

Greetings Council President and Councilmembers:

I am LaTonia Rich, CEO and co-founder of Tree of Hope Association. Since 2012, Tree of Hope has worked in this community providing support through peer services to individuals in the substance misuse and co-occurring disorders. I'm here to testify on the value of peer support, and the difference we can make in the community with your help. We have experienced exponential growth since opening our recovery center in July of 2022, today I am here to request that you consider us for an increase on our County Council grant to cover additional office space needed.

I am a person with lived experience and although I've always been drawn to service, today I live my life in service to others. Tree of Hope is committed, not only to offer services to those in recovery but also to training those individuals to be employed as peer support workers, walking side by side with individuals seeking recovery from substance use disorders. They help people to create their own recovery plans, and develop their own recovery pathways. Recovery plans and other supports are customized and build on each individual's strengths, needs, and recovery goals.

Our organization has proven to be an asset to Montgomery County, performing peer services as well as Service to End and Prevent Homelessness (SEPH), Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), and potentially preparing to welcome the 24-hour Opioid response team, STEER, to come under our umbrella beginning in July. Also, we are in talks with the Department of Labor to develop an apprenticeship program for returning citizens. Our services are needed and well received, our staff is growing, and we have acquired additional space in our building to accommodate our expanding team.

We are located at 30 Courthouse Square, in the center of Rockville. This location is perfect for us as we are right next to the Metro, the Courthouse and Access to Behavioral Health and central to many recovery houses and programs in the area.

Since our grand opening, July 2022, we have served 3,817 people through Peer Support meetings and support groups. Conducted 1034 Peer group groups across the county. We have trained and supervised 425 people toward Maryland Certified Peer Recovery Specialist certification across the State of Maryland. We have 20 voluntary peers and 4 youth peers who carry a caseload of up to 10 people at any given time. We have made over 350 referrals to treatment and other resources for those we support.

Our work speaks for itself as we are being asked for services within programs and for special projects.

We have the experience, the staff and the passion to spearhead change in our community but we cannot do it alone. We are asking for your help to assist us in continuing to bring a crucial service in this community.

Thank you for your consideration of increasing our base budget an additional \$60,000 over the County recommendation.

My Sincerest Thanks

LaTonia Rich

Executive Director

Tree of Hope Association