

Good afternoon County Council President Friedson and the rest of the County Council.

My name is Josephine A. Benjamin and I live in Chevy Chase I am asking you to support funding for special housing vouchers for single parents of children with disabilities who cannot work full time (or at all) due to their children's disabilities and schedules.

I arrived in the United States back in 2009 with my two children, full of hope and dreams to reunite with my husband. After my third child was born in 2010, I worked three jobs, took care of my children and my family, and was taking classes at Montgomery College. Then in 2016 my fourth child was born, and I started working at Johns Hopkins hospital in Baltimore while continuing my studies at Montgomery College.

Between 2018 and 2019, both my 7 year-old daughter and my toddler son were diagnosed with Non Verbal Autism, Depression, ADHD and Severe Anxiety. I looked for all the resources that the school handed to me to help my children. I tried to manage everything from my work, my children's therapist, all the doctors and specialist appointments, school conferences and IEP meetings until I could not make it work any longer. I had to resign from my job. While I was a full-time caregiver to my children, my marriage ended. I tried to get a job that had some flexibility so I could handle my children's schedules, but the only job I got was compensation or PRN, which is very low income. I cannot work full time because I have to pick my children up from school and stay with them after dismissal.

Now looking for a place to live is a real struggle, as no one will approve of any apartment for me and my four children due to my income. I cannot get assistance from the Department of Health and Human Services because I cannot show an acceptance letter from an apartment building. If I cannot find someone to co-sign my apartment application, my children and I will end up homeless.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 28% of single mothers in this country live in poverty. A single mother with multiple children with disabilities is not only in poverty, she is in crisis. A single mother's life can often be defined by a string of crises and a balancing act between unworkable options. Where can one locate a secure, respectable, and reasonably priced home without having to spend so much of the family's income on it that they have no money left over for groceries,

electricity, transportation, medications and kids necessities? A lot of women have no choice but to go back to their abusive partner.

I am asking for your support for special housing vouchers for single parents of disabled children who cannot work full time (or at all) due to their children's disabilities and schedules.

Thank you for your time and support to our communities.