



## HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

3430 Courthouse Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-2013 Voice/Relay

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December 19, 2023

The Honorable Deb Jung, Chairperson  
Howard County Council  
3430 Courthouse Drive  
Ellicott City, MD 21043

Dear Chairperson Jung,

Pursuant to Section 403 of the Howard County Charter, I am providing my intention to submit a plan for reorganization of the Executive Branch of County Government.

### Charter Requirements

Section 403 of the Howard County Charter requires the County Executive to submit to the County Council: *“A detailed explanation of the reasons for reorganization and an evaluation of the financial impacts. The Executive Reorganization Plan must be submitted to the Council at least 120 days prior to submission of the next budget, and the legislation implementing the Plan must be introduced within 60 days of submission of the Plan to the Council.”*

The proposal to be submitted to the County Council will pertain to the reorganization of the Department of Community Resources and Services (DCRS), County Administration, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), and the establishment of the Office of Agriculture.

### Establish the Office of Opioid Restitution Fund

Howard County began receiving Opioid Restitution funds from the national settlement agreements in late 2022 and will continue to receive funds for approximately the next 15 to 20 years. The County established an Opioid Abatement Fund, which is where the settlement funds currently reside.

We asked the Opioid Collaborative Community Council (OCCC), established by my Executive Order in February 2023, to lead a workgroup to identify an appropriate agency in County government to administer the settlement funds. The OCCC led the workgroup over the summer of 2023, and the workgroup determined that DCRS is the most appropriate County agency to administer the funds given their experience in overseeing similar cross-disciplinary programs, such as work done by the Local Children’s Board (LCB). The workgroup also recommended that the County establish a new volunteer board whose objective is to establish a grant program, which includes putting out applications, scoring proposals, and making recommendations for awards.



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We accepted the workgroup's recommendation and determined that a new office should be established within DCRS to administer the grant funds and staff the work of the board. Using the LCB framework as a model, I plan to recommend, in my FY25 operating budget proposal, the creation of three positions to staff the new office. One position will be an administrator of the new division, one position will be responsible for staffing the board, and one position will be responsible for grants administration.

The Office of Law and our team are currently reviewing the settlement agreements to determine whether and to what extent a portion of the settlement funds can be used to finance the positions. We will use this analysis of the agreements to determine what General Fund amounts, if any, will be needed to support the positions.

### Move Office of Consumer Protection from Department of Community Resources and Services to County Administration

The Office of Consumer Protection (OCP) investigates and conciliates complaints of deceptive or unfair trade practices. We have observed over the past several years that OCP's caseload has grown and become more interrelated with other constituent and enforcement related services that are handled by the Office of Human Rights, the Office of Law, DCRS, the Department of Inspections, Licenses, and Permits, and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

We examined the structure of other consumer protection offices throughout the state to determine if there was precedent and increased efficiency and coordination for establishing a standalone agency. Montgomery County has a standalone office; Baltimore City's consumer protection work functions within its law department; and the State's consumer protection office functions within the Attorney General's Office. In reviewing their objectives, they all recognize the interrelated role of consumer protection cases and the value of creating a clearer organizational connection to legal services.

We believe that elevating the OCP as an office under County Administration will achieve Howard County's objective of streamlining constituent cases, referrals, and enforcement actions. Specific goals we hope to achieve with this shift include centralizing responses and guidance for constituents, elevating the importance of consumer protection as a critical County service, expanding the County's role in formulating policy and programmatic initiatives for consumers, and enhancing consumer and business education, and outreach through partnerships with the Public Information Office, which is also a part of County Administration.



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OCP contains three full-time positions, which would move to the new office. The County would reclass the Administrator position, which would result in a fiscal impact. In addition, the County would consider establishing a new Division of Landlord-Tenant Affairs within the new office, which would result in the creation of three new County positions. All these personnel enhancements would be supported with General Funds. Note that the establishment of a new Division of Landlord-Tenant Affairs would also be necessitated should Council Bill 44-2023, be passed. Also, please note that any administrative, constituent-related and public education and marketing functions currently provided by DCRS would be supported by County Administration.

