



To: Howard County Council
From: Alec Lynde, Executive Director of Howard EcoWorks
Date: May 7th, 2026

Re: Testimony in support of proposed FY27 funding for Howard EcoWorks

Good morning Chair Jones, Vice Chair Rigby, and Members of the County Council,

My name is Alec Lynde, and I am the Executive Director of Howard EcoWorks. While this is my first time before you in this role, I am honored to represent an organization so deeply rooted in Howard County's environmental leadership.

I came to this work through a career in military and government service, where I spent nearly a decade managing complex programs and thinking strategically about long-term outcomes. When I looked for where to bring these skills next, Howard EcoWorks was the clear answer. Our organization is serious about demonstrating results, serious about building up the communities we work in, and serious about training the next generation of environmental stewards. These are the impacts I wanted to see in my own work, where I hoped to combine my passion for the environment and community building with my professional experience. While I am relatively new to this role, I am excited to hit the ground running and to work with each of you to expand our organization's impact in Howard County.

Before I go any further, I want to acknowledge Lori Lilly. Lori built this organization from the ground up through her vision, determination, and a deep commitment to the idea that you could put people to work and restore the environment at the same time. The County's sustained investment in that mission over the last decade made it all possible. So thank you for being partners in this work for so long.

Howard EcoWorks sits at the intersection of environmental restoration and workforce development. We train local residents, including adults facing real barriers to employment, for careers in the green industry, while delivering high-quality conservation services that directly advance the County's environmental goals. Through our READY program and our partnership with the Office of Community Sustainability, we are managing stormwater, reducing flooding risk, and improving water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Through the Ellicott City Safe and Sound program, we are

on the ground implementing green infrastructure that helps protect residents from devastating floods. And through our ongoing work with the Department of Public Works and the Department of Recreation and Parks, we are restoring landscapes and maintaining public assets across Howard County every single day.

The \$500,000 in annual READY funding proposed in the FY27 budget is what sustains this model of public and non-profit partnership. It represents a strategic investment that delivers workforce development, environmental restoration, and climate resilience all at once, and it helps us leverage additional state, federal, and philanthropic funding that Howard County alone could not provide.

The proposed one-time PayGo funding of \$100,000 for capital improvements at Holly Hills matters just as much for our future. Holly Hills is our new permanent home in Glenwood, and our vision for it is clear: a regional hub for conservation, restoration, growth, and community impact. We are building out a native plant nursery with greenhouse capacity, rehabilitating the land with sustainable practices, and creating a central space to support our goal to be a leader in green jobs training. With this investment from the County, we can begin making our vision real by establishing our new headquarters on the property.

At a time when residents are feeling the impacts of increased flooding, extreme heat, and severe storms, Howard EcoWorks offers a practical answer to these local challenges. We are building the natural and human infrastructure that Howard County needs to thrive. For these reasons, I respectfully ask the Council to fully support the proposed funding for Howard EcoWorks in the FY27 budget.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your continued partnership.

Sincerely,



Alec Lynde
Executive Director | Howard EcoWorks
(667) 447-5519 | alynde@howardecoworks.org

HOWARD COUNTY ARTS COUNCIL
Testimony submitted to Howard County Council
Regarding FY2027 Proposed Budget
May 7, 2026

Good evening Chair Jones and members of the County Council. I am Coleen West, Executive Director of the Howard County Arts Council located at 8360 Court Avenue. On behalf of the Arts Council, I want to thank you for your leadership and past support. We appreciate all that you do on behalf of the arts and the citizens of Howard County.

The Arts Council was established in 1981 to fulfill the provisions of County Code #12.804a. Working together with County government, we have been fostering the arts and ensuring community access to the arts for 45 years.

