but also one so far away. I have always been a very involved parent and having children at different high schools, especially with one being much further away will impact my involvement with the schools. Its much further to get to Seneca than the 5 minutes to Clarksburg High. According to the National Education Association (neatoday.org) family engagement is critical in student achievement. The research shows family involvement with schools improves student achievement, reduces absenteeism, gives parents confidence in education as well as the student having higher grades, better social skills and improved behavior.
My biggest issue is we are an active duty United States Military family. We go through long periods of time where I am the only parent. I would estimate I am a single parent 90% of the time because of his work and being deployed serving YOUR country. We have no family in the area at all either. So, while I am doing everything raising my 3 children, I do hope you can at least imagine how busy I am, along with my own work too. My children are at a crucial age where parents need to be involved, be present and help them continue to make positive and tough choices. This age group (mine currently are 13, 15, 16) deals with a tremendous amount of pressure and parental involvement is proven to be a top factor in the choices and path that children will follow.

If the Superintendents recommendation proceeds, my daughter will be forced to go to a different high school than her brothers. She will have to wake up between 5 and 5:30 am, which is earlier than many adults get up for work. Also, all 3 of my kids are involved in different school activities. This is going to create a nightmare for not just my family but countless others. Even households with both parents present, finding family time is very difficult with work, commutes, money, our kid’s activities and each cut into crucial family time. I want to continue to be involved in my kids schooling and I never want one to feel I am choosing one over the others or thinking their event is less important than another's. If this continues to be the final choice, I will have to tell my children that none can be involved with their school activities, events, etc. as I cannot be in 2 places at the same time.

To forcefully separate siblings is not only creating a logistical nightmare for parents but adding pressure to sibling relationships that are crucial. According to research studies through National Institutes of Health (ncbi.nlm.nih.gov) sibling relationships unlike friendships, are non-elective and usually imply a lifelong bond. Relationships between siblings are very important and have a huge impact on social competence and been linked to a range of outcomes including identity and self esteem, aggression, delinquency, school achievement, relationships and even substance use and other health risk behaviors in childhood and adolescence.

Aside from the fact of having 3 children at 2 different schools, the long bus commute is very upsetting. My boys commute daily would be approximately 15-20 minutes going to their high school, yet my daughter will have 1.5 to 2 hours of commuting daily. I am not okay with this and it is unfair to be forced upon. Long commutes to school have negative impacts on children’s well-being, especially taking a substantial toll on sleep. Research presented through CityLab (citylab.com) shows that each additional minute of commuting is associated with a 1.3 minute reduction in sleep. So, a student that has a 30 minute commute gets an average 26 minutes less sleep and girls getting even less than boys.

So, I would respectfully ask each of you to consider different family situations such as mine. Could you for just a minute put yourself in my place and try to understand how difficult things already are and how much additional stress this adds to not just myself and husband but my 3 kids. They do not deserve to be stressed by something like this or give up their activities, interests and dreams and forced to have their lives change. A bus will still come to my neighborhood to get my son’s so it just makes sense to keep families together if they are at ages where they would go to a school at the same time.

I would kindly ask the BOE to please evaluate option 9 again for the families of Clarksburg. However, I would like to highly suggest putting in a sibling option so parents can keep their children at the same school all together if they choose (given they attend at the same time). Please let that choice be one that comes from parents as we are the ones that know what is best for our families and our children as individuals.
I appreciate you listening to my personal impact of this. Thank You so much for your time and I am available for any questions or discussions from any or all BOE member.

Best Regards,

Christine DuBose