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Testimony IN SUPPORT OF the Howard County Arts Council's FY16 Proposed Budget
Before the Howard County Council
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My name is Tara Hart and I am a resident of Columbia, a professor of Fine Arts and creative writing at Howard Community College, and Co-Chair of the Board of Directors at the Howard County Poetry and Literature Society, the forty-year-old small but mighty organization known as HoCoPoLitSo. The Howard County Arts Council's Community Arts Development grant program has been essential to HoCoPoLitSo, enabling us to make a direct and positive impact on Howard County citizens through access to the greatest writers alive today. We bring world-class writers, whose distinctions might include Pulitzer Prizes and National Book Awards, in direct contact with people, and this community is full of people hungry to connect with each other in learning new ideas and forms of expression. If you have been told that the arts are a luxury and their impact is vague and unmeasurable, I tell you that we have reams of evidence demonstrating otherwise. Our audiences tell us over and over again how much it means to meet authors in person, or to receive a literary promise and achievement award, or to see an episode of our interview show *The Writing Life*. In order to demonstrate our worthiness for these grants, we work extensively and efficiently in partnership with other organizations and spend a lot of time measuring and documenting the impact of our programs, and if I had time tonight I could show you in numbers, voices, and stories exactly how important it is that we all, whatever age, demographic, or income level, have access to great art presented in deliberate, well-designed, and meaningful ways. As this year's writer in residence, Joseph Ross, recently said of his experience in visiting all of our county high schools, including Homewood and Howard Community College, in classes designated for at risk, regular, honors, or G/T students, "Poetry helps our young people. It provides a safe place for them to explore their feelings: fears, joys, apprehensions. It provides them with a chance to create, to see the fruit of their own imaginations. Perhaps most importantly, it shows them how similar we all are— in our humanity." He quotes Lucille Clifton, the first Writer-in-Residence from Howard County, who said, "Poetry saves lives from the inside out." In a similar vein, writer Anne Lamott says, "Books help us understand who we are.... They show us what community and friendship mean; they show us how to live and die." Ladies and gentlemen, if I'm making this sound like life and death, I am, in a way — I'm asking you as someone who not only works in the arts, but who was so delighted 17 years ago to discover the not-just-economically enriched but culturally rich and enlightened community here, and who stayed here to raise her family, to please continue to support Howard County arts, recognize their immeasurable and priceless impact, and thus sustain the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual life of this great community.

Thank you.