



May 21, 2024

Dear County Executive Elrich,

We write on behalf of our organizations: Jews United for Justice, Racial Justice NOW!, and the Silver Spring Justice Coalition. Representatives from each of our organizations attended the May 9 Meet and Greet with Police Chief candidate Marc Yamada. We are surprised to see that less than two weeks after the Meet and Greet, you moved forward with the nomination. We have serious concerns about the selection process and do not support Assistant Chief Yamada's nomination.

First, while we appreciate having had the opportunity to meet Assistant Chief Yamada, we do not view this meeting as a form of meaningful community participation in the selection process. It was a courtesy to afford us an opportunity to get to know the person who will be our next Chief a little better, but it was not community participation in the selection process and we hope you do not plan to suggest publicly that it was.

Second, we reject the idea that only current employees of the Montgomery County Police Department were worthy of consideration for this important position. Your failure to conduct a national search reflects a lack of care for the importance of finding the very best candidate to lead our police department. Moreover, with an internal candidate, we are certain to see a continuation of the status quo - a status quo in which our police department continues to cause harm to marginalized communities through over-reliance on police and race-based disparities in a range of areas including schools, traffic enforcement, use of force, and mental health crisis response.

A maintenance of the status quo is exactly what we anticipate from Assistant Chief Yamada based on his responses to our questions during the Meet and Greet. Similar to Chief Jones, Assistant Chief Yamada refused to acknowledge the presence of systemic racism in policing in Montgomery County and he embraced the Montgomery County "exceptionalism" that we all know is unfounded. Moreover, he fell back on out-dated "bad apple" ideas about individual bias that can be trained out of an officer and regurgitated MCPD's talking point about census numbers being an invalid data point by which to measure racial disparities (despite the fact that a range of government entities, including the Department of Justice, routinely rely on this data when examining disparate impacts).

Even more disturbing was the Assistant Chief's embrace of racist dog whistles that even Chief Jones had avoided, blaming the "crisis among our youth" on the "breakdown of the

family,” and a “lack of respect for authority” among young people. Illustrative of his old-school approach to addressing public health and safety challenges, like drug use disorders, was his embrace of the DARE program, which has long been debunked as ineffective.

When asked about mental health crisis response, [an area that our County is failing miserably in](#), Assistant Chief Yamada immediately fell back on the need to train police officers better, rather than relying more heavily on mental health professionals. When pushed on this question, he agreed to make the health-professional response a priority, “if that’s my boss’s priority.” This statement does not reflect the type of buy-in necessary to make this critical cultural shift possible. We understand that there are no plans to place any one member of your administration in charge of crisis response and that the work will, by necessity, be led by the new leader of HHS and the new police chief. Thus, we need a chief fully committed to the changes that you have been working towards. Assistant Chief Yamada’s response gives us no confidence that he will embrace that role.

Similarly, when asked, the Assistant Chief could not proactively name a single way in which he would decrease police involvement by having other types of service providers replace police. Instead his primary solution for minimizing police involvement was to increase the use of technology, like the drone program and electronic traffic enforcement. We were also disturbed to hear him insist that drone responses cannot be racist or demonstrate race-based bias because they involve technology, ignoring the fact that the drone operators – the ones who monitor the drone footage to decide on the response - are very much human.

Last, but certainly not least, because the Meet and Greets were structured so that each organization was limited to only one question, we were not able to pose any of the many questions that we would appreciate having the Assistant Chief answer in advance of his confirmation hearing with the County Council. [We would appreciate you sharing these questions with the Assistant Chief as soon as possible.](#)

We oppose this nomination and reject any suggestion that this nomination was the result of a thoughtful process taking into account the voices of the community that the new Chief of Police will be responsible for serving. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this nomination further.

Sincerely,

Jews United for Justice
Racial Justice NOW!
Silver Spring Justice Coalition