Creating an environment where artists can thrive and people of all ages and backgrounds have access to the arts are important goals for the Arts Council. I am here tonight to urge you to continue to invest in the arts and artists and to remind you that when it comes to our quality of life, building community, and growing our economy, the arts can be – and should be - part of the solution. To that end, I ask you to:

- fully support County Executive Ball's proposed annual arts appropriation of \$1,404,172 – 69% of this funding will support 60-70 grants to local and regional arts organizations and artists, and
- fully support the proposed Paygo appropriation of \$173,675 to support capital and other costs related to relocation of the Arts Council to the Capitoline Center.

In FY25, attendance at arts events funded through these grants was 470,013 (313,666) at county programs and activities) and volunteers for local, county-based arts groups receiving grants donated 83,200 hours – a value of \$2.9 million – clear indicators that the arts are important to the citizens of Howard County.¹

This spring, recognizing the importance of the arts sector on the State's quality of life and economy, the General Assembly passed a record \$34.8 million in annual funding for the arts:

- \$31.8 million for the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) to support annual operating and project funding, and
- \$3 million in capital funds for small to mid-sized arts organizations (with budgets under \$3 million) Note: the Arts Council was awarded a \$300,000 capital grant in FY24 (the first year of this program) to support black box theatre renovations at the Capitoline Center.

A strong arts sector improves our quality of life, but it is also an economic asset that stimulates business activity, attracts tourism revenue, and helps retain a high-quality work force. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that the arts and culture sector accounted for 4.2 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP), or \$1.17 trillion, and generates 5.4 million jobs.²

The arts contribute to Maryland's economy by creating jobs across multiple industries, driving tourism and tourism dollars, and providing a foundation for creativity, innovation, and unique products and services that will help keep Maryland competitive in the global market. A study published by the Conference Board (serving the Fortune 1000 U.S. companies), found 97% of employers say creativity and innovation skills are important in U.S. workplaces, however 85% of employers say they can't find the creative, innovative applicants they seek.³ Howard County companies have to compete with its neighbors to attract the creative workforce of artists, entrepreneurs, and innovators they need to be competitive

To attract and retain these creative workers, adequate wages, affordable housing and studios, and "fit-for-purpose" arts spaces are needed AND a strong network of arts, technology and other creative businesses - large and small – needs to be in place to employ them.

Howard County has positioned itself well to meet these expectations. We have a vision for a vibrant arts, retail and entertainment district in Downtown Columbia along with Merriweather Post Pavilion, the iconic Chrysalis amphitheater, and the new performing

arts center. We have a growing state-of-the-art community college and library system, excellent recreational facilities, and the arts curriculum in our public schools is among the strongest in the nation. Ellicott City was named one of the “Top 20 Leading Creative Class Cities” by Richard Florida⁴ and we have a plan to develop a center for arts, culture and history at the former Courthouse. Pre-COVID, we were home to 763 arts-related businesses that employ 3,511 people in the County.⁵ The arts sector accounts for 3.9% of the total businesses in the County, 1.7% of the people they employ, and is made up of major tourist attractions, for-profit media and design businesses, and a vibrant network of non-profit arts groups.

Howard County is a special place that has developed a strong community for the arts. Studies show Howard County:

- Has a higher number of arts and cultural organizations and artists than 97% of counties in the US;
- Raises more arts contributions and earns a higher level of program revenue than 90% of counties in the US⁶;
- residents spend more per capita on arts and entertainment than the seven Baltimore-Washington metro counties.
- has the second highest level of arts participation per capita than the seven Baltimore-Washington metro counties⁷.

The arts (both for- and non-profit) are an important part of the County’s small business sector. The heART of the arts community are the non-profit groups, which are also a primary focus of the Arts Council. Non-profits, such as Misako Ballet, the Columbia Orchestra, Silhouette Stages, and others, provide opportunities for engagement and participation, they incubate artistic ideas and enterprises, and they create distinctive experiences that attract tourists, businesses and residents alike.

