

**HOWARD COUNTY ARTS COUNCIL
Testimony submitted to Howard County Council
Regarding FY2024 Proposed Budget
May 8, 2023**

Good evening Chairwoman Rigby and members of the County Council. I am Coleen West, Executive Director of the Howard County Arts Council located at 8510 High Ridge Road. 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 and especially appreciate the safety net the County provided during the pandemic.

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 42 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 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 \$1,191,000 - 76% of this funding will support grants to 50-60 local and regional arts organizations.

In FY22, attendance at arts events funded through these grants was 266,000 (93% of pre-COVID attendance) and volunteers for local, county-based arts groups receiving grants donated nearly 100,000 hours – a value of \$2.4 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 record annual funding for the arts:

- \$30.5 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).

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 4.4 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP), or \$1.02 trillion, and generates 4.9 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. And, Howard County companies will have to compete with its neighbors to attract the creative workforce of artists, entrepreneurs, and innovators they need to be competitive. However, 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, while 85% of employers say they can't find the creative, innovative applicants they seek.³

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 proposed cultural 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 Florida.⁴ And, 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.

Recent 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 the primary focus of the Arts Council. Non-profits, such as the Candlelight Concert Society, Columbia Festival of the Arts, Misako Ballet 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 engage the public.

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. Even in good times, their budgets are extremely fragile. While they are used to operating on shoe-string budgets, after two years of closures and reduced capacity, they've suffered huge losses in ticket sales and a steep decline in earned and contributed income. Their already fragile budgets are at great risk.

It's hard to imagine what the new normal will be for the arts sector after COVID-19, however history shows us that the arts are one of the hardest sectors hit and the last to recover from economic downturns. For perspective, after the 2008 recession, it took the Arts Council 9 years to get our camp enrollment back to pre-recession numbers.

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 tonight, to ask you to support funding for this non-profit 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. In turn, the non-profit arts groups give back to our community by enhancing our quality of life and community wellness, celebrating artistic traditions, preserving cultural heritage, attracting new businesses and jobs, and generating revenue for the County.

In FY22, Howard County grantees not only provided us with exceptional programming, they earned \$4.5 million in revenues –24% Howard County, 21% from earned income

and admissions, 11% individuals, 9% State, 9% Federal, 4% corporations, 3% foundations, 19% other⁸— and generated 149 FTE jobs.⁹

Statewide (pre-COVID-19), 13,185 arts-related businesses generated 52,723 jobs¹⁰ in Maryland, including 258 non-profit arts groups that generated 16,900 FTE jobs. The non-profit sector alone had a total annual impact of \$1.3 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 \$4.16 in spending on goods and services.¹³ Using this formula, the non-profit arts groups in Howard County, generated an extra \$17 million in secondary spending to our local economy in FY22 for a total economic impact of \$21.5 million (this does 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). An investment in the arts is an investment in our future.

Seventy-six percent of the proposed county funding will go to support 4 grant programs that provide operating and project grants to 50-60 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 FY22, the Arts Council awarded \$371,352 (CAD: \$358,000, JRT:\$12,352;CH:\$1,000) to 23 Howard County organizations.
- 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 FY22, we awarded \$171,000 to 11 city organizations.

- 3) The Outreach Howard program awards grants to City grantees to produce projects IN Howard County. In FY22, \$42,000 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 FY22, we awarded \$32,000 to 14 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 arts.

All grantees are required to submit final reports, which the Arts Council uses to evaluate grant programs, to track attendance and budget figures, and to hold grantees accountable to their request. These reports show that community interest and support, in terms of participation, is very strong – 266,000 attended arts events sponsored, in part, through County funds and 97,000 volunteer hours, valued at \$2.4 million, were donated. We also provided opportunities for 6,435 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 32,000 square foot multi-purpose Howard County Center for the Arts in Ellicott City. At the Center, we sponsor year-round classes, art exhibits in our galleries, and performances in the community black box theatre. We also provide low-cost studios for 14 visual artists, office space for 3

resident arts groups, and meeting space for 6 volunteer run groups that participate in our Arts Advancement Program. In FY22, 24,000 people visited the Center and we provided opportunities for 3,230 artists students 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, our on-line arts calendar, ARTsites, a partnership with 12 sites throughout the County to place sculptures in public spaces for one year, as well as free community-based arts activities for underserved audiences, such as our Head StART in ART program.

Head StART in ART is a model artist-in-residence program for preschoolers from low-income families that has been recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Maryland State Arts Council as an exemplary early childhood arts program. This program introduces 100-120 children to practicing artists and provides them with experiences and training in the arts that would otherwise not take place. Each residency is designed to provide age-appropriate activities that complement Head Start's curriculum and reinforce core life and learning skills that are needed for future success. This program is free to participants. It received the John W. Holland Service Award from the Community Action Council in 2011. 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 Orchestra, the Columbia Festival of the Arts, 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 the 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. As County leaders look for ways to improve our economy 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.

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.

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

¹ *Attendance Report for FY22 Grantees*, Howard County Arts Council, 2022.

² U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and National Endowment for the Arts, *March 2023*.

³*Ready To Innovate*, Conference Board, 2008. Also cited on www.artsusa.org/information_services/tookkit 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 *Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 Calculator*, Americans for the Arts, 2022.

