



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

ACS Testimony to Racial Equity Task Force
Feedback on Proposed Recommendations
May 6, 2021

The Association of Community Services of Howard County (ACS) is a member organization comprised of 154 nonprofit organizations, service providers and community advocates who work diligently to meet the needs of Howard County residents. We are committed to furthering racial equity within our own organization and broader membership and continuing to partner with the County Council to do the same in Howard County.

Although the primary purpose of this testimony is to give feedback on proposed recommendations, **we ask that you extend the comment period for these recommendations and hold another public hearing at least 2-3 weeks from now to allow more residents the opportunity to be part of shaping our future.** One of the recommendations includes a call to give longer comment periods for public feedback and there is an opportunity to start that now with the Racial Equity Task Force. These recommendations were publicly posted less than one week before the hearing and that limits the amount and quality of public input on them.

We concur with most of the recommendations presented by the workgroups for public feedback and are grateful for the recommendations that include partnership with ACS and utilizing the data we share through our Self Sufficiency Indicators Report and HoCo Population Analytics [these can be found under “Resources” on the ACS website: <https://www.acshoco.org/>]. As was noted in many of the recommendations, we cannot emphasize the need for more County data that is disaggregated by race/ethnicity to provide a fuller picture of current challenges and allow us to have metrics for progress as we make changes to advance racial equity.

Our testimony below highlights specific recommendations that we hope will be final recommendations in the RETF report submitted later this year. Please note that the absence of certain recommendations does not necessarily indicate a lack of support for them, rather, we have chosen to emphasize ones closely related to ACS Advocacy Priorities.

Economic and Workforce Development

- Pg. 2, Wages, Recommendations 1-5: We support every effort to get us closer to the point where every resident earns a living wage.
- Pg. 3, Expanding Benefits Access, Recommendation 2: Child care now costs most families approximately 1/3 of their income and is a major cost that exacerbates income disparities. Public private partnerships to increase available, affordable, and *quality* child care to people with lower incomes is essential to families being able to work and for the social, intellectual, and emotional development of children.
- Pg. 4, Hiring, Promotion, and Executive Leadership, Recommendation 2: It is unclear to us how publicly publishing hiring and recruitment practices will advance racial equity in and of itself given that there are many subjective aspects to recruitment and hiring that go beyond written procedures for filling open job positions. Rather, it may be more beneficial for the Council to establish equitable recruitment and hiring practices into legislative policy that everyone must follow and build a publicly available recruitment network to broaden the reach of nonprofits, businesses, etc. in the recruitment and hiring process.



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Education

- Pg. 6, Recruiting, Hiring, Retention and Promotion of People of Color in HCPSS, Recommendation 1: Through the Howard County Equity Collaborative, ACS was a strong supporter of Educational Equity Policy 1080 and encourages the County Council to put forth resolutions for HCPSS to recruit, hire, retain, and promote people of color.
- Pgs. 7-8, Early Childhood Development and Education (0-5), Recommendation 2: Accessible and safe transportation needs to be provided for children who qualify for the Head Start program so nothing stands in the way of participating in a quality pre-K program, much like our public schools provide transportation for our K-12 students.

Land Use and Housing

- Pgs. 9-10, Zoning and Affordable Housing
 - Recommendations 1: With limited space available for growth, our best option to meet the housing needs for the County is to allow for greater population density, particularly west of the Public Water Service Area within proximity to planned, public, or commercial development.
 - Recommendation 2: We request that recommendations be more in sync with the Housing Opportunities Master Plan's MIHU proposals.
 - Recommendation 3: The effect of APFO is to limit true opportunities in all areas of the County. Therefore, affordable housing should be a by-right process in a wider range of zoning areas, particularly in areas with above-average FARMs rates. We should eliminate barriers to the development of affordable housing with faster reviews, fewer restrictions, and lower fees. Finally, alternative educational models need to be considered and capacity limits revisited.
 - Recommendation 4: Given that the County Executive has created a beginning allocation of \$5 million in the budget for the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund, we think this recommendation should be to establish a dedicated revenue stream to maintain and grow the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund.
- Pg. 11, Narrative Change, Recommendation 3: This should be combined with public engagement recommendations in the Legislative Processes sections.

Legislative Processes

- Pg. 13, Legislative Process, Recommendation 1: We strongly support every part of this recommendation because we need to assess and change the status quo in an equitable manner so policies can truly be informed by the people they most directly impact. We request that you add the need to maintain hybrid participation capabilities in the long-term, beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Pg. 14, Soliciting Public Comments, Recommendation 1: Allowing longer periods of public comment, ideally a minimum of 2 weeks in advance of a hearing or deadline for public comment, is important to allow the greatest number of people to read, evaluate, and thoughtfully respond to proposals.

Personal and Public Safety

- Pgs. 17-18, Gender-based Violence, Recommendation 2: Particularly since HopeWorks is an ACS member and highly respected in the County, we support the police department partnering with them to respond to situations of gender-based violence in the most effective manner.



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- Pg. 18, Alternatives to Policing, Recommendations 1-4: Every effort to make mental health, crisis support, and substance use intervention safer and trauma-informed is welcomed in our communities.

Public Health and Environmental Policy

- Pg. 22, Environmental Policy Recommendations, Recommendation 2: The portion of this recommendation that focuses on identifying restorative practices to handle past policies and practices that removed land and/or food sovereignty from communities of color should be included in the *Land Use and Housing* portion of the recommendations. We whole-heartedly agree with recommendations to remove barriers to free play, use of shared green space, etc. that impacts community health opportunities.
- Pg. 23, Environmental Policy Recommendations, Recommendation 8: Maximizing our investments in public transportation should be an ongoing priority to benefit the environment as well as better connect us to one another and work opportunities throughout the whole County.

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide these insights on behalf of our nonprofit sector and the communities we serve. Please do not hesitate to contact ACS for support of racial equity work in Howard County.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Driessen

Joan Driessen
Executive Director