The Association of Community Services of Howard County, on behalf of its 125 nonprofit organizations and community advocates, appreciates the opportunity to provide the following comments regarding the FY 2018 Howard County proposed operating and capital budgets.

Nonprofit Center
Let me begin by taking this opportunity to thank the Council for your ongoing support of the Nonprofit Center. Helping, last year, to ensure a ten-year rent subsidy for the nonprofit tenants has been critical in making this Center a reality. The Center has been operational since March 27th and by June 9th we will have 13 tenants. Already we are learning about each other and I am hearing conversations about how organizations can work together to better serve clients. We’re working on a date for a Council tour of the Center before the official June 9th opening.

FY 2018 Budget Requests
At the December 2016 public hearing, ACS asked Administration consideration of the following FY 2018 funding requests:

1. A $200,000 (3 percent) cost of living increase in the Community Service Partnership Human Services grant program to enable grantees the opportunity to provide small staff raises, attract qualified new hires, and/or absorb rent and other operations increases without having to dip into program funding.

2. Institution of multi-year grants for nonprofits delivering services critical to the County’s priorities, which in turn would result in significant reductions in the costly administrative burden to both nonprofits and government.

3. A $300,000 increase in Plan to End Homelessness (PEH) Housing Stability Subsidy Program (HSSP) vouchers to bring immediate relief to 18 or more low-income households that have no ability to increase their incomes and therefore without assistance will remain over-burdened by rent requiring continued reliance on public assistance at a 40% greater County cost.

Note: With this testimony, we have delivered over 900 County resident-signed postcards addressed to Council members supporting increases in PEH funding, including HSSP vouchers. An equal number were presented to the County Executive in conjunction with our December budget testimony.

4. Sufficient funding to ensure the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has optimal staff capacity and operational funding to execute federal grant programs (e.g., CDBG, HOME) and the County’s MIHU generated Fee-in-Lieu program all of which enable low-income affordable housing unit increases.

5. Funding for improvements to intra-county bus stops, routes and schedules in support of the needs of our community’s aging, disabled, behaviorally challenged and low-income populations.
FY 2018 Budget Realities

Regrettably, we find no FY 2018 proposed funding that correlate to our requests.

1. Community Service Partnership Human Services Grants. Of the 29 nonprofits funded through the human services CSP awards, one awardee was new, a previous awardee was shifted from a human service to a Civic CSP, and five agencies split the increase of $159,979, with a substantial part of that increase allotted to staffing the new Leola Dorsey Day Resource Center. Twenty-four agencies received no additional funding.

2. Multi-year CSP Grants/Contracts. Consistent with the past several years of CSP funding, almost $3.9 million (67 percent) of the $5.8 million total CSP proposed budget would be awarded to four agencies. That consistently high level of long-term County investment in those four agencies would seem to make a strong case for shifting—at least as a pilot—those four agencies from annual to multi-year CSP grant awards.

3. Plan to End Homelessness. There are great Plan to End Homelessness successes to celebrate since its inception five years ago. But, today CSHS still is receiving on average 87 calls each month from individuals and families eligible for CSHS support. The system is in place, but there still are more people entering the system than exiting due to limited capacity. This past December, 340 families were in case management, but 293 families were on the case management wait list.

   The budget reflects a $184,000 increase in Plan to End Homelessness funding. Unfortunately, almost half of that increase likely will be used to cover a $77,000 shortfall in federal Fair Market Rate subsidies as the County lost its appeal to use Columbia-based market rates for the Housing Stability Subsidy Program.

4. DHCD. The lack of affordable housing is one of the root causes of the vast majority of our County’s economically unstable residents. There could be no greater impact on reducing homelessness than significantly reducing the affordable housing gap. The good news is that a Deputy Director position is included in the proposed budget. A greater investment, however, is needed to bring to fruition the goals envisioned for the Moderate Income Housing Unit (including Fee-in-Lieu), revitalization of aging neighborhoods, “live near your work” and Settlement Down Payment Loan programs.

   And might we ask, why is the DHCD not included in the Community Services budget, as is Recreation and Parks, Transportation, etc.? To always see Housing hanging by itself at the end of the budget document implies that housing is not a County priority.

5. Transportation. 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. The FY 2018 Capital Budget should include sufficient funding to assure that: all County bus stops have a concrete pad to stand on; are sidewalk accessible for families with children, persons with disabilities and seniors; our community’s disabled workers need get to their jobs on time; and waiting times are reduced on one or two of the routes that would be most helpful to more efficiently get people from their County homes to their jobs here in the community.

   Our nonprofit community understands that the Council is process-limited in how you can impact the proposed County budget. I do, however, want to accentuate our message that this year’s budget once again is a missed opportunity to do more than tread water in resolving the needs of our community’s most economically, physically and emotionally vulnerable. Twenty-four percent (25,956) of Howard County households still earn less than $60,000 or 54 percent of Howard County median income. Of this quarter of our County’s population, about 10,500 have annual incomes of less than $30,000 and 6,000
households have annual incomes of less than $20,000. These numbers have remained fairly consistent over the past several years and, as you heard in May 2 testimony from ACS member nonprofits, demand continues to outpace the availability of services and support.

A significant number of nonprofits benefit from County operating and capital investments and they understand the need for diversified funding to not be solely dependent on County support. The Nonprofit Center, the new 24/7 initiative, bringing focus to housing needs for youth aging out of the foster system and persons leaving the Correctional facility are all positive new County investments. But the total County investment in human services still continues to only hold the line relative to the consistently high level of need. Our County’s safety net has holes. We are too often maintaining families in poverty, rather than lifting them out.

Let me share a personal experience...My new office window looks out on the main entrance door of the Nonprofit Center. Seeing the steady flow of residents seeking assistance is a daily reminder of the extent of the need in our county. The hope is that our service providers can meet these needs. Most perplexing, frustrating and heart-wrenching, is when these needs cannot be met as when I witnessed a mother seated on the curb with her head in her hands and trash bags filled with what I can only assume to be her possessions, her two children looking on.

**Looking Ahead**

On behalf of ACS, I suggest that before we get to FY 2019 budget decision-making, our public and private sectors work collaboratively to find ways to move the following issues higher up the County’s priority list.

- Improving Howard County’s current State “Availability of Low-Income Housing” ranking of 14th.
- Investing sufficiently in the Coordinated System of Homelessness Services and County affordable housing programs and initiatives to attain substantive decreases in the demand for homeless support services.
- Finding affordable housing for the families of the 600 homeless children attending our public schools.
- Ensuring our disabled, behaviorally challenged, aging and low-income residents have safe and timely access to the County’s public transportation system.

Thank you. As always, my ACS colleagues and I are available to respond to questions about ACS positions and we would appreciate the opportunity to engage with Council members to actively work toward resolution of the issues noted above.

Respectfully,

Joan R. Driessen
Executive Director