⁹ *Revenue Sources for FY22 Grantees*, Howard County Arts Council, 2022.

¹⁰ *Creative Industries 2017: The State Report*, Americans for the Arts and Dun & Bradstreet, 2017.

¹¹ *Economic Impact of the Arts in Maryland*, Maryland Department of Commerce, 2019.

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*, Maryland Department of Commerce, 2019.

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.

**Howard County Council
FY24 Budget Hearing
May 8, 2023**

TESTIMONY

Deborah Clutts

Good evening, Councilmembers. My name is Debbie Clutts. I am a 28-year resident of the Hickory Ridge neighborhood and a 40-year resident of Howard County. I have a 25-year-old adult son, Matthew, with autism spectrum disorder, and I am a long-time volunteer with the Howard County Autism Society.

I am also a strong supporter of Patuxent Commons, which, as you know, is an affordable, accessible development in Hickory Ridge that will provide individuals with disabilities housing and a supportive community. From the start, this project has been a genuine team effort and given the support of the Council for the project, we consider each of you to be members of this team. Your unanimous vote last April to approve a PILOT and an APFO waiver for the project was a clear indication of your strong support and we greatly appreciate it!

We have made consistent progress on many critical fronts over the past 12 months and our developer Mission First remains on track to close on the project financing before the end of the year. But we need your help to get there. The fiscal year 2024 budget being discussed at tonight's hearing contains \$1 million in capital support for Patuxent Commons. We ask for your support for this funding. Like most non-profit construction projects, we are facing a financing gap, due to increased material and labor costs and interest rates, along with other factors. Please be assured, we have been working hard to address this gap by seeking support from a range of sources, including making a case for additional state funding. For

example, in the most recent legislative session, the Howard County Delegation secured an additional \$500,000 in capital funding. And since our last appearance before the Council last year, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation made a \$1.25 million grant to the project! But the \$1 million in FY24 Howard County funding is critical.

We also urge your support for the \$²⁷22 million in funding for the Trust Fund and other DHCD housing programs. The supply of affordable, accessible, and appropriate housing for people with disabilities is severely lacking in Howard County. Patuxent Commons is a step in the right direction; however, the existing demand is overwhelming.

I know each of you understand how important the Patuxent Commons' location – on an outparcel in the Hickory Ridge neighborhood – will be to its success. This location will be a tremendous asset to people with disabilities, many of whom rely on public transportation and a walkable community, including access to shopping, job opportunities, and recreation. It is an exceptional site that is ideal for a project that will serve exceptional people.

I hope you will lend your support for this funding and for our efforts to bring this critical project “across the finish line!” Help us ensure our sons and daughters with disabilities as well as our senior citizens can affordably live in Hickory Ridge and be a true part of our inclusive and caring community.

Thank you.

Deborah Clutts
Resident, Hickory Ridge

**Howard County Council
FY24 Operational Budget
Public Hearing
MAY 8, 2023**

TESTIMONY

**Theresa Ballinger, Chair
Howard County Autism Society
Housing Task Force**

My name is Theresa Ballinger and I am speaking to you this evening both as a parent of an adult son with autism and as the chair of the Howard County Autism Society Housing Task Force. I am here to express support for funding included in the proposed FY24 County operating budget to support much-needed affordable housing initiatives in Howard County.

We are particularly supportive of this funding because of the \$1 million in support it will provide Patuxent Commons, a project all of you are familiar with which will provide affordable, inclusive housing for individuals with disabilities and other Howard County residents of all ages, abilities and incomes.

Since I last appeared before you regarding this project in March of last year, evidence of the growing need for this project and others like it has only increased. I want to share some new figures released by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention just last month that speak to the growing incidence of autism in our country. The CDC now projects that one of 36 eight-year-old children in the US have an autism diagnosis. That is a major increase from only three years ago, when the CDC projected one in 44 eight-year-olds as having an autism

diagnosis. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, including an increased rate of diagnosis itself, but the prevalence rate is also clearly increasing.

As you are aware, the Autism Society has been actively exploring strategies to address the growing housing crisis facing adults with autism and other disabilities for over a decade.

Meanwhile, the need for housing such as Patuxent Commons is clearly increasing. And we are still working to generate this one critically needed project! It goes without saying that we're very excited for Mission First, the project's developer, to close on financing later this year. But it won't happen without your continued support. The realities of rapidly expanding material and labor costs and rising interest rates have impacted our project budget and we need new funding commitments to close the gap. The \$1 million in dedicated funding will be hugely important, as is will be the funding for the Housing Trust Fund, which Mission First is applying to as well.

Working together, we can get Patuxent Commons over the finish line Councilmembers!

Please help us bring this much-needed project to Howard County and support the DHCD funding it needs to stay on track, so we can close on financing and begin construction late this year.

Thank you!