It takes a special ecosystem to maintain a vibrant arts community on a local level – you need the talent and dedication of practicing artists, strong arts organizations, innovative businesses, enthusiastic audiences, financial support and arts-friendly policies from government, and contributions from businesses and individuals. In addition, you need

affordable space to incubate, create, and produce the arts and you need “fit-for-purpose” space to present the work and fully engage the public in the work.

The non-profits work year-round to make the arts available to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. They do an incredible amount of work with very little resources. While they are used to operating on shoe-string budgets, even in good times, their budgets are extremely fragile.

The small to mid-sized organizations (which make up the bulk of Howard County arts organizations) cannot make up for lost revenue by increasing productivity and reducing overhead – they have minimal operating expenses as it is – cutting budgets further means closing doors for good.

I am here today, to ask you to support funding for the non-profit arts sector by approving the County Executive’s proposed budget. County funding provides arts non-profits with a life-line – a baseline of unrestricted support that they use to underwrite their core activities and to leverage private dollars.

County investment in the arts serves the public interest by broadening public access to the arts and by preserving and fostering diverse forms of expression and traditions. In turn, the non-profit arts groups give back to our community by enhancing our quality of life, improving community wellness, celebrating artistic traditions, preserving cultural heritage, attracting new businesses and jobs, and generating revenue for the County.

In FY25, Howard County grantees not only provided us with exceptional programming, they earned \$6.2 million in revenues – 31% from earned income and admissions, 40% Howard County (56% of HC funding is one-time PAYG0), 9% State, 9.5% individuals, 5% other 4.5% corporations, 1% foundations, 0% Federal⁸– and generated 317 FTE jobs.⁹

Statewide, for-profit and non-profit arts and cultural businesses contributed \$13.7 billion to Maryland’s economy, representing 2.7% of the state’s GDP, and generated 86,200

jobs.¹⁰ The non-profit art sector alone includes nearly 250 non-profit arts groups that generated 8,600 FTE jobs and had a total annual impact of \$1.2 billion.¹¹

The arts also generate tourism dollars for our local economy. Based on past attendance, 20-30% of our non-profit arts audiences are made up of people who reside outside of Howard County,¹² these visitors come to our County and spend money at local restaurants and businesses. The Maryland State Department of Commerce reports that every \$1 of operating generates an additional \$119% in spending on goods and services.¹³ Using this formula, the non-profit arts groups in Howard County, generated an extra \$7.4 million in secondary spending to our local economy in FY25 for a total economic impact of \$13.6 million. In addition, 83,200 volunteer hours, valued at \$2.9 million, were donated. (These numbers do not include revenue from for-profit venues such as Merriweather Post Pavilion, Toby's Dinner Theatre, movie theaters, or design, marketing and printing companies, or others that do not receive direct funding from the Arts Council; it also does not include the Baltimore City groups that receive grants from the Arts Council).

An investment in the arts is an investment in our future. Seventy-one percent of the proposed county funding will go to support 4 grant programs that provide 50-60 operating and project grants to organizations and schools.

- 1) The Community Arts Development (CAD) program provides operating and project grants to local arts organizations as well as non-arts groups interested in presenting arts programs. In FY25, the Arts Council awarded \$401,262 (CAD: \$394,170, JRT: \$19,325) to 24 Howard County organizations and \$220,000 to MACC.
- 2) The Baltimore City Arts and Culture (BCAC) program awards grants to city organizations that have regional significance and provide considerable services to Howard County residents. In FY25, we awarded \$174,512 to 11 city organizations.

- 3) The Outreach Howard program awards grants to City grantees to produce projects IN Howard County. In FY25, \$42,095 was awarded to 7 organizations.

- 4) The Artist-in-Education (AiE) program, a partnership with the County PTAs, provides grants to place visiting artists in school classrooms to enhance student experiences and skills and meet local and state goals for arts education. In FY25, we awarded \$35,113 to 17 schools.

