



Administration's FY 2020 Citizens' Budget Hearing

March 5, 2019

Testimony

Good evening County Executive Ball. As Executive Director of the Association of Community Services and representative of our 154 nonprofit member organizations and community advocates, it is my privilege to convey the priorities we wish to see addressed in the Administration's FY 2020 budget.

Nonprofit Collaborative

Let me begin by taking this opportunity to offer thanks for the ongoing support of the Nonprofit Collaborative. The \$223,000 rent subsidy that will be provided thru the Capital Budget continues to be critical to making the Collaborative a vital resource of coordinated and comprehensive human services. The Collaborative now has nine (9) full-time nonprofit residents; seven (7) agencies that maintain satellite offices; and seven (7) nonprofits renting mailboxes at the NPC. This new space has increased outreach activities by NPC tenant organizations, facilitated the creation of collaborations among them, and improved their operational capacity. The Training Room and small conference rooms are consistently booked by NPC residents. Since NPC began renting meeting space to local nonprofits and government agencies, there have been 47 events.

As importantly, we are seeing the anticipated synergies of having several agencies in one central facility. The navigator program that connects those coming to the NPC with the broad range of services needed to effectively address the problems they are experiencing has guided 220 people to needed services over the past 15 months.

A success story: In early July, Kelly, a 34-year old woman, came to the Housing Commission seeking a housing voucher. The staff there told her there were no vouchers available and referred her to the NPC Navigator who listened to her story: She had always kept up with her bills but after trying to start a small business that failed she fell behind and had received an eviction notice and judgment. The Navigator offered a sympathetic ear, encouragement and a promise to find resources for her. Over the next two weeks, the Navigator followed up several times, giving Kelly leads to help with her employment and housing situations. Fast forward to late September when Kelly returned to the NPC simply to thank our Navigator for the support and advice she offered – and to let her know that she now has steady employment and a place to live.

Now that the County's Department of Community Resources and Services, Department of Housing and Community Development, Community Action Council and Department of Social Services are part of the Human Resources campus the value of the Collaborative's one-stop resource center has been exponentially expanded.

FY 2020 Budget Requests

In preparing this budget request, ACS has tried to balance consideration of County revenue projections and competing priorities with the continuing and substantive unmet human resource needs that the nonprofit sector continues to see and serve. The following are ACS's priority funding requests for the coming year.

NonProfit Sector Infrastructure Support

- Increase Community Service Partnership (CSP) funding by a minimum of two (2) percent (approximately \$140,000). The 2018 data reported in the current *ACS Self-Sufficiency Indicators Report* reflects substantial unmet human services related need in Howard County. As we have in the past, ACS continues to assert that an increase in funding is essential to helping CSP awardees remain competitive with the public and private sectors for well-qualified staff, to hire additional staff to respond to increasing workloads, and/or to absorb rent and other operations inflation-related increases without having to dip into program funding. Even level funding of the CSP program would further exacerbate awardees', and therefore the County's, inability to provide basic services that support the well-being and safety of our communities' most vulnerable residents. We still have 24,000 economically insecure Howard County households that earn less than \$50,000 per year.
- **Begin in FY 2020 institution of multi-year CSP funding grants.** ACS has argued the past few years that with appropriate monitoring and accountability mechanisms, instituting multi-year CSP grants will reduce the current significant annual administrative burden for both nonprofit service providers and government. In addition, multi-year funding will enable nonprofit providers to institute with reliability long-term program planning and execution, and will enable government to monitor more longitudinally the impact of its investment in service delivery through the nonprofit sector. A shift to multi-year grant funding is consistent with guidance you provided to Transition Team subcommittees to identify ways to make government more efficient. The shift would also reflect the strong support for multi-year funding that was voiced during the ACS-hosted County Executive and County Council Candidate Conversation this past October.

Affordable Housing

- **Commit funding to FY2020 development and completion of a Housing Opportunity Master Plan** as called for in the County Council's Economic Opportunities and Prosperity Task Force and affirmed in your Transition Team Report. As you have also heard in each of your listening sessions, the issue of housing that is accessible to low income, senior, disabled and other populations remains high on the list of priorities County residents wish addressed. Our County has invested in master plans for our aging residents, for transportation development, for walking, biking and complete streets. It's now time to invest in a Housing Opportunity Master Plan. It won't be an easy task; but it is a task our community cannot afford to put off any longer.
- **Maintain level funding of \$1.4 million for the current Plan to End Homelessness grants.** We look forward to completion in the next few months of Plan update, which should provide clear priorities for future effective resource levels and allocation. In the absence of a completed update, however, we know there continues to be significant unmet need for

housing, financial assistance and case management as people who are homeless or near homelessness continue to present themselves and use the Coordinated System of Homeless Services.

- **Commit \$85,000 for five (5) additional Housing Stability Subsidy Program (HSSP) vouchers.** The current 21 DCRS administered HSSP subsidies have proven to be highly successful in helping households with very low fixed incomes (and little opportunity due to disability or other factors to increase their incomes) to achieve economic stability. As Housing Choice and other federally-supported vouchers to support these populations are essentially no longer available, locally supported housing assistance such as HSSP must become a more substantive part of the County's Plan to End Homelessness.

Transportation

- **Continue funding for improvements in access to safe and reliable public transportation within the County.** Recent funding to improve bus stop accessibility and safety has been a good start toward helping disabled, senior and low-income populations manage the basic transportation needs associated with living independently and keeping jobs. But there remains a long list of shelter, crosswalk, lighting, curbs, median strip work to be done. ACS, as a member of the Pedestrian and Transit task group, continues to work with Office of Transportation to help ensure that funding for these projects is prioritized and ensures the most efficient and effective use of funds.
- **Continue funding for the Bike Master and Complete Streets Plans** as they are another means of improving the mobility of low income, youth and senior residents, and people with disabilities.

Community Health

- **Fund the Howard County General Hospital (HCGH) operations request of \$625,000 to continue County government's investment in Howard County General Hospital's Population Health infrastructure.** Specifically ACS supports the HCGH request to expand its Emergency Room Behavioral Health Navigators, "Practice Howard" Primary Care, and Care Coordination for High Utilizers programs.

In closing, and while these may or may not be budget related, we do wish to mention two other specific County initiatives that we believe merit attention as you consider FY 2020 priorities. We suggest first that the County identify strategies to facilitate moving forward more quickly than has been projected for the Downtown Columbia development projects—Toby's and the new library, transit center and firehouse—that are to yield affordable housing for very low to moderate income households. The second initiative is identifying a site and opening an in-County detoxification center within the next year.

Thank you, Dr. Ball, for this opportunity to testify. We look forward to discussing with you and your administrative team ACS's FY 2020 budget priorities.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Driessen

Joan Driessen, Executive Director