Theresa Ballinger

Chair

Howard County Autism Society Housing Task Force

Email: tballinger@howard-autism.org



**Howard County Council
FY24 Operating Budget
Public Hearing
May 8, 2023**

TESTIMONY

**Melissa Rosenberg, Executive Director
Howard County Autism Society
with Matthew Plantz, HCAS Board Member & Disability Advocate**

Good evening members of the Council. My name is Melissa Rosenberg and I am the Executive Director of the Howard County Autism Society. I am here this evening with Matthew Plantz, a disability self-advocate and board member of the Autism Society. Together, we want to express our support and request yours for the proposed FY2024 funding of \$1 million for Patuxent Commons. We also strongly support the \$22 million in funding for the Housing Trust Fund and other housing programs.

I'd like to give Matthew the floor for a moment so he can share some brief remarks. Matthew, would you share with the Council why Patuxent Commons and projects like it are so important? (Matthew provides remarks before Melissa speaks again)

Thank you, Matthew. I would like to offer some updated data that backs up your statement and further demonstrates the growing need for housing like Patuxent Commons in Howard County that is affordable, accessible and inclusive for adults with disabilities.

According to school census data issued in October 2022, there are nearly 6000 students in Howard County special education classes. Of those, approximately 59% have either learning disability, autism, developmental delay, or an intellectual disability. 27% are in High School.



What that means is that approximately 950 high school students will be transitioning out of school over the next five years that fit in either autism, developmental delay, intellectual disability learning disability. These members of our community need support at a variety of levels, for housing, employment and transportation. HCAS believes it is time to act on the housing front. Not only for those who need it now, but for the growing number who will be entering post-school life in the near term, and for each additional wave to follow.

With the housing stock for individuals with disabilities in Howard County so inadequate to the rapidly growing need, it is essential that initiatives like Patuxent Commons receive the funding they need to advance.

Thank you for your previous support and thank you in advance for providing additional County funding for this innovative, much-needed project, the Housing Trust Fund and other DHCD programs.

Melissa Rosenberg

Executive Director

Howard County Autism Society



People Acting Together

HOWARD COUNTY, MARYLAND

Dear Chair Rigby, Vice Chair Jung, Members of the Howard County Council:

My name is Charles Koplik and I am on the board of PATH (People Acting Together in Howard) and I am testifying as their representative tonight. PATH is a multi-racial, multi-faith, non-partisan residents' organization, rooted in local congregations and organizations. Our dues-paying member institutions, Catholic, Presbyterian, Jewish and Muslim, include over 20,000 Howard County residents.

I wanted to first briefly state PATH'S support for the Maternal Health Program (for which the Executive included \$1.7M in his budget) and the Housing Fund appropriation of \$10M for affordable housing development and preservation. The \$1.7M for the Maternal Health Program will support Chase Brexton and Howard County General Hospitals to ensure moms get the prenatal care they need. Removing these services from those who do not qualify for Medicaid would be devastating to many families in Howard County. We also strongly urge support for the expansion of the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund, which would allocate an additional \$10M to the \$5 million appropriated in FY23 but not spent. As you know, the Trust Fund can provide funding for rental housing development, preservation and rehabilitation, rental assistance, homeownership, and home improvements.

Tonight, I wanted to focus on PATH's strong support for the lakefront library project. The plan creates a world class library which would become a physical and cultural center of Columbia, and the plan provides for the development of a minimum of 240 units of housing in downtown, 120 of which would be designated as affordable housing units.

The library will help preserve the character of downtown by being there, instead of a high-rise apartment building, and we believe that it will become an important gathering space and opportunity to address issues of equity in our downtown, where the library is already overcrowded. Remember that more and more people will be moving downtown to Columbia as construction in our town expands. The library will bolster and support students from pre-K through Community College.

Think about it this way. An apartment building would provide exclusive views and ease of access to those wealthy enough to live there, or we could welcome everyone to enjoy

and cherish Columbia's iconic Lakefront, indoors and outdoors, in a Library -- a space that is meant for learning and engaging in ideas and ideals -- That is Columbia.

The Merriweather Affordable Housing project provides mixed income housing, including market-rate units along with income restricted units. The affordable housing units could support firefighters, seniors, teachers, and others who could not otherwise afford to live in Howard County. In PATH's meetings with members of our community, we hear the stories of teachers who can't afford to live in the county where they work, of seniors who cannot afford to live in the county where their children and grandchildren live.

The need for affordable housing has been critical for our residents but is so often delayed or deferred. The Housing Opportunities Master Plan recommended 300 units of affordable housing/year (for households making <60% of AMI). Here is a win-win opportunity that can help in an important way address this critical need.

Thank you for your attention.

Charles M. Koplik



Oral Testimony to Support the FY24 Operating Budget

May 8, 2023 | Public Hearing

Valerie Traore, Executive Director – Association of Community Services of Howard County

www.acshoco.org | Valerie.traore@acshoco.org

To members of the Council and the viewing public, good evening . I'm Val Traore and I'm Executive Director of ACS of HoCo: The hub of the nonprofit community. I stand before you representing 130 plus diverse nonprofit organizations whose mission range from Aging to Legal Services to Watershed Protection. We are all working collaboratively together to make Howard Co a great place for everyone

As we celebrate 60 years of service in this county, we have gained a unique understanding of the challenges of the nonprofit sector and the communities they serve. You have understood that as well as evidenced in your support of the FY23 budget where you approved of resources and funding that helped our nonprofit community survive through post pandemic challenges. We thank you.

