



Howard County  
Housing Affordability Coalition

## Howard County Council Public Hearing

May 18, 2026

### Testimony: Proposed FY 2027 County Budget

Good evening. On behalf of the Housing Affordability Coalition, I'm testifying in support of the proposed FY 2027 operations funding for the Department of Housing and Community Development. Specifically, I'll highlight the following:

- Shifting the final 5 Homeless Services positions to General Revenue funding assures that the Community Renewal Fund will be used solely for programmatic purposes.
- The 6 percent increase for Homeless Services is necessary to cover current needs, while leaving the potential to cover increases in the costs of rents and services for low income County residents.
- The disappointing \$1 million allocation to the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund is insufficient to support the Fund's primary mission of assisting new or redeveloped affordable housing projects. It will be used to help address program needs, but \$1 million is, nonetheless, not adequate in light of housing affordability needs.
- The Community Renewal Program Fund seems to be adequately funded to continue in FY 27 projects, including the HCPSS and HCC rental subsidies and the Settlement Down Payment Loan programs. But as transfer taxes, recordation and Fee-in-Lieu fees—the only sources of Community Renewal Program funding—continue to trend downward, so will DHCD's capacity to support these programs in the future.

My Coalition colleagues and I continue to be frustrated by the snail-like progress on Downtown Columbia affordable housing projects. We sincerely hope that the remainder of this Administration's and Council's eight-year terms of service will be focused on more timely progress, particularly for the affordable housing in the Merriweather district and at Banneker. Decisions concerning the site locations for the new Banneker fire station and the Library are critical for keeping the DRRA-required housing projects on schedule.

In closing, the Coalition wishes to underscore Council member comments made during this past Monday's DCRS and DHCD budget worksession. Demand for the County's homelessness and housing (and families and children and seniors) services continue to increase while resources are at best stagnant. The leadership of both departments continue to restructure and reset priorities to achieve efficiencies and maintain services to our county's most vulnerable residents, but they cannot effectively serve those populations with a continuing "do more with less" strategy.

An anomaly in FY 2026 general revenues enables small DCRS increases in FY 27, but revenue forecasts are trending down. DHCD has already seen over the past few years its transfer tax, recordation fees and Fee-in-Lieu revenue sources measurably decline and these too are forecast to further decline. The once \$40 million DHCD Reserve Fund has been tapped to provide good programs, but now sits at \$18 million with commitments for continued spending to maintain that programming. The Fund will sit at zero in the not so distant future,

With revenues trending down and demand for services trending up for the foreseeable future, the County will face tough decisions regarding increasing revenue, cutting services or some combination of both. The DHCD and DCRS future funding dilemmas are not unique among its sister departments, but the Coalition would argue that they are the two agencies that have the most direct impact on the most economically and socially vulnerable people in our community. If you as current council members (and also you County

Executive Ball) have ideas about how to ensure future County revenues are sufficient to meet County human service—including housing—demands, we encourage you to talk about them during the remainder of your terms or to put them in your middle desk drawer for those who follow you into leadership positions.

Sincere thanks for the yeoman work you have done each year as you've worked through this always challenging annual budget process. My Coalition colleagues and I may not have agreed with all your decisions, but we have appreciated your diligence, your time spent, and your commitment to trying to ensure that the County is well positioned to meet its responsibilities.

The Coalition requests that you support the proposed FY 2027 DHCD Expense budget.

Respectfully submitted,

*Jackie Eng*

Coalition Coordinator