The CAD, BCAC, and AiE programs must be matched at least 1-to-1 by the grant recipient. The goals of the grant programs are:

- To foster excellence, diversity and vitality in arts offerings for Howard County residents.
- To broaden opportunities for Howard County audiences, artists, and arts organizations.
- To increase the availability of arts activities in Howard County. And,
- To increase awareness of the arts.

All grantees are required to submit final reports, which the Arts Council uses, to track attendance and budget figures, and to hold grantees accountable to their grant request. These reports show that community interest and support, in terms of participation, is very strong – 409,609 attended arts events supported, in part, through County re-grant funds. We also provided opportunities for 4529 artists through these grant programs.

In addition to the grant programs, the proposed budget provides funds to support the Arts Council's other principle program, the multi-disciplinary art center in Ellicott City. At the Center, we sponsor year-round classes, exhibits in our galleries, and performances in the community black box theatre. We also provide low-cost studios for 18 visual artists, office space for 3 resident arts groups, a dance studio, and meeting space for up to 6 volunteer run groups that participate in our Arts Advancement Program. In FY25, 60,404 people visited the center at 8510 High Ridge and we provided opportunities for 4,186 artists and student artists to showcase their work. Whether they take a class,

view an exhibit, drop in a studio, or enjoy a performance in the black box theatre, the center provides rewarding experiences in the arts for people of all ages and from all walks of life.

Funds we receive from the County also support county-wide initiatives, such as:

- the on-line arts calendar that features arts events produced by local arts groups
- ARTsites, a partnership with 12 sites in the county to place sculptures in public spaces for one year that provides public access to the arts
- and other community-based arts activities for underserved audiences, such as our Fabulous 50+ Players musical theatre troupe that provides a creative outlet for active seniors in our community by performing in senior and community centers throughout Howard County program.

Cuts to the Arts Council budget would cause us to reduce or eliminate free public programs such as this and limit free public access to the arts.

Cuts would also adversely affect the groups that receive County funding through the Arts Council's grant programs. Local treasures, such as the Columbia Pro Cantare and HoCoPoLitSo rely on these grants to meet their day-to-day operational needs.

Unrestricted funds for general operations are rare, the Arts Council, through its grant from the County, is one of the only sources of such support. As mentioned earlier, the operations of the non-profit arts groups, both large and small, are extremely fragile – any cuts to the arts budget will have a negative impact on our local arts groups, our community, and the people we serve.

In addition to their economic impact mentioned earlier, the arts impact our daily lives in other tangible ways. Numerous independent studies from the academic, arts, business, law enforcement, medical and technology fields confirm that the arts are an effective means to address a wide variety of issues and challenges in our community such as:

1) Workforce Development

Early encouragement and training in the arts help students develop core life and social skills that lead to future success, both academically and in the workplace. To quote educator, Paul Lehman, "A lot of what is taught in schools suggests that there are correct and incorrect answers – as evidenced by the use of multiple choice and true/false questions. In the real world, questions are not posed that way." He goes on to say that the academic, business, and public sectors say today's graduates are not prepared to keep our workforce competitive in the new global economy. This is supported by the Conference Board study cited earlier. In order to be competitive and address real-life circumstances, employers need people who can do more than check off an answer from a prepared list of options or people who have only been taught what is tested - they need people who are able to make independent, complex judgments and decisions. The arts, by their very nature, teach people to seek multiple interpretations and solutions, weigh options and think critically. They also teach us how to be more tolerant and open.

In order to attract and maintain a creative workforce, greater emphasis on arts education and practice is needed in our schools and communities.

2) Education

The contributions the arts make to academic success are well documented, I will take this opportunity to cite two important studies. First, a report from the College Board Profile of SAT and Achievement Test Takers, which has been tracking tests for decades, shows that students who studied the arts or music for four or more years, on average, score 93 points better on their SAT scores than students with just one-half year of arts or music.¹⁴ Second, is a study from UCLA that followed a sample of 25,000 American high school students over a ten-year period. The results of this study show that students who studied the arts had higher grades, scored better on standardized tests, had lower dropout rates, and were more active in community affairs than other students. In addition, it found that students from disadvantaged families who studied the arts improved their overall school performance more rapidly than other students.¹⁵

While studying the arts, students hone their perceptual, analytic and interpretive skills while developing creative thinking, communication and problem-solving abilities – providing them with the critical skills needed to succeed in school and in life.