And being the keen council you are, I know you sensed a “However” coming up so let me not disappoint you. We need your help again. The FY24 budget has some line items that could really help our nonprofits and the communities they serve such as

- Support for the Department of Community Resources and Services (DCRS)
 - \$34 million (\$33,936,525) Total--supports breadth of community need, providing resources to nonprofits' clients--Office of Children and Families, Local Children's Board, Office of Consumer Protection, Aging programs, health promotion and nutrition, etc
 - \$12.7 million (\$12,648,673) Community Service Partnership s(CSP) - (good to address the full gamut as represented by ACS membership)
 - human services \$8,974,866
 - civic grants \$328,500
 - arts, tourism, and health \$3,001,987
- Support for the Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) \$27 million budget that includes:
 - \$10 million for the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund (HOTF)
 - \$1 million eviction prevention (rental and foreclosure)

 - \$1.1 million for home rehabilitation (helping low- and moderate-income residents, including seniors and people with disabilities, stay in their homes)
 - \$5.5 million for home ownership programs (assisting with settlement/down payment loans and other costs associated with purchasing a home)

- Operating budgets of our nonprofits continue to be a juggling act of making the decision of providing decent wages and benefits to our staff vs. cutting a vital program because there is just not enough funds to sustain both. We ask that you **dedicate robust funds for nonprofits' operational, program, and capital support.**

We know you have tough job saying yes to some and regrettably having to no or not yet to others. On behalf of the nonprofit community, We thank you for what you've done, what are you doing and what we know you will continue to do for us. And on a personal note, I find it an absolute delight and privilege to live in a county that while not perfect, is perfect in its persistence to be and do better.

Wishing you and the viewing public, a restful sleep tonight. Thank You!



Testimony to Howard County Counsel May 8, 2023
By: Ann Heavner
Executive Director, Rebuilding Together Howard County

On behalf of the board of directors, low-income homeowner clients and thousands of volunteers and individuals in our Rebuilding Together Howard County network, I am testifying in support of the county executive's \$27 million funding increase proposed for the Department of Housing and Community Development. Also, I am testifying in support of the county executive's Community Service Partnership Grant funding from the Department of Community Resources and Services.

Rebuilding Together is the nation's largest not for profit organization dedicated to providing the rehabilitation of residential structures for the purpose of providing decent, safe and affordable housing opportunities for low-income households.

There are 120 affiliates in the United States. For the past 31 years, Rebuilding Together Howard County has successfully preserved the limited stock of affordable, single-family homes in Howard County and revitalized the housing community. We have repaired free of charge over 1,250 homes. A recent study was conducted to determine the Return on Investment for Rebuilding Together funding. **For each dollar funded to Rebuilding Together, it generates a Return on Investment of \$2.85.**

Rebuilding Together services are available to all low-income county residents regardless of where they live in the county. Just recently on April 29th, 19 teams of volunteers totaling 360 individuals worked to provide critical home repairs to 17 homeowners in need. We are proud that we had 7 Rotary Clubs, 2 Regional Construction Companies (Buch Construction and Harkins Builders), Banks, Corporations and Churches who answered the call to community service to help those in need at no-cost to the homeowner.

Rebuilding Together® Howard County, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) Corporation, EIN 52-1748888

The nation's largest volunteer organization preserving and revitalizing low-income houses and communities



In addition to our volunteer program, we are the **go-to organization in Howard County to provide Home Modifications**. As a member of the Age Friendly Howard County Implementation Task Force, we provide the knowledge and skills to successfully install Home Modifications to allow individuals with disabilities and the elderly to age in place, maintain their mobility and decrease the safety risks associated with falls. Some of the lifesaving equipment that we are certified to install in this program includes ramps, stair glides, grab bars, exterior railings and handicapped accessible bathroom modifications to allow mobility challenged residents to gain easy access to their home and navigate within the home.

Through our **Safe and Healthy Home Program**, we evaluate each home based on 25 Characteristics of a Safe and Healthy Home. Then we provide the critical repairs. After the repairs are complete, we conduct another evaluation of the 25 Characteristics. As a result, we are able to quantify the impact that Rebuilding Together is making by improving the inventory of affordable houses in Howard County.

Community Revitalization is a major focus of our organization and we have a history of success. First, we responded to meet the community revitalization needs of Ellicott City homeowners hard hit by two major floods. We were board members of the One EC Recovery Project and provided major repairs to 14 homeowners impacted by the floods. In addition, for a home beyond repair, we demolished it and rebuilt it from the ground up for an elderly couple. Currently, we are in a partnership with the Howard County Department of Community Resources and Services to meet the needs of the mobile home community.

Another service we offer is our **Urgent Repairs Program**. Through it we assist low-income homeowners who have critical home repair needs that require immediate attention. For example, loss of heat during the winter, broken water pipes, a tree crashing onto a roof, loss of electricity and a broken hot water heater are some of the examples of critical repairs provided under this program. These

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Chair Rigby, Vice Chair Jung, Members of the Howard County Council:

Good evening. My name is Joel Frankel, and I am the Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Howard County. The Jewish Community Relations Council is part of the Jewish Federation. The JCRC, guided by our Jewish values, seeks to promote the common good and to build mutual understanding between our local Jewish community of about 25,000 residents and the broader civic, ethnic, and religious communities here in the county.

