

April 9, 2024

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LAURA LOEB: MONTGOMERY COUNTY FY25 BUDGET TESTIMONY

My name is Laura Loeb. I am a resident of Potomac in District 1.

I am providing this budget testimony as an individual. I am a retired lawyer and currently co-chair the Board of JOIN for Justice, a national Jewish social justice organization. Ensuring that individuals and families have access to safe, stable housing is central to my core Jewish values and is critical to reducing racial inequities. If the County Council provides adequate funding for the initiatives highlighted below, we can make great strides toward significantly reducing homelessness. Indeed, other metropolitan communities that have implemented similar programs have been able to reduce homelessness. Why can't Montgomery County be a leader in this area?

Increase funding urgently needed for eviction prevention and emergency rental assistance

- There are insufficient funds to replace the disappearing federal funding for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). It is a tragedy that the federal funds for this program are being eliminated because these funds really helped to prevent evictions and homelessness.
- The \$22.6 million in the Housing Initiative Fund dedicated to fund the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) will only provide limited funding for a limited demographic of renters – those with a household member over 62 or with disabilities -- to get a one-year deduction on rent, with possible extension. This program does not help renters who continue to experience job loss, illness, or family crises who will need help paying their arrears or risk eviction. Additional money is needed and these restrictions on who the funding may go to must be revised so that more families who need temporary rental assistance are eligible. Charlotte, NC has a model public/private partnership program, entitled [A Way Home Grants](#), that since 2012 has provided rent assistance to over 1,000 parents and children with incomes under 50% AMI and most recently 9 out of 10 families were able to transition to stable housing after this assistance. Such a success story that we can replicate here in Montgomery County.
- Also, I urge the Council to significantly increase the funding for the new Eviction Prevention Team, currently allocated at \$841,966. This team, whose members will come from the staff who distributed ERAP funds, is being reduced from 28 to

8. As currently funded, this Team will have neither the staffing nor the resources to help residents who are facing eviction. I urge the Council to increase funding for staffing *and* to provide dedicated funds to directly assist families at risk of eviction.

Support the proposed funding to implement rent stabilization

- I applaud the Council's recent passage of historic rent stabilization legislation, which will protect thousands of renters from predatory rent increases. Now, the Council should approve the County Executive's proposed funding to create a new Rental Housing Division in DHCA and to add staff to the Office of Landlord Tenant Affairs to ensure the successful implementation of rent stabilization for both landlords and tenants.

Support the proposed funding for 3 peer specialists at Progress Place

- I encourage the County Council to support the proposed funding of three peer specialists at Progress Place for \$207,950. These three peer specialists will help address the growing behavioral health crisis and will increase engagement with unsheltered guests at Progress Place. Peer support specialists are an effective way to engage and help people obtain stable housing.

Support the proposed funding to increase homeless shelter capacity

- The [Point in Time Count](#) shows an increase in homelessness that will likely continue into the next few years. Our County must increase shelter capacity to ensure that everyone in our County has safe shelter. I support the \$2.9 million in the draft FY25 budget to increase shelter capacity.
- Similarly, with the end of Emergency Rental Assistance, more families will be evicted, so funding the motel overflow program is essential to keeping our families safe while they are experiencing homelessness. I support the \$2.6 million in additional funding to continue motel shelters.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony. As one of the most affluent counties in the country, we have an obligation to provide safe, affordable housing to all our residents. The County Council adequately funding the programs outlined above is not only the right course of action, it will save the County money in the long-term through reduced spending on other social service programs. Studies have shown that families having stable housing will lead to enhanced stability in jobs, education, and health. I would welcome an opportunity to talk with you further about how other communities, such as Charlotte, NC, have succeeded in establishing model public/private partnerships to provide stable, safe, and affordable housing to its families.

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Loeb