

## **Transcript of President Cuttitta's Update on the MCPS Budget & Our Contract**

Hello, I'm Merle Cuttitta, president of SEIU Local 500. I want to take a few moments today to update Local 500 members who work in the supporting services at MCPS on our current contract negotiations and the MCPS operating budget for Fiscal Year 2011.

If you work in a school building, you probably received a letter last week from Superintendent Weast detailing cuts to staffing hours. The numbers in that letter were bleak, but I want to assure members that Local 500 will do everything in its power to see that, no one will face hardship, due to layoffs or furloughs.

As many of you know, the county's projected deficit for next fiscal year is growing. The actual deficit in Montgomery County for next year is projected to be over 700 million dollars, or more. Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett will submit his budget recommendations within the week. The budget then goes to the county council.

At the same time members of Local 500's bargaining committee, made up of union members in all areas of the supporting services, are negotiating new contract terms with MCPS. The bargaining committee has worked diligently with their MCPS counterparts, and nearly all the non-economic issues that were being bargained over have been settled. Now we are working to find an economic settlement with MCPS and the other MCPS unions, MCEA and MCAAP, at the table. This is no easy task given the uncertain and dim budget outlook both at the county and state levels.

This past fall, a survey was sent to all Local 500 members and meetings at many schools and MCPS worksites were held to determine what your priorities are for our new contract given our difficult economic circumstances. Overwhelmingly, Local 500 members responded that Protecting Jobs, and Preserving Benefits, were most important when it comes to our new contract. You prioritized protecting jobs and preserving benefits over Cost of Living Adjustments and STEP increases. The bargaining team has taken your priorities to heart and is doing everything possible to carry out that charge.

Local 500 members have done great work so far this year. More than 150 members of Local 500 came to the school board's budget hearing in January to support a budget that adequately funds MCPS. Our voices were heard. And when the Board of Education approved that budget without drastic cuts, we sent more than 800 emails to the Board of Education thanking Board members for doing the right thing.

Right now, all of this work and even jobs are threatened. With the economic picture in the county worsening, nothing is off the table. It is going to take every single one of us to ensure that the County Council passes a budget without cuts that could mean furloughs or even layoffs for supporting service employees.

The County Council will face enormous pressure from the County Executive and the Washington Post among others to sacrifice services because of the economy. Cuts alone will not solve this budget problem. The County Government can't refuse to do anything about revenues and expect everyone else to absorb the pain. There must be a more balanced approach of both revenue increases and services

cuts. They will need to hear from everyone of us about how essential the work we do is, what a difference we make in the lives of students and to the very future of the county. We need to share our story with council members, the media, friends, family and neighbors.

We will be in touch very soon with details on Executive Leggett's budget as soon as it's submitted. Plus, we will give you information about the county budget hearing that will be scheduled for early April – that ALL of us need to attend.

In the meantime, I am asking you to sign the online commitment card at [www.seiu500.org](http://www.seiu500.org). Please agree to one or several actions that will make a difference in the upcoming fight to preserve jobs and services at MCPS. Become a part of Local 500's Rapid Response Team. You'll be the first line of communication with your coworkers about the MCPS budget and our supporting services employee contract, and you'll do invaluable work for your colleagues and the MCPS community.

We're all in this together, and we'll make it through this together. Thank you for your time and your service and all that you do for the students of MCPS.