



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

April 13, 2020

Dear President Bill Ferguson and Speaker Adrienne Jones,

As Executive Director of the Association of Community Services (ACS), it is my privilege to represent over 170 nonprofit member organizations and community advocates who work diligently on behalf of vulnerable populations in our community. During this time, ACS is serving a leading voice in Howard County in providing resources for fellow nonprofits and Federal, State, and Local policy and advocacy updates. We are encouraged by the requests from members of the General Assembly, the media, and fellow advocates around the pressing need for COVID-19 information to be disaggregated by race, the Governor's announcement and actions to have that demographic information released last week, and Speaker Jones highlighting this important issue in last week's Joint COVID-19 Response Legislative Workgroup meeting.

I am writing this letter to add the support of ACS in these actions and implore you to go further by requesting that the Task Force:

- press for disaggregated data on COVID-19 to include Hispanic/Latinx Marylanders and any other racial/ethnic category available instead of solely African American, White, Asian, and Other.
- partner with leaders and decision-makers so that the analyses and responses to this information are compassionate, accurate, and equitable.

We care because as ACS has utilized the last year to intentionally learn about and develop racial equity work in Howard County, and we see a vital need in these unprecedented times the information about COVID-19 in Maryland to fully display the racial/ethnic breakdowns of the health data that is already presented. There are populations missing from this data who need to be counted so that our efforts better suit their needs. Many of our members are direct service providers who see the existing inequities and disparities among the clients and their own staff. Now more than ever, nonprofits are crucial to meeting the needs of these times and having data that reflects what we are witnessing is crucial to how we direct services and communications with increasingly stressed resources and are able to keep our own heads above water.

Additionally, we ask you use your influence to ensure that analyses and responses are focused on compassion, understanding, and, most importantly, equitable action because we share the concern that this type of information can be used to perpetuate biases, race-based violence, and misinformation, and we want positive, equitable responses to come from the release of this data. Equitable action is particularly crucial when public health recommendations for everyone to wear a mask, for example, exacerbates the risk of racial profiling when people go out to get essential items. No one should have to make a decision between risking exposure to COVID-19 or getting racially profiled for following public health guidelines. We need responses to COVID-19 to promote public health for everyone in a way that meets the diverse needs of our many communities in Maryland.



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

It is our hope that you will utilize your voices to better serve fellow Marylanders during this time. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have and if ACS can be of any support. For more information about ACS and our COVID-19 efforts, please visit www.acshoco.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Driessen
Executive Director