Good evening County Executive Kittleman. As Executive Director of the Association of Community Services, it is my privilege to offer testimony on behalf of our 115 nonprofit member organizations and community advocates who work diligently on behalf of vulnerable populations in our community.

Nonprofit Center
Let me begin by taking this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support of the Nonprofit Center that is slated to open early next year. Providing funding for start-up expenses this year and the 10-year rent subsidy for the nonprofit tenants have been critical in making this Center a reality. The 10 nonprofits that will be the original tenants are excited about moving in and looking forward to providing more coordinated and comprehensive services to residents of Howard County.

Community Service Partnerships
• **Three percent increase.** In a few days, ACS will release the 8th edition of its annual *Self-Sufficiency Indicators Report*. One of the trends that we have been able to define because of the longitudinal nature of the data is that the large increases in human service need that followed the recession that began in 2008 have leveled off, but the needs remain much higher than pre-recession levels. Community Service Partnership (CSP) Human Service Grants are a critical element of County investment in responding to these needs.

   ACS appreciates that while there have been shifts in which nonprofits are funded and the level at which they are funded to respond to community needs and County priorities, the total CSP investment has remained relatively static over the past three years with a 1% decrease since FY 2015. There is only so much that can be achieved by working smarter with the same level of resources to meet the same or greater levels of need, particularly when the cost of doing business increases year-to-year. As the CSP grants are most often a critical source of grantees operational funding, we would ask that the CSP Human Services Grant awards budget be increased by $300,000. Among other uses, this 3 percent increase would enable grantees opportunity to provide small staff raises, hire additional staff, and/or absorb rent and other operations increases without having to dip into program funding.

• **Multi-year contracts.** To the best of our knowledge, there has been no movement to move beyond annual CSP grant awards to institute multi-year contracts. It was our understanding that the Administration and County Council last year were in agreement that multi-year contracts for nonprofits deemed critical to human service delivery would enable them to move beyond annual operations and program planning to 24 or 36-month funding cycles, in turn resulting in improved long-term planning capabilities and service delivery, and significant reductions in costly administrative burden to both nonprofits and government. We would appreciate the multi-year contract concept being taken off “pause,” now that the Department of Community Resources and Services (DCRS) is moving beyond this past year of major transition.

   Among the challenges we foresee in instituting such a change is determining which nonprofits would be eligible for contracts versus traditional annual CSP grants. We suggest that such decisions
could be made based on one or more of the following: (1) the importance of the service in relation to County priorities; (2) whether the nonprofit is the sole provider of critical services; and/or (3) expenditures above a set amount. In developing a multi-year contract process, we would ask that consideration also be given to including opportunities for adjustments in the second (or beyond) contract year(s), enabling requests for needed new positions, staff increases, new programs etc. not envisioned during the initial contract negotiation.

**Housing**

We know that there is a shortage of some 6,000 rental units affordable to households that make less than 50 percent of Howard County median income. This means that human service and healthcare workers, child care providers, retail and hospitality workers, maintenance and other occupational groups essential to our community's economic infrastructure—and upon whom our resident’s rely—cannot afford to live in the community where they work. Or, if they are living here they are paying an extraordinarily high portion of their income for rent and are therefore most likely to be struggling to meet their families’ basic needs. We also know that we cannot resolve homelessness in our County without affordable housing.

As you develop the FY 2018 budget, ACS encourages you to help ensure that the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and Department of Community Resources and Services (DCRS) have sufficient staffing and programmatic resources so that every tool in the County’s housing toolbox is used to the max. An excellent new opportunity is ensuring use of fee-in-lieu funding for, as stated in the MIHU legislation, “rental housing subsidies, the purchase and rehabilitation of existing properties for sale or rent to low or moderate income households, emergency eviction support, or other housing opportunities.”

Continued funding support for the Redevelopment Loan Program will help families maintain the standard of their homes required by community covenants, thereby avoiding evictions. An increase in funding for the DCRS Housing Stability Subsidy Program (HSSP) would bring immediate relief to households over-burdened by rent (and decrease their dependence on other community supports). Thanks to a new Medicaid ruling that housing is a “social determinant of health,” there is a new tool DCRS can add to the Howard County box that will support housing subsidies as well as payment for the wrap around services that are often necessary to keep low income households in their housing. That waiver needs to be obtained and the resulting program implemented.

Similarly, DHCD should be sufficiently staffed and supported to ensure that no State housing monies—such as CDGB and HOME funding—for which Howard County is eligible are left on the table.

**Transportation**

The continued lack of adequate, reliable transportation is a constant in discussions related to helping low-income households and people with special needs maintain or reach self-sufficiency. Improvements are needed...for parents reliant upon public transportation to drop children at daycare and get to work on time...for people requiring social service support to efficiently get to and among government and nonprofit agencies...for access to health care...for employees working night and early morning shifts...for students seeking to participate in after school activities...for seniors wanting to get around independently within our community.

Let me offer one specific example: There is an ongoing need for expanded or additional routes and "after hours" scheduling to increase mobility for individuals with disabilities who need to access employment and housing. Late pick-ups and arrivals are more the norm than the exception. This creates
issues for individuals with disabilities as they frequently arrive late to work or are waiting beyond close of business for transportation to their next destination.

County Administration is working diligently to ensure that Howard County residents are well served as a regional transportation system evolves. We submit that it is equally important that local routes are available where and when they can best serve low-income and special needs populations. In this next fiscal year can we invest in making sure that all County bus stops are safe, have a concrete pad to stand on, and are accessible for families with children, persons with disabilities and seniors? Can we get our community’s disabled workers to their jobs on time? Can we reduce the waiting times on one or two of the routes that would be most helpful to get people from their County homes to their county jobs here in the community?

In closing, I am pleased to reaffirm ACS’s gratitude for the County’s long-term commitment to the Nonprofit Center. I also appreciate this opportunity to share the issues that ACS has identified as meriting heightened attention and resources in FY 2018: a three-percent increase in the Community Service Partnership Humans Services grant program and consideration of multi-year contracts for nonprofits delivering services critical to the County’s priorities; increases in housing affordable to households making less than $60,000; and improving intra-county bus stops, routes and schedules.

We look forward to discussing with you and your team ACS’s FY 2018 budget priorities. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Driessen
Joan Driessen, Executive Director