I am here tonight on behalf of the JCRC to support the proposed FY24 funding for the Department of Housing and Community Development, including the proposed \$10 million for the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund and \$7 million for housing programs and initiatives. This funding will provide a much-needed County increase to assist our residents with purchasing a home, rehabbing homes for accessibility, and avoiding eviction or obtaining assistance with security deposits.

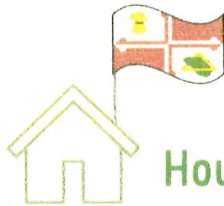
We recognize that there is a shortage of housing in the County that affects not only lower-wage workers, but also seniors, people with disabilities, public sector employees, young adults, and families with young children. In 2020, almost half of the renters in the County paid more than 30 percent of their income on rent. Almost a quarter paid more than 50 percent. How can one survive an emergency or even have money for basic necessities when paying that level of rent? This may be one reason that so many of our residents are lining up all over the County for food aid and why members of our Jewish community turn to the Jewish Emergency Network for emergency financial assistance ranging from rental assistance to dental repair, moving expenses and unpaid utility bills.

The situation for low-income seniors is dire. In 2022, there were about 900 apartments available for 3,000 senior households with incomes from \$30,000 to \$50,000. And for the 1,800 with incomes below \$30,000, there were only 180 apartments. This indicates that the overwhelming majority of low-income seniors are living in places they can't afford, which impacts all aspects of their health and well-being.

The Jewish Federation provides information and referral services to anyone who calls into our social services office in addition to ongoing case management for members of the Jewish community. Over the past year, we have received requests for help with rent and mortgages ranging from \$800 to \$5,500. In fact, 40% of the calls in the last seven

months have been from people looking for assistance with housing, rental, or mortgage assistance. Many of these callers are seniors who are already doing everything they can to make ends meet. These types of calls are also why, as funding allows, we provide food gift cards ranging from \$125 to \$200 monthly to help clients who already receive food stamps in order to alleviate the strain of paying rent/mortgages in Howard County.

Thank you again for your consideration of the proposed \$10 million for the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund to finance low and moderate income housing projects and initiatives and \$7 million for housing programs and initiatives into the budget. This will allow the trust fund to continue pursuing projects that will yield rental and homeownership support, while also working to identify new funding sources to ensure a sustainable trust. Providing this funding is only a start, but it is a start, and we urge you to approve it.



Howard County Housing Affordability Coalition

County Council FY 2024 Operations Budget Public Hearing Testimony

May 11, 2023

Council Chair Rigby, Vice Chair Jung and council members. With this testimony, the Housing Affordability Coalition is submitting a petition signed by 381 individuals encouraging the Council's support of full funding of the \$27 million DHCD proposed budget, including:

- \$15 million for the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund;
- \$1.1 million for home rehabilitation that will help low- and moderate-income residents, including seniors and people with disabilities, stay in their homes;
- \$5.5 million for home ownership programs to assist with settlement and down payment loans and other costs associated with purchasing a home;
- \$1 million in rental and foreclosure eviction prevention assistance to help households that are still recovering from COVID financial set-backs and others experiencing post-COVID high rent increases.

It is well-documented that there is a critical need for additional affordable rental units, affordable home ownership opportunities, support for safety improvements and adaptations that will help people with disabilities live independently and seniors age in place. The annual Transfer and Recordation taxes and Fee-in-Lieu revenues that support DHCD and its programs are certainly critical to helping address some of our community's housing challenges. These have proven, though, to be insufficient to significantly address the current and projected housing crisis. Hence the Coalition's ongoing commitment to the Housing Trust Fund.

The Coalition's research of successful housing trust funds is clear that fully actualizing and ensuring the long-term sustainability of a fund requires at a minimum an annual fund balance of at least \$30 million dollars. An FY 2024 appropriation of \$10 million—more than doubling the current year contribution—is an appreciated major commitment toward reaching that optimal funding level. It's imperative, however, that if the Fund is to be truly long-term and self-sustaining, it needs to be supported by new revenues—and we would very much appreciate the opportunity to work with the Administration, the County Council and others in the community to review potential funding mechanisms, including bringing other sources of funders to the table such as those that have benefited other jurisdictions. The need for increased revenues is underscored by the fact that in this initial year, the 12 applications received and currently under review would require a Fund investment of almost \$25 million. That's not to say that every application merits funding, but the level of interest by a range of nonprofit and for-profit entities is indicative of the housing business community's desire to help ameliorate the current housing crisis.

Housing most often is a root cause of a family's financial insecurity. The Coalition therefore also supports full funding of the Department of Community Resources and Services' FY 2024 proposed operations budget to ensure that the department continues to maintain and improve the human services safety net that supports these vulnerable residents. While strongly supportive of the proposed funding, the Coalition is however disappointed that the proposed FY 2024 budget: (1) does not include

Howard County Housing Affordability Coalition

staffing increases in the Community Partnership Office and in fact proposes what appear to be significant Community Partnership revenue and program decreases, (2) just level funds the Plan to End Homelessness as the department begins in earnest to implement the new *Path Home* strategy, and (3) affords only a 3.8 % increase in its Human Service Grants to support the nonprofits that are a strong, collaborative, effective and essential part of the safety net.

