



*ACS supports Howard County nonprofits in the achievement of their missions
because strong nonprofits improve the quality of life for all*

FY22 Operating Budget Hearing Testimony May 4, 2021

Good evening, Council members. My name is Joan Driessen. I am the Executive Director of the Association of Community Services and I am speaking tonight on behalf of ACS and our 154 member organizations and community advocates.

I must begin this testimony by extending my **sincere gratitude for the creation of a budget line item for the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund and the \$5 million beginning allocation for it.** According to a recent rental housing survey, we have approximately 450 units available for the 3,000 households that earn \$30,000-\$50,000. The shortage of available housing units leaves nearly 1 in 4 Howard County renters severely rent-burdened (i.e., more than 50% of income is spent on rent). These residents are left with unaffordable options that limit their ability to afford other essential needs in order to stay housed. The Housing Opportunities Trust Fund is a critical step in building Howard County's housing infrastructure, implementing the recommendations of the Housing Opportunities Master Plan, and having long-term solutions to our existing housing challenges that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On behalf of the nonprofit community, thank you for **maintaining even funding for: The Community Service Partnership (CSP) grants so nonprofits can continue responding to the basic needs of our residents and stay afloat, \$320,000 in one-time grant funding to meet COVID-19 needs, prioritizing transit funding within the CSP grants, and level funding for the Plan to End Homelessness.** The County relies on nonprofits to maintain critical services and our nonprofit sector has repeatedly demonstrated how effectively it can leverage County money together with outside grants, donations, and the support of volunteers to address both urgent and long-term needs.

In 2020, you demonstrated additional support for nonprofits through grant allocations made possible by the CARES Act. As The American Rescue Plan Act's (APRA) allocation of approximately \$63.1 million to Howard County is received over time, **ACS requests that a portion of ARPA funding be prioritized to meet the needs of fellow residents served by our nonprofit community, expand the capacity of nonprofits, and to support the long-term sustainability of nonprofits.** The County's ability to continue responding to the pandemic is dependent upon maintaining a strong and effective nonprofit sector.

I encourage you to **ensure that the County budget reflects our commitment to building an equitable present and future.** Our soon-to-be-released Self-Sufficiency Indicators Report [<https://www.acshoco.org/self-sufficiency-indicators/>] tells us that we have a significant way to go to eliminate disparities in Howard County. This latest report not only captures the impact of the COVID-19



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pandemic on financial stability for Howard County residents, but it is also the first time we have been able to demonstrate how different racial and ethnic groups experience disparate impacts across our systems. These disparities are not due to inherent attributes associated with any given group, rather, they are indicators of systemic factors – budgets, laws, government policies, written and unwritten practices, workplace cultures – that have created and sustained the outcomes we see today. Now is the time to change courses and build an operating budget that reflects our values so every resident can truly prosper.

ACS supports the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) equity initiatives and efforts to reimagine safety in our schools. **We urge you to take the opportunity of determining the FY22 operating budget to partner with us in fostering a better educational experience for our current and future students.** You, as Council members, play a critical role in making this possible by funding the HCPSS budget to make these priorities a reality. Specifically, as Dr. Martirano proposes school safety plans that both include and exclude School Resource Officers (SROs), the budget has to enable either plan to be successful. We recognize that SROs are presently funded in the police department's budget, however, we will not be in a position to plan for school safety without SROs if the HCPSS budget does not have the latitude to incorporate alternatives proposed in Dr. Martirano's plans.

As always, ACS is prepared to work with County government to support our residents and nonprofit sector and continue working to realize the shared vision we have for Howard County. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this evening.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Driessen

Executive Director