

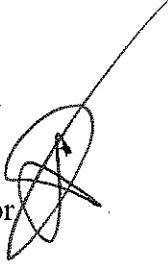


Howard County

Subject: Testimony on Council Bill No. 12-2016, reorganizing the Executive Branch of Government related to the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Department of Citizen Services

To: Dr. Calvin Ball,
Council Chairperson

From: Lonnie R. Robbins,
County Administrator



Date: February 8, 2016

The above-referenced Council Bill reorganizes County Government pursuant to Section 403 of the Howard County Charter. The Bill transfers the housing functions currently performed by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to the Department of Citizen Services. The bill also renames the Department of Citizen Services to be the Department of Community Resources and Services (DCRS) and creates an Office of Housing and Community Partnerships within the, newly renamed, DCRS.

CB12-2016 will enable the County to enhance services, serve underserved constituencies, and improve affordable housing options in the County. Putting all community services for seniors, veterans, children, homeless and other constituent groups under one roof will enable the County to implement the “No Wrong Door” approach to community services. It will also provide for better coordination of services for residents who require help from multiple offices.

The Housing Commission function will become mostly separate from County government. The benefits of a mostly-separate Housing Commission were outlined in the County Executive’s

correspondence dated December 22, 2015 and range from enhanced financing methods to public perception.

The housing functions that remain with the County after the separation of the Housing Commission will be performed by the new Office of Housing and Community Partnerships. Those functions include administration of the following: the County's Rehabilitation Fund, the County's Moderate Income Housing Unit program, the Tenant Retrofit Loan and Grant Program, the Housing Initiatives Loan Program, the Rental Housing Expense Assistance Program, the Rental Housing Development Program, the Homeownership Assistance Program, and the Displacement Assistance Program.

Related to the Housing Commission, the Bill allows the Commission to hire its own counsel for legal representation. Approximately 30 employees of the currently-existing DHCD will become employees of the Commission. These employees will be offered permanent employment with the Commission at the same salaries, benefits, and leave accruals as they currently have. The Commission will adopt a personnel policy and procedure, similar to the Economic Development Authority. The employees who are moving to the Commission are aware of the proposed change and generally support it.

The Bill clarifies the duties of the, newly renamed, DCRS. The Bill adds the provision of support services for veterans as well as updates the list of duties to reflect those duties currently being performed including coordination of the Americans with Disabilities Act, selected emergency management responsibilities, and administering the Coordination of Care for persons experiencing homelessness. The Bill also creates the duties of the Office of Housing and Community Partnerships to reflect its housing function as well as grant administration, administration of the Coordination of Care for homelessness, administering the existing MultiService Center, making other policy recommendations, and participating in community-based organizations.

The Bill also proposes to rename offices and Departments as follows:

Current name	Proposed new name:
Department of Citizen Services	Department of Community Resources and Services
Office on Aging	Office on Aging and Independence
Office of Consumer Affairs	Office of Consumer Protection
Office of Children's Services	Office of Children and Families
Formerly the Department of Housing and Community Development	Office of Housing and Community Partnerships (within the new DCRS)
Boards and Commissions impacted:	
Commission on Aging	Commission on Aging and Independence
Advisory Board on Consumer Affairs	Advisory Board on Consumer Protection

Fiscal Impact

There will be minimal fiscal impact to this proposal. There are eight employees in the currently-existing DHCD who perform the functions that are being transferred to the new Office of Housing and Community Partnerships. The eight staff coming to DCRS are fully funded with revenue transferring from DHCD. There will be an attempt to recreate the structure currently existing within the current HCHD in the new Office of Housing and Community Partnerships. There are 30 employees of the Housing Commission who will become employees of the Commission, not the County. The Housing Commission will have an Executive Secretary who is paid from the Commission's budget. Aside from specific grant requests or loans for specific projects, the Commission will fund and maintain its own budget.

The Bill will also maintain the Housing Commission employees' participation in the County Pension Plan and eligibility for OPEB benefits. There is no fiscal impact to this because these employees are currently eligible and receiving these benefits.

