



Howard County Council Public Hearing: Proposed FY 2020 Operating Budget

May 1, 2019

Testimony

Good evening Council Chair Rigby, Co-Chair Jones and Council members. As President of the Association of Community Services and representative of our 160 nonprofit member organizations and community advocates, it is my privilege to offer comments on the Administration's proposed FY 2020 Operations budget.

FY 2020 Budget Requests

In consideration of the proposed budget, 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 ACS comments reflect our support for and issues with the Administration's proposed FY 2020 Operations Budget.

NonProfit Sector Infrastructure Support

- As President of Heritage Housing, I am pleased to take this opportunity, on behalf of my fellow 15 NonProfit Collaborative tenants, to share our appreciation for the continuing rent subsidy that enables us to serve vulnerable clients efficiently and effectively in an astoundingly collaborative and productive workplace.
- The proposed level funding of the Community Service Partnerships (CSP) is very much appreciated, but falls short of our request for a minimum increase over FY 2019 funding of two (2) percent—about \$140,000. As we have in the past, ACS continues to assert that an increase in funding is essential to helping CSP awardees keep up with inflation. Without at least minimal increases in this critical operational funding, nonprofits cannot 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 - related increases without having to dip into program funding. The proposed level funding of CSP funding will further exacerbate awardees', and therefore the County's, ability to provide basic services that support the well-being and safety of our communities' most vulnerable residents.

Affordable Housing

- The Administration's commitment of funding (through the Department of Housing and Community Development) development of a **Housing Affordability Master Plan** is sincerely appreciated. Our County has invested in master plans for our aging residents, for transportation development and for complete streets. It's now time to invest in housing. It won't be an easy task; but it is a task our community cannot afford to put off any longer. We anticipate that development of the Plan will provide a collaborative and open community process that, once complete, will provide a framework and specific actions to guide future policy, legislative and regulatory decisions to the end goal of increasing access to affordable housing across the County's income, workforce and population spectrums.

- 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. We had therefore hoped, that rather than level \$1.1 million in funding for the Plan to End Homelessness, that there would have been, at minimum, a commitment of an additional **\$85,000 for five (5) additional Housing Stability Subsidy Program (HSSP) vouchers**. The current 16 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.
- The Administration's proposed implementation of a "**Live Where You Work**" rental subsidy program recognizes that locally supported housing assistance must become a more substantive part of County efforts to utilize currently available, but market priced housing, to meet the needs of low-income county residents.

Transportation

- ACS supports the continuing 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, and median strip work to be done. The proposed funding for a **projected 60 bus stop upgrades** is important.
- ACS also supports the County's investment of \$330,000 in the **Human Service Transportation Program**, which has been shifted from the Office of Transportation to DCRS' CSP program. Partnering with organizations such as The Arc of Howard County and Humanim helps ensure efficient, quality client support and as an excellent return on County investment.

Community Health

In the area of community health:

- ACS enthusiastically endorses the proposed County investment of \$750,000 in a long overdue **residential treatment facility** that will have 10 designated beds for Howard County substance abusers.
- In addition, we support the continued commitment to fund the Howard County General Hospital (HCGH) operations, particularly enabling development of **Population Health's community programs**.

On behalf of the ACS Board of Directors and Executive Director Joan Driessen, thank you for this opportunity to highlight our supports of and our concerns about the proposed FY 2020 Operations Budget. As always we are available to respond to Council members' questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Grace Morris

President