Good evening County Executive Kittleman. As Co-chair of the ACS Public Policy Committee it is my privilege to testify in support of additional resources for our County’s Plan to End Homelessness.

There has been considerable progress since the Plan’s inception five years ago. Organizations now collaborate to form the Coordinated System of Homeless Services (CSHS) with a single point of entry. There is a reliable Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) that is providing sound data to measure successes, areas of need, and to inform current and future resource allocation. And, of course, the Leola Davis Resource Center is now a reality with the anticipated housing and providing supportive services for 35 chronically homeless County residents this coming summer and the joint opening of the new Day Resource Center with facilities equal to the important mission it serves. Since 2011 CSHS has helped over 500 families overcome potential evictions or actual homelessness.

There are great successes to celebrate; but today, CSHS still is receiving almost 100 calls each month from individuals and families seeking assistance. This past June 30, 179 families were in case management, but in August there were 279 families awaiting case management. The system is in place, but there still more people entering the system than exiting due to limited capacity. It is evident that additional resource investment is necessary to ensure all our citizens are stably housed.

Generally as a County Executive begins budget discussions, ACS prefers to convey specific ‘asks,’ and we promise they will be forthcoming within the next few weeks. We do not, however, wish to get ahead of the final recommendations of the Department of Community Resources and Services’ (DCRS) strategic initiative to update the Plan, in which ACS and several of its members are participating.

What we are prepared to say, however, is that a 2015 sample of HMIS data for households receiving case management and financial assistance showed that 15% would likely need Permanent Supportive Housing (a housing subsidy and case management), 35% would need a subsidy only and 50% would not need any housing support after receiving CSHS services. It is important to note that these percentages across levels of need are consistent with national statistics. These percentages applied to today’s CSHS current and waitlisted clients, would mean that a combined 150 units of permanent supportive housing and housing subsidies would meet current CSHS needs. 150 units of housing is an attainable goal over the next three to five years if government, nonprofits, including the Housing Commission, developers and other partners work creatively and collaboratively together.

A major FY 2018 step that would result in significant progress, would be doubling the number of scattered site Housing Stability Subsidy Program (HSSP) vouchers from the current 18 to 36. These Plan recommended HSSP vouchers have proven to be the right solution for households with no capacity to increase their very low incomes. The vouchers have also reduced the County’s cost of supporting these households by as much as 40 percent, as a voucher costs about $18,000 compared with $30,000 to maintain a typical household in shelter. In FY 2018, $300,000 in additional HSSP funding would be a clear win-win investment.

The DCRS Plan update has been working within the framework of a three-legged stool that supports the Coordinated System. The legs are affordable housing, housing subsidies and supportive services. We have been told that nationally, and understand from our own local experience, studies show that housing is not sufficient without affordability, hence the need for low cost housing or subsidies. Likewise, supportive services such as flexible financial assistance and case management are of little value if a person or family is not housed. We look forward to working with the Administration to further develop the path, that we believe must include additional resources, to ensuring that any homelessness in our County is a brief and nonrecurring event.

Respectfully submitted,
Grace Morris
Co-chair, ACS Public Policy Committee