### Move homelessness services from Department of Community Resources and Services, Office of Community Partnerships to Department of Housing and Community Development

Currently, homelessness and housing services reside in different County agencies. The County's strategy to increase access to permanent housing and homeownership will be enhanced by merging these two service areas into one department and will employ a more coordinated approach to navigate individuals through the entire housing continuum.

Homelessness services, part of the Office of Community Partnerships within DCRS manages the coordinated homelessness response system, which is responsible for providing shelter care and working with individuals to secure a pathway to permanent housing. DHCD manages rental housing programs for low-income households and works with developers and property owners to increase the available supply of housing that is affordable to low-income households. For example, DHCD received and awarded \$32 million in federal and state funds to prevent evictions and keep residents in their homes throughout the pandemic from 2020 – 2023. The agencies that received these funds from DHCD are the same agencies that receive funds from DCRS to assist residents facing eviction or homelessness. Also, DHCD manages the County's homeownership loan programs, which is a critical final stop on the housing spectrum.

A notable challenge of the housing continuum is the ability to transition individuals from shelter into permanent housing and homeownership, to facilitate wealth-building. Merging homelessness services and housing services can address this challenge by 1) streamlining the services that are most essential to help people enter and maintain permanent housing, and 2) allowing for a more comprehensive approach to building up the necessary supply that currently hinders access to permanent housing. This is a concept that was discussed in the Housing Opportunities Master Plan and is illuminated by the similar partnerships that both DCRS and DHCD have with housing-related nonprofits, including Grassroots, Bridges to Housing Stability, Humanim, and Community Action Council.



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There are several benefits to this merger, including:

- Creating a one-stop shop for residents to access housing assistance;
- Accessing new funding streams for homelessness services such as HOME, CDBG, the Community Renewal Fund, and the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund;
- Coordinating funding to nonprofits to reduce duplication and measure their performance across an integrated set of metrics;
- Combining the strengths of our homelessness services team and housing teams so that our residents have a clear pathway;
- Fostering a seamless pathway from homelessness to homeownership and the building generational wealth.

We believe that by taking the actions listed above, outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness will improve. Outcomes pertaining to resource coordination, case management, community advocacy, and realizing the dream of homeownership, among others can be improved by taking this administrative step.

There are six positions within the Office of Community Partnerships that are focused on coordinating homelessness services. The County would transfer these six positions to DHCD resulting in a net fiscal effect. In addition, there may also be a fiscal impact related to reconfiguration of office space and facility improvement to accommodate the relocation of staff. DHCD and DCRS will remain on the same campus at Patuxent Woods so that any other wrap-around DCRS services are still readily and easily available.

### Establish Office of Agriculture

We intend to create an Office of Agriculture (OOA) consistent with the policy directive provided by the County's recently adopted General Plan, HoCo By Design. Specifically, Economic Prosperity Policy 9 (EP-9), Implementing Action 6 reads:

*"Consider consolidating offices, services, and educational resources supporting the agriculture community in a single location to better coordinate marketing and other programs, and support operators when interacting with government agencies. Ideally these functions would be physically located in the west in a location that also hosts the public for programs and activities to learn about and promote agriculture."*

Presently, the County provides a variety of programs and support to the farming community through multiple agencies. This includes agricultural outreach and administrative functions through the Agricultural Coordinator housed in the Office of Community Sustainability (OCS). The Agricultural Coordinator serves as Executive Secretary to the Agricultural Preservation Board, manages the Roving Radish farm-fresh food program (including 10+ contingent employees), and administers the Enhanced Agricultural Grant (EAG) program.



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The Agricultural Coordinator also manages the 'HoCo Fresh' marketing program – promoting local producers, facilitates the HoCo Harvest venison donation program, and is the team lead for the Howard County Fair 'Farm Academy.

A Director of Agricultural Business Development operates out of the HCEDA and primarily provides marketing and ombudsman services on behalf of farm businesses. This role also administers the Agriculture Grant for Innovation and Expansion (AGIE) program.

