

Testimony Submitted to Montgomery County Council
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Lawrence E. Couch, Co-Chair
Justice and Advocacy Council of Montgomery County

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the FY23 Operating Budget. My name is Larry Couch and I co-chair the Justice and Advocacy Council of Montgomery County (J&A), which collaborates with the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington to advocate for the needs of poor and vulnerable people at the County level. Our current priorities include: Affordable Housing; Food Insecurity; Wealth Disparity and Inequality; Immigration; and Mental Health.

In the area of affordable housing, we support efforts to increase and retain housing deemed affordable for those 50% or below the Area Median Income, including funding for: the Montgomery Housing Initiative operating budget; a new Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing Fund project; more rapid re-housing slots; and money to increase the maximum rental assistance subsidies. We urge that even more be done to relieve the heavy burden that housing costs have on the lower income residents of our County.

We support funding for the creation of the Office of Food System Resilience and enhanced grant funding for food assistance programs.

Catholic Social Teaching holds that we are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic or ideological differences. Therefore, the J&A strongly endorses the \$5.5 million programming dollars to support newly arriving migrant and asylum-seeking children and families.

The adequacy of and access to mental health services even before the pandemic was far below what it needed to be, and the pandemic increased this crisis. The J&A supports the budgeted funding for more suicide prevention and mental health crisis services, including expanding mental health support services in the high schools and among fire and rescue personnel. However, we urge the County Council and the County Executive to consider more far-reaching expansion efforts to provide adequate mental health services for all County residents and to eliminate barriers to access of those services.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.