A couple of weeks ago, a (non-profit) colleague shared a story of an interaction with a low-income client for whom he was trying to find a new place to live because she was facing a large increase in her rent. He said to her that he was working to ensure that she and others in our community living with housing instability have a voice. Her response was, "I have a voice, but nobody's listening." In asking people to sign onto the Coalition petition, we asked if there were comments they wished to share with Council members as you deliberate this FY 2024 budget. Here are a few of those comments.

- *I truly hope that each council member listens seriously to this request and responds in the affirmative.*
- *Access to affordable housing is one of the most important challenges we face in this county. We must do more than we have in the past so we can really become a diverse and inclusive community.*
- *Your past support for inclusive affordable housing, including Patuxent Commons, is appreciated and continued support is required.*
- *Four years ago, I was fortunate enough to get the help I needed from a local nonprofit to stay in my home and what a blessing that has been for this low-income senior. There are so many more like me, but also young people with families. So I am asking the County Council to please approve the Administration's funding increases for housing. I know it would make a difference in so many lives, including yours.*
- *We have an enormous need for more housing and especially affordable housing. Funding for the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund and DHCD programs are key to helping us move forward in a productive way and provide the housing our teachers, public safety personnel, seniors and other long-standing community members need.*
- *Our housing market is "blinking red." We're in crisis. Every study from DHCD and DPZ acknowledges the absence of homeownership opportunities and the punitive rent burdens experienced by all but affluent households. And every community service provider is swamped supporting housing-insecure families. We need the Council to lead us through this crisis. More funding for the trust fund and DHCD is a start.*

Thank you for listening.

Respectfully submitted,

Jackie Eng, Coalition Coordinator



Howard County
Housing Affordability Coalition



Howard County Housing Affordability Coalition

Petition: Proposed FY 2024 Operations Budget Proposal

County Council Members: Please Support Increased Funding for Housing Initiatives

Tens of thousands of Howard County families are struggling. Punitive high rents, caused by a scarcity of affordable rental housing, are crushing the ability of many families to thrive. Homeownership opportunities have largely disappeared for families earning moderate or low incomes -- including many of our essential workers, such as teachers, medical technicians, and employees in hospitality, construction, and other industries. Most young adults can't afford to "launch" in the community where they grew up, and many seniors can't afford to age in place.

I urge the County Council to approve the Administration's requested increases in funding for housing-related initiatives in fiscal year 2024, including increases for:

- Housing Opportunities Trust Fund
- Department of Housing and Community Development programs

Petition Signers

- Masudah Abdul-Khabeer
- Laurie Alderman
- Leslie Alexander
- Eric Allen
- Sharon Allen
- Kelly Almendarez
- Mary Ruth Alter
- Skye Anderson
- Claudia Andorsky
- Elliot Arditti
- Mostafa Aria
- Raya Armaly
- Harriet Bachman
- Citlali Bacmeister
- Ayesha Bajwa Holmes
- Alan Baker
- Sheryl Baker
- Theresa Ballinger
- Maria Roselle Baltazar
- Honi Bamberger
- Sherry Banks
- Sarah Basehart
- Christine Basham
- Dawn Baskin
- Maria Bayer
- Mae Beale
- Rebecca Beall
- Susan Behan
- Elizabeth Benevides
- Dr. Thomas Benjamin
- Shauna Benning
- Nadine Bernard
- Estelene Boratenski
- Patrick Boxall
- Nancy Boyd
- Mary Brandenburg
- Emily Brandon
- Susan Brazzel
- Karen Brewer
- Jennifer Broderick
- Amy Brooks
- Cedric Brown
- Monica Brown-Tinson
- Judy Bruns
- Patty Buffington
- F.T. Burden
- Richard Burrows
- Erica Byrne
- Mary Carrington
- Adrian Carroll
- Haley Carroll
- Larry Carson
- Kathleen Casey
- Paul Casey
- Eileen Chalfant
- Kevin Chin
- Clara Chu
- Stephen Clinger
- Courtney Clutts
- Deborah Clutts
- John Clutts
- Tom Coale
- Sara Cochran
- Kiki Coffman
- Fern Cohen
- Woodrow Collins
- Katie Collins-Ihrke
- Laurie Coltri
- Oswald Copeland
- Dana Couch
- Laura Cox
- Christine Crandell
- Erin Cutts
- Jim Davidson
- Allecia Davis
- Amanda Davis
- Nneka Davis

