

Budget Amendment- CAC - Oakland Mills - DFRS

Hello, my name is Dwight Mikulis and I'm on the Board of Directors for Community Action Council, or CAC and I'm here this evening to give testimony supporting the funding bill in order for us to have adequate facilities for the Howard County Food Bank.

I'd like to thank the Council for the opportunity this evening and also for your support of CAC over the years and its mission of advocating for the poor in Howard County. In fact, three County Council members were able to attend just last week our Annual Holland Dinner that recognized 50 years of service by the CAC in Howard County. Thank you Dr. Ball, Mr. Weinstein and Mr. Fox.

I would like to quickly acknowledge other supporters of CAC tonight in our audience which including other Directors, staff and community members served by CAC.

My introduction and path to CAC was pretty simple, naturally my wife Diane got me involved.

Diane received information on the One Month's Rent program that CAC has to help in the short term families or individuals that have a temporary set-back. We both thought what a great way to try and break adverse outcomes if someone could just stay in their house or apartment until employment improved.

Jump ahead two months and I had an opportunity to be on the board of CAC which I joined in January of this year. Although we are concentrating this evening on the funding for one important piece of CAC service which is the Howard County Food Bank, CAC really has multiple services to try and lessen the effects of poverty and provide assistance to Howard County families in need.

Now to the critical issue about the need for CAC to increase the ability to provide food for needy individuals and families in Howard County. The funding provided by the County Council would match an already awarded matching grant at the State level, so actually tonight's funding is worth double. The Food Bank would be relocated to a building owned by CAC that would increase our warehouse capacity and the Service Area for customers thereby giving us the ability to better provide for the already 27,000 individuals and more in the future.

Imagine a location where Food Bank customers including children would not have to line up outside the building in all types of weather because of not enough space inside for them to sit.

Imagine where our customers could properly choose food items in an area at least bigger than a 10 x 12 room. Imagine where users could learn about the other CAC services like weatherization and temporary assistance, in privacy, instead of literally sitting in the warehouse with volunteers working nearby.

I spent a day this summer working the warehouse, bagging groceries, filling meat and vegetable freezers carrying food to vehicles and stacking shelves and I came away with real appreciation for the work done by CAC employees and volunteers in a space that is completely inadequate to the current needs of the community not even counting future needs.

We are very fortunate at this time to have state funding along with restored funding through this bill and I strongly encourage the Council to support the CAC and the poor of Howard County.

Thank you.



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Community Action Council Food Bank Proposal Testimony by Bitia Dayhoff
Howard County Delegation
October 19, 2015

Good evening Madam Chair and members of the Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony on a project of high importance. I am Bitia Dayhoff, President of Community Action Council of Howard County. And I am here in support of County Bill 425-2015 which provides funding towards the purchase of a site to house the Howard County Food Bank.

CAC is Howard County's designated anti-poverty organization serving the needs of the low income population. Approximately 5.5% of Howard County population lives in poverty and according to the Maryland Hunger Solutions, more than 22,000 Howard County residents are food insecure.

Our agency understands this information firsthand. We live it every day as we try to support low income families overcome a multitude of struggles. Our mission is to diminish poverty, enable self-sufficiency, and advocate for low income families and individuals. We achieve our mission by providing services that include Head Start, energy assistance, weatherization, and housing assistance services such as eviction prevention.

In addition, CAC operates the Howard County Food Bank and that program is the reason for my testimony this evening. The Food Bank is the largest hunger relief entity in Howard County which has been operated by CAC since its inception in early 1980s. It's a healthy Food Bank where by we provide access to nutritious food products as well as organic fruits and vegetables that are grown at our own garden.

Currently CAC operates its food bank in a 2,900 square foot space off of Rt. 108. We've occupied the space for approximately 10 years. When CAC moved into this location, we were serving approximately 3,600 individuals per year. However, the request for food assistance has drastically increased since 2008. Since then, our

distribution has increased by 480%. In FY 2015, the Food Bank distributed more than 680,000 pounds of food to 27,000 individuals – right in Howard County.

Based on the first quarter of FY 2016, we anticipate this number will continue to grow. It is simply not safe to serve 27,000 individuals from a facility that is designed to serve a couple of thousand.

The lease for this location expires in June 2016 and in anticipation of the termination of the lease, CAC requested and received, under the leadership of Senator Guy Guzzone, state funds to secure a permanent location for the Food Bank. As you know the state funds must be matched 100%. The County Executive Kittleman has included this match in the budget and for that we are grateful.

At the existing location, the space is extremely limited and our clients line up outside for hours at times before it is their turn to be served. Imagine if you were an elderly woman with a walker and had to stand outdoors in the dead of the winter or the heat of the summer, imagine if you were a mom with two little ones in a stroller and you had to wait outside when it's raining, or snowing so that you could feed your family. Our families deserve better. We hope you can help us help them.

Many of you have attended our Thanksgiving Turkey Distribution; many have helped us for the Martin Luther King Day of Service. You have seen firsthand how tight our space is. You have seen firsthand how it takes hundreds of people to set up in order to serve thousands of Howard County residents who would go hungry if not for the efforts of our small nonprofit organization.

CAC, in pursuing ownership of a larger location, will assure long term security for continuation of this much needed service in Howard County. Additionally, CAC will have an opportunity to create a comprehensive service delivery center which not only meets the food needs of families, but provides other services such as energy and housing assistance.

I thank you for your favorable consideration of this important bill.

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