The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) is home to an Administrator for the Agricultural Land Preservation Program (ALPP). This position primarily oversees the ALPP, including evaluating and crafting new easement acquisitions; as well as enforcement of County-held preservation easement terms.

Other farm-facing functions in the County include the work of the Soil Conservation District and the University of Maryland (UMD) Extension.

An Office of Agriculture will serve to better connect and foster collaboration between all departments and organizations working in the Howard County agricultural sector through a more unified leadership structure and by creating a convenient location for the community to access assistance and programs.

The Office of Agriculture is envisioned as an extension of the Office of County Administration, with four full-time positions. The Agricultural Coordinator position presently housed in the Office of Community Sustainability would be relocated to the new Office of Agriculture as the "Administrator for Agriculture." I plan to suggest, in my FY25 operating budget proposal, the following three new positions to support the Office: an Executive Assistant/Administrative Aide, a Manager – Agricultural Program and a Manager – Roving Radish Program. The Executive Assistant will provide administrative and analytical support to office operations. The Manager – Agricultural Program will develop and administer farm-focused grants and programming. The Manager – Roving Radish Program will oversee the operations of the Roving Radish, including its 10+ contingent staff.

HCEDA's Director of Agricultural Business Development will also share space with the Office of Agriculture but remain an employee of HCEDA.

The Office will require space for four full-time employees (Administrator of Agriculture, Executive Assistant, Manager – Agricultural Program, and Director of Agricultural Business Development) as well as two floating offices that will be made available to DPZ's ALPP Administrator, UMD Extension staff, and Manager of the Roving Radish Program (which is expected to be located at the Old Courthouse Building).



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A conference room for presentations and team meetings will also be necessary.

The opportunities for learning, collaboration, and resource sharing by coming together in a singular location will enhance customer service and program delivery for Howard County's entire agricultural community. The addition of human resources will allow successful models to grow and new activities to launch. For example, this could include agricultural education or a Beginning and New Farmers Program, also called for in HoCo By Design.

We also envision strong partnerships between the Office of Agriculture and Department of Recreation and Parks to develop and administer agricultural learning, agri-recreation and agritourism uses such as community gardens, youth animal husbandry and agricultural festivals and events for residents.

All positions (new and existing) as well as planned programming are envisioned to be funded by the Agricultural Preservation Fund.

### Fiscal Information

The proposal is expected to create approximately nine net new positions: three in the Office of Opioid Restitution (estimated salary without benefits of about \$304,000); three in the Landlord-Tenant Division of the Office of Consumer Protection (estimated salary without benefits of about \$260,000; consistent with fiscal impact statement for Council Bill 44- 2023) and three in the Office of Agriculture (estimated salary without benefits of about \$215,000). One currently existing position within the Office of Consumer Protection may be reclassified (approximate cost of about \$6,000).

The Plan will also shift approximately six positions between agencies or funds. We are currently evaluating which fund the new positions will be paid from as they may not all be paid from the General Fund. For example, we are evaluating whether the three new positions in the Opioid Office may be funded through Opioid Settlement Funds. There may also be some non-personnel operating costs and capital costs related to space reconfiguration. This fiscal information may be subject to change as we work through this plan.

The COVID-19 recovery helped us identify the necessary areas where we must provide a stronger attention to our residents' and community's needs. Every day, we strive to ensure that we are creating a better future not just overall, but for all. There is no better time than right now to address tomorrow's problems through the bold solutions of today and that is what we are accomplishing by establishing these new Offices that create greater efficiency and capacity. Transforming government operations during this pivotal time is necessary to secure the best opportunities for our current and future generations.



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I thank you for your consideration of these important enhancements to our organizational structure. I look forward to working with you and the entire County Council on securing these vital opportunities. Your strong partnership will help us build lasting change to ensure Howard County is the best place to live, work, play, grow, and thrive for all our residents, businesses, and visitors.

Sincerely,

Calvin Ball  
Howard County Executive

cc: Councilmember Liz Walsh  
Councilmember Opel Jones  
Councilmember Christiana Rigby  
Councilmember David Yungmann  
Michelle Harrod, Council Administrator