

Testimony of Sister Sharlet Ann Wagner, CSC
Montgomery County FY25 Operating Budget Public Hearing
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington

Good afternoon. My name is Sister Sharlet Wagner. I am the Executive Director of the Newcomer Network of Catholic Charities.

I am speaking this morning in support of funding for the Newcomer Initiative. I thank the executive and the Council for their support for newcomers. Montgomery County was among the first to step up when the buses of migrants began arriving from Texas in April, 2022. I was proud of the county's rapid response as it provided temporary housing and case management support. Montgomery County took the lead in convening a biweekly meeting of nonprofits and government. Thanks to strong support from the county and to the work of nonprofits, Montgomery County has avoided the chaos other parts of the country have experienced, and our collaborative work continues to bear fruit.

I want to focus today on case management. These services are critical for this population, and I urge increased funding for case management. With county funding, Catholic Charities is able to hire two case managers dedicated to serving those at the respite center. With additional funding we would be able to do so much more to serve newcomers in the county.

This is a population with particular needs, including for culturally-appropriate services, service providers who speak their native language, and case managers who understand the immigrant experience and immigration legal requirements. We consistently see that a top worry on the minds of newcomers as they arrive is how to comply with all immigration law requirements. Case managers assist them in understanding requirements, getting to their immigration appointments, and connecting with legal help. Case managers help newcomers enroll their children in school, receive medical care, apply for work permits, and seek employment and housing.

Our Catholic Charities case managers see each day the difference these services make. One of our clients recently thanked a case manager and said, "When I talk to you, you listen to me. You don't treat me like I'm a burden." Newcomers to our county are not a burden and it's heartbreaking that some are made to feel that they are. Funding for assistance to newcomers is an investment. This population need not become chronically homeless nor chronically in need. Many arrive at prime working age. The Congressional Budget Office recently revised its 10-year economic forecast to take into account the recent influx of immigrant workers and noted that in the next 10 years GDP will be greater by about \$7 trillion and revenues greater by about \$1 trillion. Newcomers are eager to work and eager to contribute, become full, and they have a great deal to offer.

Mass migration is an act of desperation. Families flee horrible circumstances they had no hand in creating. Our case workers see each day that families that arrive in crisis are stabilized, they are enabled to comply with immigration requirements, they are empowered to find housing and employment. Newcomers who arrived needing assistance become contributing new members of

our communities. I thank the Council for its investment in newcomers and urge the Council to fully support the County Executive's recommended allocation for FY25. Thank you.