



**Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Statement on FY 23 Budget Priorities  
April, 2022**

**Wayne Miller, Chair · Robert Koffman, Vice-Chair**

The Commission on Veterans Affairs thanks the County Council for the support you have provided over the past 13 years for funding programs that benefit the quality of life for Veterans and their families. We recognize that the COVID-19 public health emergency is placing difficult and unprecedented pressures on programs and services of the County as well as the rest of the country. We recommend the following:

- 1) **Shelter at Seneca Landing Special Park** - Montgomery Parks has completed construction of a new floating launch for non-motorized boats, improving accessibility and safety for kayakers, canoeists and paddle boarders at Seneca Landing Special Park. It is used daily by the general public but is especially useful for disabled Veterans and others for access to Seneca Creek and the Potomac River. Team River Runner facilitates two important treatment modalities: exercise and nature. We recommend the County Council provide needed funding of an estimated \$100,000 through the Parks CIP for the design and construction of a shelter for the picnic area for all but especially for people who have disabilities and who have temperature regulation issues to be safer and more comfortable while using and enjoying the park.
- 2) **Vouchers for Homeless Veterans and their Families** We continue to be pleased with the County's efforts to end homelessness amongst Veterans and to assist in obtaining permanent housing. The program was highly successful during the Zero:16 campaign. Montgomery County has been the direct recipient of 98 HUD VASH vouchers and an additional 25 ported HUD VASH vouchers from DC and other states. We are in strong support of Bethesda Cares expansion of their outreach to Veterans. We commend the County making a priority of the addition of permanent affordable housing for homeless populations and working to achieve racial and social equity through sound housing policy.
- 3) **Serving Together** - Serving Together was created to coordinate the system of care for Veterans, service members and their families so the entire community can better identify those Veterans and direct them to supports that are in place for them. This organization is a recipient of funding from the County, and we recommend this funding continue. The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) provides funding for Serving Together programming through a Behavioral Health & Crisis Services (BHCS) General Funds/based budget contract. Contractual services were originally funded, in FY11, by Community Grant award, and last year, FY21, Contract Funding switch from Community Grant to DHHS/BHCS Based Budget. \$150,000.00 was originally encumbered for FY22, and Behavioral Health is in the process of adding a 3% Inflationary Adjustment of \$4,500.00 per County Resolution. This increase in funding changed the Contract's funding total from \$150,000.00 to a \$154,500.00 in FY22.
- 4) **Warrior Canine Connection** - Warrior Canine Connection enlists wounded, ill, and injured Warriors in a therapeutic mission of learning to train service dogs for their fellow Veterans. To train a service dog, an otherwise isolated Warrior must necessarily re-enter society, experiencing positive interactions with members of the community. The demand for trained service dogs has created wait lists years long. Many Veterans report that after working at training service dogs they are recovered to the point that they no longer need a service dog of their own. This novel approach and one-of-kind therapy merits WCC for approval of a \$50,000 Community grant and is included as part of the Capital Budget within the cost sharing. We recommend that this funding continue.