

Good afternoon council members, my name is Tho Tran. Today I am here to propose a sustainable initiative for the county's budget to better serve immigrant communities, who are facing language and cultural barriers. Specifically, I am here today to advocate for the Vietnamese community to rent an old building from the County to use as a community center like the TESS center for Spanish speaking people. I came to America 12 years ago, and I experienced many difficulties finding resources. My struggles inspired me to create a non-profit organization, called Vietnamese American Services. We serve thousands of Vietnamese people in the County with an annual budget of over \$1.5 million dollars and 20 full-time employees. When immigrants like me need help, most of us will go to places where we are familiar with the language and culture. When someone comes to VAS for one service like applying for health insurance, they usually return for assistance applying for food stamps, searching for a job, learning English, they bring their parents to attend our Senior programs and they refer their family members.

Renting or gifting space to Vietnamese American Services would be beneficial to Montgomery County for several reasons: First, Each year over 16,000 Montgomery County Vietnamese residents will receive customized service! Secondly, you will reduce the costs for Vietnamese-speaking staff in customer service departments because we already have bilingual employees, taking care of the programs that the community needs. Finally, if we have a permanent and stable community center, we will generate our own fund-raising drives from private corporations, federal, and state opportunities... and reduce the need to apply for the county grants. Thus, the County will be able to use funds to support other projects, reducing pressure on grant review staff and related departments. Furthermore, the County will be able to collect building rental fees on property that is sitting unused and strengthen its relationship with the Vietnamese community.

I think this is a smart investment for Montgomery County, so please add us to the list of your action plan as soon as possible. Thank you very much for your consideration.