



*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  
March 3, 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. Our members touch on many of the areas addressed by the workgroups of the Racial Equity Task Force (RETF).

We applaud the County Council and this Task Force for exploring the barriers to opportunity through a racial equity lens and preparing to reshape the structures in our county to repair the systems that created and perpetuate inequitable life outcomes based on race and ethnicity. ACS is doing similar work in that we are in an ongoing and ever-growing process of incorporating racial equity into our own organization's work and striving to expand racial equity throughout our entire nonprofit community.

We will highlight the areas where ACS has insights into the RETF's priority issue areas below.

#### Education

Education begins at birth and extends through the lifespan. Quality childcare, public schools and colleges, and libraries are essential components of lifelong learning. The following areas require attention and action:

- Access to high quality and affordable childcare with living wages for childcare workers
- Curricula that accurately reflect the history, gifts, and present realities of every ethnic group – particularly for African American, Asian, Latinx and Native American/Indigenous people in the US
- Minimally, proportionately diverse educators within each school in HCPSS
- Technology, broadband access, and IT support to allow multi-media learning
- Eliminate disparities in disciplinary actions, particularly for students of color and those with disabilities
- Full implementation of HCPSS Educational Equity Policy 1080

#### Land Use and Housing

The ACS Howard County Population Analytics (<https://www.acshoco.org/hoco-population-analytics/>) depict the changing demographics in Howard County by Regional Planning Districts and demonstrate the disproportionate concentrations of housing based on income and race/ethnicity.

- Concentrations of residents and race/ethnicity reflect housing, land use, and zoning policies that segregate communities rather than promote racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity within communities.
- Racial inequity is clearly reflected in housing need within the county. Residents who are Black/African American represent 18.6% of the population and make up 54 % of the eligible residents that call CES. By contrast, residents who are White make up 52% of the population but 18% of the eligible CES households.
- The creation of a Housing Trust Fund and changes in zoning as recommended in the Housing Opportunities Master Plan would help to expand housing opportunities throughout the entire county for people at every income level.
- We limit employment opportunities when affordable housing and public transportation are concentrated and limited.



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### Economic and Workforce Development

The ACS Self-Sufficiency Indicators clearly demonstrate the inequality that exists in Howard County. Our 2020 SSIR will be released this month with data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, but the 2019 report is still available on the ACS website (<https://www.acshoco.org/self-sufficiency-indicators/>).

- On average, Black/African American and Hispanic households make 40% less than their White and Asian counterparts.
- Living wages are needed so people will no longer have to work multiple jobs to support themselves and their families.
- Prospective employers are discouraged from locating in Howard County when there is not adequate affordable housing to meet the needs of their workers.
- Technology, broadband access, and IT support for employees must be in place to accommodate remote work needs during and beyond the pandemic, expand employment opportunities, and offer greater work/life balance.

### Legislative Processes

Our nonprofit community typically engages in the legislative process on behalf of the people we serve expressly because of the barriers to public engagement. Policies need to be informed by the people they serve and we limit public input by keeping the status quo.

- It would be beneficial to maintain a year-round legislative schedule to handle issues/challenges in real-time. At the same time, we simply do not have the capacity to be a consistent participant in monthly legislative processes -and many others face that same challenge as individuals and as nonprofits.
- Broadening the opportunities for people to engage with government by allowing testimony to be delivered remotely will need to be sustained beyond the pandemic so we can hear from more people with lived experiences that pertain to proposed legislation.
- Allowing residents to sign up for specific time slots when delivering testimony will accommodate a broader range of input by honoring the time constraints of those wishing to participate.
- An updated and more user-friendly website for the County Council would make it easier to find information.

Broadly, there is a need for more County data that is disaggregated by race/ethnicity to provide a full picture of current challenges and allow us to track progress as we make changes. We supplied two resources within this testimony, but we need more of that County-wide with easy accessibility for everyone.

We applaud the work that this Task Force is doing and appreciate the opportunity to provide these insights. We look forward to helping to dismantle existing barriers and ensuring that Howard County is a place of opportunity for all.

Respectfully submitted,

*Joan Driessen*

Joan Driessen  
Executive Director