The arts also provide a common ground for understanding. They facilitate intercultural understanding and provide a common lexicon for building relationships in an increasingly diverse and global society. With the growing number of non-English speaking students enrolling in our public schools, it is important to maintain a strong arts curriculum, one that is integrated with other subjects, in order to connect with non-English speakers and bridge the cultural gap.

3) Community Health and Wellness

The arts have a positive impact on community health and wellness. Nearly one-half of the nation's healthcare institutions provide arts programming for patients, families, and staff; 78 percent deliver these programs because of their healing benefits to patients—shorter hospital stays, better pain management, and less medication.¹⁶ Physicians and therapists use visual art, music, dance, and drama to treat patients with a variety of therapeutic needs. Here, the arts are used to strengthen speech patterns, self-image, and socialization skills; they help patients overcome or reduce physical dysfunction; and music therapy, in particular, has been very successful in treating seniors with Alzheimer's Disease. Military service members and Veterans rank art therapies in the top 4 (out of 40) interventions and treatments.¹⁷ The arts not only help patients cope with loss, isolation, depression, and the effects of mental and physical illnesses, but help families cope as well.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, people all over the world turned to the arts to connect with one another, add perspective to their lives, and help make sense of what was happening around them and others world-wide.

Whether it was concerts on rooftops, performances on Tic Toc, or painting plein air, we learned just how important the arts are in helping us cope with the dreadful sense of hopelessness, despair, stress and anxiety caused by prolonged social isolation. The arts have the power to unite, heal, and soothe. They provide us with a space to express our grief, solace, wonder and joy. And, for many suffering from mental illness and depression, these therapeutic qualities are lifeline that help safeguard their mental and spiritual health.

The arts provide a means for seniors to remain active and productive in the community as participants, volunteers and audience members. Controlled research by the Center on Aging found that older Americans involved in the arts demonstrated better health, fewer doctor visits, and less medication usage – saving money and improving the quality of life of seniors.¹⁸

As Howard County's special needs and senior populations grow, more programs, such as the Arts Council's Fabulous Fifty+ Players musical theatre program for older adults and the No Boundaries musical theatre program for people with developmental disabilities, will be needed to meet their needs. In addition, infrastructure and specialized training and professional arts service providers are needed to integrate the arts into community health and wellness service delivery systems.

4) Youth At Risk

The arts help at-risk youth. Numerous studies have found that arts education programs can help reduce dropout rates - increasing the retention and engagement rates of students and raising educational attainment levels. Participation in arts programs decreases young people's involvement in delinquent behavior, increases academic outcomes for disadvantaged children, and improves students' attitudes about themselves and their future. Studies by the U.S. Department of Justice demonstrate increased pro-social behavior among adjudicated youth involved with arts programs.¹⁹ Similarly, an evaluation of Core Arts examined the effect of arts programs on adjudicated youth in

Mississippi and found that participants in this program made notable improvement in cooperation, self-control, academic performance, interpersonal skills, attitude, and incidence of disruptive or risky behavior.²⁰

As the number of youth-related incidents continues to rise, Howard County may want to explore options to use the arts as a preventative measure or as an alternative teaching method for troubled youth or those suffering from mental health issues.

5) Community Revitalization

The arts are a powerful tool in community development and revitalization. They transform communities into special places by activating declining neighborhoods, bringing people together, creating a welcoming sense of place, and instilling a sense of community pride that is at the core of community building. Urban and cultural planners across the globe have used creative placemaking as a strategy to develop and revitalize cities and neighborhoods. It is a proven strategy that marries arts development with economic development and community development. The process typically starts with artists creating a stabilizing presence -- establishing studios, opening arts spaces, providing community activities in neighborhoods that are in flux. They make art and get involved in organizing community events and festivals. Soon people hear about interesting things happening in that neighborhood and want to see it for themselves. That foot traffic creates even more buzz - attracting entrepreneurs and businesses who want to invest in the neighborhood. Coffee shops, restaurants, and unique boutiques start popping up. New people are attracted to the neighborhood and choose to move there. Most importantly, the social and economic health of the community is improved - enhancing the well-being of local residents and helping the quality of life and local businesses to "rise" along with the neighborhood.

While many of us value the intrinsic impact of the arts on our lives - as an advocate for the arts, the Arts Council knows it is important to show how the arts impact the wider community. The Arts Council, through grants from the Maryland State Arts Council,

Howard County, and the National Endowment for the Arts, is leading an effort to produce a new arts and culture plan and chart a course for the future. The last plan was updated decades ago and much has changed in the County and the arts community <https://www.hocoarts.org/support/arts-culture-plan/>.

As County leaders look for ways to improve our economy, build community and maintain our quality of life, the arts can be – and should be - part of the solution for economic growth, workforce development, community revitalization, academic success, life-long learning, community health and wellness, and for our own personal growth. The new plan will help us guide these efforts.

In closing, the arts entertain, engage, and enlighten us in many different ways and on many different levels. They are a good investment with many great returns – I hope you agree.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak with you this evening, please support full funding for the arts.

¹ *Attendance Report for FY25 Grantees*, Howard County Arts Council, 2025.

² *U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and National Endowment for the Arts*, April 2025.

³ *Ready To Innovate*, Conference Board, 2008. Also cited on www.artsusa.org/information_services/tookit by Americans for the Arts.

⁴ Richard Florida, "America's Leading Creative Class Cities in 2015," *City Lab*, The Atlantic Monthly Group, April 20, 2015.

⁵ *Creative Industries: Business & Employment in the Arts*, Americans for the Arts and Dun & Bradstreet, 2017.

⁶ *Arts Vibrancy Index Report*, National Center for Arts Research, Southern Methodist University, 2022.

⁷ *Needs Assessment For Arts Facilities*, Howard County, MD, Webb Management Services, 2015, pg 20.

⁸ *Revenue Sources for FY24 Grantees*, Howard County Arts Council, 2025.

⁹ *Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 Calculator*, Americans for the Arts, 2025.

¹⁰ *Economic Impact of the Arts in Maryland 2026*, Maryland Department of Commerce, 2026.

¹¹ *Economic Impact of the Arts in Maryland 2026*, Maryland Department of Commerce, 2026.

¹² *ArtsVision: State of the Arts in Howard County 2003*, Howard County Arts Council and Vision Howard County, 2003, page 21.

¹³ *Economic Impact of the Arts in Maryland 2026*, Maryland Department of Commerce, 2026.

¹⁴ *2016 College-Bound Seniors: Total Group Profile Report*, The College Board, 2017; analysis by Americans for the Arts, 2018.

¹⁵ *A Study of Model Community Arts Programs*, Howard County Arts Council and the Horizon Foundation, 2002, pp 76-77.

¹⁶ *2009 State of the Field Report: Arts in Healthcare*, Society for the Arts in Healthcare, 2009.

¹⁷ Source: blog.americansforthearts.org/2017/02/14/top-10-reasons-to-support-the-arts-in-2017.

¹⁸ Source: Americans For the Arts, www.artsusa.org.

¹⁹ Source: Americans For The Arts, www.artsusa.org.

²⁰ *A Study of Model Community Arts Programs*, Howard County Arts Council and the Horizon Foundation, 2002, pp 77-78.

Testimony re: 2026 Howard County Budget by David Ryan

My name is David Ryan, and I live in District 1, at 4013 Arjay Circle, Ellicott City.

I am testifying **against** the budget of the Office on Aging and Independence, specifically on the allocation for fitness instruction at the 50+ Centers.

My wife has advanced Parkinson's Disease and Parkinson's-induced dementia. There are of course many other seniors in the County who likewise suffer from this insidious disease.

While there is no cure for Parkinson's, medical science has shown the disease's progress can be slowed by **consistent intense exercise**.

For the past two years my wife and other Howard County seniors with Parkinson's have experienced enhanced quality of both physical and mental health from the Rock, Steady, Boxing classes, conducted twice a week at the Columbia 50+ Center.

The program is clearly addressing a need since just recently a second set of classes was added.

Yesterday I emailed you all a brief video of my wife in class, **exuding pure joy**. If you have not seen it yet, please check with your staff, or see me afterwards.

Rock, Steady, Boxing is an international program designed specifically for those with Parkinson's.

Studies show that the training exercises boxers go through are ideal for Parkinson's patients.

So, imagine our shock when we recently learned that the program is scheduled to end July 1, due to the non-acceptance of the instructor's proposal to an Office on Aging's RFP..

Now, I could spout on about how flawed I believe this particular RFP was, but I also realize undoing an already-awarded RFP is nearly impossible.

But really, ok, if OAI feels they have to shake up the roster of classes at the 50+ Centers, I guess I say, "have at it," but must that **really** be done at the expense of a popular program that so uniquely serves a vulnerable senior population? – a population who in most cases have lived here in Howard County for decades.

I believe there has to be **some way**, even at this point, to reinstate the vital Rock, Steady, Boxing program – a program that has proven to so closely align with the purpose of our senior centers.

So to that end, I urge the Council to delay approval of the Office on Aging and Independence's budget until this matter can be remedied to all stakeholders' satisfaction.

Thank you.

David Ryan
4013 Arjay Circle, Ellicott City, MD 21042
m: 301-717-3747

Good morning.

My family and I have lived in District 5 since 2004. My mother, Donna Steinberg, lived with us for many years and now resides in an assisted living residence in District 1. She has advanced Parkinson's Disease.

For the past two years, she has participated in a Parkinson's-specific exercise program, Rock Steady Boxing, twice a week at the East Columbia 50+ Center.

And I want to be clear: this is not just another fitness class — it meets participants where they are physically, mentally, and socially. For people with Parkinson's, it builds strength, confidence, connection, and dignity.

It is working.

In fact, demand has grown so much that the program expanded to additional classes — a clear sign it is meeting a real and urgent need in the community.

And yet, now we are being told that this program is no longer welcome, needed, or worthwhile.

That is deeply frustrating — and hard to understand.

Howard County's Office on Aging and Independence and Dept of Community Resources and Services are meant to support health, access, and independence for older adults and people with disabilities. This program is a direct example of that mission in action.

So what changed?

Because from where families like mine stand, this decision creates a real gap in service.

This is not an inconvenience. Routines are broken. Progress is lost. Isolation increases. For people with Parkinson's, even short disruptions can cause measurable decline. And that is harm.

Research shows that consistent, Parkinson's-specific exercise slows progression and improves quality of life — and we see it every week.

So I have to ask: was that considered? Was the impact fully understood?

Public service carries a simple obligation: do no harm. When a decision removes access, disrupts continuity, and leaves vulnerable residents without support — that is harm, regardless of intent. Even if unintentional, once it's known, it becomes a choice — and no longer accidental.

Today, we all have a choice.

I am asking you to call on OAI, DCRS, and the Procurement Office to work together — quickly — to find a resolution. Either restore this program at the East Columbia 50+ Center or provide a real alternative without a gap.

Because this is not just about a contract or a process or one person's agenda.

It is about people like my mother — who depend on this program to stay active, connected, and engaged in their lives.

There is no good reason to look the other way — which violates the principle of do no harm. And for County Agencies entrusted with public service, that should be unacceptable.

Please — do no harm. Help us fix this.

Thank you.