
Sent: Tuesday, March 17, 2026 6:45 PM
To: CouncilMail
Subject: FW: Support for Council Bill 20-2026 – Establishment of an Interfaith Advisory Commission
Attachments: Written Testimony CB20-2026.docx

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Dear Council Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for **Council Bill 20-2026**.

In the spirit of Women’s History Month, I have prepared the following testimony which outlines the profound impact of faith-based service in our community. I believe an Interfaith Advisory Commission is a necessary step toward deeper community engagement and a more inclusive "public square."

I respectfully ask for your favorable report on this bill.

Sincerely ,

Ms. Chippella DAIMA Lewis, M.A
10641 Gramercy Place Columbia, MD 21044 (DISTRICT 4)

"Love is the KEY, if you want to be Free!" ~Mattie Lee Coleman

Written Testimony - Chippella DAIMA Lewis (Wilde Lake Community DISTRICT 4)

*I support the passing of **Council Bill 20-2026** for the establishment of an Interfaith Advisory Commission, and I hope our City Council does too; because if we ever did need one, we sure do need one now.*

The Establishment Clause—Separation of Church and State—prohibits the government from favoring a specific religion, but it does not mandate the total absence of religious voices in the public square.

In recognition of Women's History Month, I would be remiss not to mention the names of women leaders who have positively influenced our world through civic engagement, directly impacting and spearheading legislative changes that have enhanced our government and society:

- Dorothy Day: Dedicated her life to radical hospitality, pacifism, and providing direct aid to the poor.
- Sojourner Truth: Argued for the inherent dignity of all people.
- Harriet Tubman: Led hundreds of enslaved people to freedom via the Underground Railroad.
- Elizabeth Ann Seton: Founded the Sisters of Charity.
- Fanny Crosby: A blind hymn writer who penned over 8,000 gospel songs.
- Aimee Semple McPherson: Revolutionized the use of modern media and radio for religious outreach.
- Lucretia Mott: A central leader in both the abolitionist and women's rights movements.
- Coretta Scott King: Integrated nonviolent ethics into the Civil Rights Movement and founded the King Center, having dedicated her life to institutionalizing the philosophy of nonviolence and expanding the scope of the movement to include women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and economic justice.
- Elisabeth Elliot: An influential author who gained international recognition for her message of forgiveness and perseverance.
- Rosa Parks: Civil rights activist whose refusal to surrender and nonviolent defiance transformed passive frustration into organized collective action that helped begin efforts to dismantle systemic injustice.

- Jackie Jackson Civil Rights & Global Advocate- "First Lady" of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition has led international delegations to address humanitarian crises and fair foreign policy regarding Cuba, Haiti, and South Africa.
- Angela Davis: A prominent American academic, author, and activist known for her leadership in the civil rights and prison abolition movements; a member of the Black Panther Party dedicated to advocating for racial, gender, and economic justice.

HOWARD COUNTY

- Shehlla Khan: Co-Chair of PATH (People Acting Together in Howard) and an advocate for affordable housing and racial equity.
- Paige Getty: A leading voice in the "Courageous Conversations" racial justice initiative.
- Lori James: Member of the PATH Board of Directors, focusing on grassroots community organizing.
- Rachel Safman: Advocate for active community building.
- Susan Stuart: A Coordinator for Women's Philanthropy that addresses local social justice and food insecurity.
- Zainab Chaudry: A Howard County resident and Maryland Director for CAIR, who advocates for civic inclusion and civil rights in the region.
- Mary Ka Kanahan: Known for hosting community service and social activism since Columbia's founding.
- Buffy Schwartz: Founder of the Women's Giving Circle of Howard County, helping women leverage their resources for local philanthropic impact.
- Dr. Homayara Aziz: Renowned OBGYN & Member of the Howard County Commission for Women and an advocate for healthcare equity.
- Stephanie Al-Adhami: An active member of the Commission for Women working to remove barriers to civic participation for immigrant communities.

What do ALL these women have in common? I'm glad you asked. They are women of faiths—women who draw strength from a force greater than themselves. They are servant leaders who utilize that power to gain insight and wisdom; to create, promote, mobilize, stabilize, empower, educate, support, and uplift our communities locally, statewide, and globally.

Lewis, C. DAIMA 3/17/2026

Historically, faith-based institutions have served as pillars, voices of reason, beacons of charity, and safe havens that offer resolve, restitution, and remedy for many calamities that life, failed policies, and disruptions of community experience in society.

I believe an Interfaith Advisory Commission will promote inclusion and community harmony, adding to vast and needed dialogue rather than being a proponent of dogma. In my opinion, providing a "seat at the table" for stakeholders of faith to discuss civic issues is a form of community engagement that is a chief cornerstone of our foundation, a vital component to the preservation of our history, and the very thread that culminates the "fabric of our society."

I support the passing of Council Bill 20-2026 for the establishment of an Interfaith Advisory Commission, and I hope our City Council does too; because if we ever did need one, we sure do need one now.

From: Rector Grace Elkridge <Rector@graceelkridge.org>
Sent: Wednesday, March 18, 2026 1:01 PM
To: CouncilMail
Subject: My testimony in favor of CB020-2026
Attachments: Testimony in support of CB020-2026.docx

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Please accept my written testimony in favor of CB020-2026.

Faithfully,

Mary Sulerud

The Reverend Mary Sulerud
Interim Rector
Grace Episcopal Church
6725 Montgomery Rd
Elkridge, MD 21075
410-796-3270

Testimony in Favor of CB020-2026

Given by The Reverend Mary Sulerud, Interim Rector, Grace Episcopal Church, Elkridge

March 18, 2026

About 18 months ago I was unexpectedly invited to serve on an interfaith advisory committee for the County Executive. The purpose of this group was to explore the need and efficacy of such an interfaith group as part of Howard County's governing structure. The group that I was a part of was a wonder to me. While we had moved to Howard County because of its diversity, I had not realized the extent to which that meant religious diversity as well. On any given day we are a worshipping county of many faith traditions.

During my time on this advisory committee we came up with three recommended actions for the County to take: 1) to publish an annual calendar featuring all the holy days of the various faith traditions in the county; 2) to sponsor an annual multi-faith fair in which worshipping communities could participate with booths, food, and music, and concluding with a service of prayer and music representing all the faiths in the county; 3) a regular program of visiting houses of worship as visitors to learn about other faiths. This last recommendation was one we tried with the help of the staff of the County's Human Rights Commission. It happened in 2025 as Ramadan, Lent and Passover all coincided. We also made recommendations about all the ways that the County could make it less difficult for houses of worship to expand or build, as well as engage in ministry that the County needs to augment its own work, like feeding programs, day care and pre-school options.

More importantly, I experienced the wisdom of others who are also on a journey of faith. I heard how much we shared, and how our differences mattered in ways that were strengthening. Early on in seminary I learned that one of the meanings of the word companion is literally to walk with another with bread. It is a way of describing someone who is walking with you while nourishing your spirit. I walked with nearly twenty people last year, and they fed my faith, my hope, and my joy every time we gathered. My hope is that you will see the wisdom of such a group, and its capacity to nourish the souls of this county by passing this measure. Unity amid diversity is a great sign of hope in a world that needs it.