- Claude De Vastey Jones
- Katie Dean
- Richard Dean
- Jessica Degaine
- Vera Dehaven
- Glenn Del Favero
- Kristen Detwiler
- Vanessa Deutschmann
- Lauren Diener
- Chelsea Dinh
- Nidia Dominguez
- Jeremy Dommu
- Stephanie Doodigian
- Meagan Downey
- Normale Doyle
- Joan Driessen
- Patrick Driessen
- Dianne Dunlap
- Carol Dunlavey
- Jessamine Duvall
- Janet Eagles
- Shaun Eddy
- Kim Eisenreich
- Jackie Eng
- Peter Engel
- Paris Evans
- Janssen Evelyn
- Margaret Eyes
- Jeanett Fambro
- Patricia Fanning
- Shawn Finnan
- Kike Fisher-Akinyemi
- Sharon Fleece
- Dionne Fleming
- Arlene Fonaroff
- Tiarra Ford
- Paula Forman
- Joel Frankel
- Linda Frazier
- Michael Fried
- Ruth Frost
- Gordon Fuller
- Bruce Fulton
- Michelle Garra
- Michele Gasdia
- Jay Geis
- Susan Giddings
- Rubard Gillus
- Denise Giuliano
- Cathy Gold
- Jennifer Goldstein
- Neal Goturi
- Keisha Graves
- C Vernon Gray
- Jennifer Gray
- Steven Gray
- Marian Grenway
- Ruth Griffin
- Lakeisha Hagler
- Harry Hairston
- Niranjan Halady
- Karen Hamming
- Stacey Harcum
- Jennifer Harrill-Taylor
- John Harris
- Maureen Harris
- Nylla Harrison
- Gloria Harriston
- Kelly Hatcher
- Donna Hayman
- Duaa Haynes
- Norman Hazzard
- Ann Heavner
- Nicole Hebron
- Althea Henderson
- Robert Herstein
- Robin Hessey
- Susan Hill
- Ty Hines
- Ruth Hoang
- Rhonda Holbrook
- Gail Holm
- Brenda Hood
- Bethany Hooper
- Alex Horn
- Christine Horn
- Christopher Horn
- Sharonda Huffman
- Diana Insula
- Steve Jaczun
- Deeba Jafri
- Ann Jassil-Meenan
- Suzanne Jenkins
- Ruthann Johns
- Kevin Johnson
- Mary Jones
- Ken Karinshak
- Anna Katz
- Ken Katzen
- Kevin Kelehan
- James Kempton
- Armenta Kilpatrick
- Karen Kish
- Kelly Klinefelter
- Jimara Kocik
- Grace Kubofcik
- Judy Kulawiak
- Jonathan Lachance
- Catherine Laferriere
- Margaret Lafon
- Linda Lampert Leslie
- Harbin Lang
- Jason Latendresse
- Vivian Moore Lawyer
- Vanita Leatherwood
- Natalie Ledeboer-Cid
- Craig Lee
- Jan Lee
- Regina Lee
- Gail Leithauser
- Jon Lemich
- Ray Levesque
- Stan Levi
- Gretchen Levine
- Bia Lewis
- Donald Link
- Laurie Liskin
- Abigail Lockhart

- Fran Lopresti
- Levi Lundell
- Diana Lyles
- Stephanie Lyon
- Sherry M. Banks
- Byron Macfarlane
- Kenny Mallick
- Melvyn Marcus
- Stephanie Maric
- David Marker
- Cynthia Marshall
- Claritza Marte-Hermon
- Avon Martin
- Michael Martineau
- Andrew Masters
- Shirley Matlock
- Yolanda Matthews
- Jennifer May
- Liz May
- Camille Mazelev
- Charles McCabe
- Leonardo McClarty
- Bill McCormack Jr
- Lester McCrea
- Julia McCready
- Ellen McDaniel
- Alyssa McGovern
- Orlando McGruder
- John McIntyre
- Quintana McNair
- Cynthia McNeal
- Daniel Medinger
- Alberta Medley
- Donna Meoli
- Margaret Merritt
- Sharon Merriweather
- Vickie Miles
- Wesley Millard
- Barbara C Miller
- Derek Miller
- Muriel Mitchell
- Philip Montag
- Alisa Moore
- Camille Moore
- Grace Morris
- Tina Narr
- Nina Nesteruk
- Alfred Ngolle
- Angela Nichols
- John Nupp
- Margaret Nyorkor
- Krunal Odedra
- Dona Oldfield
- Henry Oldfield
- Betty Oliver
- Bonnie Orrison
- Victoria Owens
- Richard Pardoe
- Kerrie Pariso
- Bethany Pautrat
- Kimahni Peele
- Sharon Perkins
- Michael Phillips
- Diane Phillips Laguerre
- Patrick Piet
- Judith Pittman
- Dorothy Plantz
- Jane Plapinger
- Kellie Racette
- Rebecca Reese
- Paul Revelle
- Wendy Reynolds
- Karuna Rhena
- David Rios
- Nathaniel Ritter
- Susan Rittermann
- Kelli Rives
- Larry Rives
- Monique Robinson
- Leonardo Robledo
- Mary Rodgers
- Melissa Rosenberg
- Cheryl Rowe
- Harry Rowell
- Jean Rowse
- Nicole Savoy
- Bill Salganik
- Laura Salganik
- Sabina Sambat
- Denia Sanders
- Gail Sanders
- Janet Schreiberstein
- Jean Sedlacko
- B Sue Senate
- Francine Sheppard
- Jane Sherman
- Kim Sherman
- Christina Siedlecki
- James Siegel
- Steph Silver
- Betsy Singer
- Brett Sivo
- Tamara Slade
- David Slick
- Elizabeth Slick
- Katherine Slick
- Joan Smith
- Kinaya Smith
- Russell Snyder
- Dana Sohr
- Jennifer Solpietro
- Carol Ann Southard
- Charles Spearman
- Debra Sperling
- Megumi Spikes
- Brian Spirt
- Mary Beth Staley
- Robin Steele
- Andre Stephens
- Myranda Stephens
- Daniel Sterne
- June Stringfellow
- Todd Stubbs
- Bertina Suber-Hanley
- Audrey Suhr
- Collin Sullivan
- Jamilah Sultan.
Newton

