HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE
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November 6, 2026

The Honorable Opel Jones, Chair
Howard County Council
George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

RE: Veto of Council Bill 58-2026, Grants – County Grant Agreements – Grant Agreements for the Purchase, Construction of Improvements, Development, or Redevelopment

Dear Chair Jones and Members of the Council:

After careful review of Council Bill 58-2026, as well as consideration of public testimony, I wish to inform the County Council of my decision to veto CB58-2026 pursuant to Charter Section 209 based on the below objections.

When initially introduced in September 2026, CB58-2026 was a broad sweeping bill that would significantly change how the County issues, awards, and administers grants of all types to nonprofit organizations. The bill was developed without sufficient community and stakeholder engagement, which was evidenced by the broad coalition of organizations that provided testimony expressing concern about the impact of the legislation on the nonprofit sector. As many who testified noted, the original legislation contained significant new requirements and hardships on nonprofit grantees, codified and duplicated several existing requirements, and would have established inconsistent standards for nonprofits that receive grants from different government funding entities.

Among those organizations that tesified against the legislation was the Association of Community Services of Howard County (ACS), the nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the well-being of our community by strengthening Howard County's nonprofit organizations. In public testimony, ACS expressed deep concern “that there was no attempt to involve the people the bill would affect, both grantees and the county agencies that fund them, in drafting it.” ACS also urged the Council to oppose the legislation and instead call for a comprehensive and thoughtful study of the County’s grant funding processes.

Rather than withdrawing the bill in response to community and nonprofit concerns, the bill was amended significantly during the Council’s final legislative session on October 30, 2026. Through amendments, CB58 was rewritten so that it would only apply to capital grants awarded to nonprofit organizations for the purchase, construction of improvements, development, or redevelopment of real property.

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Additionally, the amended language of the legislation made clear that certain requirements only be applied to grants of greater than $1.5 million. It is unclear where the arbitrary threshold of $1.5 million originated, as well as why certain standards should be applied to capital grants of more than $1.5 million that would not be required of capital grants below $1.5 million. Furthermore, CB58 as amended included more than 20 requirements for nonprofit grantees receiving capital funding, including requirements for long-term use agreements, significant non-county matching funds, financial guarantees or bonds, repayment provisions, and more.

In the sponsor's remarks before voting on the legislation, it became clear that the true intention of the bill was to target a specific project that had received funding from the County – including approval by the County Council – in prior fiscal years. It is important to note that CB58 as amended would not affect any grants awarded in prior fiscal years. The sponsor's stated intent behind CB58 helps clarify why the bill is both poorly crafted and narrowly targeted. Legislation drafted to target a specific grant or individual circumstance can carry negative, unintended consequences for the broader area that is being legislated. In the case of CB58, the amended legislation would significantly impact the County's ability to administer capital grants in future fiscal years.

Howard County regularly partners with nonprofit entities to deliver capital projects that promote the public good and serve the public good. There are many instances where the County has deployed grant funding in excess of $1.5 million to support capital projects that serve our community in important ways. These examples and grant awards include:

- $15 million that the County has awarded to the Johns Hopkins Howard County Medical System to renovate and open a new 29-bed observation unit at the hospital, providing important capacity to our emergency healthcare system;
- $2 million to the Community Action Council of Howard County to purchase land for the construction of their new Route One Corridor Campus, which will include a new Food Bank and early childhood learning space for families enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start;
- More than $1.5 million to the Howard County Veterans Foundation to support the construction of the new Veterans and Military Families Monument located on County property at the Columbia Lakefront; and
- Regular grant awards exceeding $1.5 million for the purchase, construction, and redevelopment of affordable housing communities that provide vital housing units to families of low- and moderate-income in Howard County. This includes critical funding for important projects like Patuxent Commons, which provides affordable housing opportunities for individuals with disabilities living in Howard County.

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These grant awards reflect just a handful of the partnerships that Howard County forges with the nonprofit community to meet the needs of our residents, ranging from emergency department capacity at the hospital to creating affordable housing opportunities for families with the greatest need for stable housing. It is apparent that few, if any, of these organizations and community partners were engaged when this legislation was drafted and subsequently amended. While many of these grantees receive external funding to support their projects, others are more limited in their ability to raise and receive external funding. In certain circumstances, the requirements of CB58 simply do not comport with the types of capital projects funded. These challenges and unintended consequences can arise when legislation is crafted to narowly target a specific organization, but is nevertheless broadly applied to a large network of organizations that are impacted.

Our nonprofit community continues to face significant challenges in light of recent funding changes at the federal level and funding constraints at the state level. This has included the rescision and reduction of significant federal funding to support nonprofits and services in our community. At a time of such uncertainty, I believe that any major actions taken in regard to nonprofit funding at the local level be done so with the utmost care, thoughtfulness, and robust engagement with our county departments and nonprofit stakeholders.

Accountability, transparency, and trust in government processes are key priorities of our Administration. When we entrust public funds to nonprofit organizations to deliver services, create community facilities, and support our neighbors, those organizations should be held to a high standard. However, CB58 fails to meaningfully advance responsible solutions to strengthen those shared goals of accountability and trust. I agree with the recommendations of ACS and many other reputable nonprofit organizations that work tirelessly to deliver services to our community. Updates to the County's grantmaking process should be done after thorough engagement of all partners involved, ensuring that policymakers have both a strong understanding of the County's grantmaking process and the right solutions to meet the needs of our community. Unfortunately, CB58 does not rise to that standard. As such, I have vetoed CB58-2026 pursuant to Charter Section 209. Thank you for your continued partnership and service in support of our Howard County community.

Sincerely,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive