

**FY25 Howard County Budget
County Executive Public Hearing
March 7, 2024**

Good evening! My name is Lois Mikkila; I am the Executive Director of the Association of Community Services of Howard County. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of ACS and our member organizations. As you well know, we represent a wide range of nonprofits that serve all segments of Howard County's population – children, seniors, those with low-incomes, people with disabilities, immigrants, veterans... anyone who needs help. And at some point, that's all of us.

The services these nonprofits provide range from mentoring to food assistance, housing, legal services, transportation, and more. In short, they provide the essential services our community relies upon to be such a great place to live, work, and play.

Nonprofits stepped up in unprecedented ways during the pandemic to meet the most critical needs in the community, providing food, personal care for seniors and people with disabilities, emergency shelter, and mental health services. Many nonprofit staff served on the front lines, risking their own health and that of their families in this time of crisis to continue providing essential services.

County Government turned to nonprofits to do more – relied on them to do more -- and nonprofits delivered. The nonprofit sector proved its ability to be nimble, as it adapted quickly to meet our community's needs.

Now, nonprofit organizations are struggling more than ever to meet their own needs. Nonprofits have always been challenged to provide critical services with limited budgets. Hiring and keeping staff has always been difficult because of the low pay and (often) a lack of benefits. But things have gotten much worse since the pandemic.

Even as they help others, nonprofit staff are struggling to meet their own and their family's needs. Nonprofit workers are experiencing stress and burnout at higher rates than ever.

Our recent Listening Sessions have pointed out just how stressed our nonprofit organizations are as they face rising costs, even greater difficulty in hiring and retaining staff than before the pandemic and continued high caseloads. It led us to conduct a short survey to assess just how bad things are. Two of the findings that illustrate their struggles:

- 43% reported that they are unable to provide health insurance to their full-time employees.
- Over a third reported that they had staff who qualified for some type of public benefit.

The nonprofits that Howard County relies on both for its safety net for vulnerable residents and quality of life services for all of our community... the nonprofits that stepped up and delivered in a time of crisis... that demonstrated their ability to be nimble and responsive to the needs of this community... These nonprofits need support from County Government, like never before. Dr. Ball, they need you to show your support in the next operating budget, in a way that is significant enough to have a meaningful impact.

In addition to your ongoing support for the new Nonprofit Excelerator, we ask you to include two things in the FY25 operating budget:

- First, an increase of a minimum of 10% in total CSP funding. We are grateful that the County provides as much funding as it does for nonprofit organizations. But the overall increase in the CSP budget must do more than keep up with inflation to address the fact that nonprofits are – and have long been – severely under-resourced. Anything less than a 10% increase would only maintain the status quo of under-investment, making our current level of services ultimately unsustainable. As part of this, we ask that you include our own funding request so we can continue to expand the capacity-building resources we provide to nonprofits.
- Second, we ask that you increase staffing and resources for the Office of Community Partnerships within DCRS to support administration of the CSP grants and to meet the need for additional technical assistance for the nonprofits applying for funding. The CSP grants program has grown significantly over the years, but staffing hasn't kept pace. The result has been slower processing and payments, which directly impacts the ability of the grantees to provide services.

We have appreciated your commitment to our sector over your entire career and sincerely hope that you will continue your support by providing the level of funding we've requested. Thank you for your time this evening.

Lois Mikkila
Executive Director