- Deseret Suydam
- Patricia Sylvester
- Anthony Tabb
- Carol Tabb
- Zelda Tally
- Carolyn Taylor
- Cathy Teleky
- Stuart Tenhoor
- Gail Thompson
- Krista Threefoot
- Kathryn Tillman
- Heather Tom
- Elaine Trogdon
- Mark Tucker
- Michael Tucker
- Michelle Varipapa
- Maribeth Vogel
- Helen Waite
- Larry Walker
- B J Walworth
- Anne Watson
- Barbara Watson
- Rhonda Watson
- Donna Weaver
- Phil Webster
- Robert Weir
- Dipper Wettstein
- Ethan Wettstein
- Asha White
- Marcia White
- Ruth White
- Susan White
- Jeanne Whittington
- Cindy Williams
- Pamela Williams
- Tonya Williams
- Tracey Williams
- Trent Williams
- Portia Willis
- Joe Willmott
- Frances Willner
- Lisa Wilson
- Melissa Wilson
- Erin Winston
- Shane Wolter
- Minah Woo
- Kathy Woods
- Caroline Zeman
- Carol Zika
- Phyllis Zolotorow

My name is Corinne Happel from Ellicott City, MD. I am against the currently submitted education budget because it does not adequately fund Howard County needs for school buses.

I am a concerned mother of five children ages 8 and under and am personally affected by the cancellations. I'm also speaking out as a board-certified pediatrician.

Over one third of school bus cuts affect elementary school students using estimates given by Transportation Director Brian Nevin.

School bus cancellations for elementary school students can affect parent's ability to work. In Maryland, leaving a child under the age of 8 unattended is considered neglect. Thus, if a young elementary school child needs to walk 1 and a quarter mile to get to school and does not have access to a private vehicle, a caregiver must walk 1 1/4 miles to go to school, 1 1/4 miles to come back home, 1 1/4 miles to go back to school to pick up the child, and finally 1 1/4 miles to bring the child home from school. In total, many elementary school parents/caregivers in the new non-transportation areas would have to walk close to 5 miles if not more just to supervise their child going to and from school.

As we think about equity and the young children who have fallen behind during the pandemic (the children with less were more likely to miss crucial educational milestones), it is concerning that we will expect their caregivers to walk close to five miles roundtrip daily to supervise them going back and forth to the school in the morning and afternoon. These parents and caregivers need time to spend working on skills like reading with their children, reviewing basic math facts, or earning valuable income to pay for surging grocery bills, rent/property tax, and childcare in Howard County. **These children should not be tired, exhausted, cold, or wet when they arrive at school because they did not have access to a private vehicle when it was stormy, wet, or cold.**

Many parents of these same elementary school children are the parents who dealt with keeping one or more of their children home during the pandemic when in person instruction shut down in schools for over a year. With inflation surging, families need to feel even more secure in the basic resources that a community provides like safe transportation to school. Suddenly losing school bus service while families are already struggling to pay for basic needs will be a huge burden.

For families who can afford it, driving kids to school from new further walk zones is not great for Howard County either. Our elementary school's drop off and pick up zones are already flooded with cars that decrease visibility and safety of walkers. An excerpt from an e-mail sent to parents from a local elementary school:

Volume of Traffic in the Parking Lot

+ As of today, we are averaging **120 cars** driving through the lot at arrival, many arriving at or after 8:40 AM.

This is a lot of traffic for staff to manage safely in a fourteen-minute arrival period.

[+ Arrival **begins** at 8:30 AM and should be **concluded** by 8:44 AM for car riders and walkers.

+ If you drive your child to school, **please arrive to school between 8:30 and 8:40 AM.**

+ **If you receive bus service to your address, PLEASE put your child on the assigned bus.**

The children who are losing school bus service are the ones who are further distances away than the children in current walk zones who are choosing to be driven to school. **As this non-service area expands outward, the majority of children who are losing service WILL be the ones who are driven in private vehicles if they can afford it.** As a result, current car lines in congested school parking lots will continue to expand as the visibility of walking school children and their safety decreases.

We need to find a way to fund a reversal of this decision to cancel school buses. Thank you!

In addition to having children walking or being driven in private vehicles from further distances to schools in Howard County, children may have to walk or drive significantly increased distances to their school bus stops. **While previously the maximum allowable distance from home to a bus stop was half a mile, bus stops for elementary school students can now be up to 1.0 mile away, bus stops for middle school students can be 1.5 miles away, and bus stops for high schoolers can be 2.0 miles away.** This has not been advertised to parents. In discussions with many, most do not seem aware. Bus stops and routes are not released until August. Just as parents & caregivers were shocked to see announcements that their school bus was canceled, others will be shocked to see that they too can be highly affected by transportation policy 5200 changes when they see in August that their school bus stop is a mile or more away from their home. Concerns about increased cars on Howard County roads, equity, and safety as they relate to bus cancellations are compounded by the change in bus stop distances from homes.