



Commission on People with Disabilities

Montgomery County Council FY27 Operating Budget Testimony

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair

April 9, 2026

On behalf of the Commission on People with Disabilities, I am recommending operating budget recommendations to increase equal access, inclusion and community engagement in the county for people with disabilities.

The Commission supports full funding of the Developmental Disability Supplement. The County Executive's current budget includes a 2.5% or \$558,661 increase for the supplement, and the request from the Interagency Coordination Committee on Developmental Disabilities (InterACC/DD) was a 5.85% increase which the Commission supports. If approved, the FY27 DD-Supplement of 5.85% would increase to \$23,652,032 to be distributed between 41 provider agencies. The full request includes an increase for the cost-of-living of 2.44%, and 3.41%, which is critical for program expansion, transitioning youth and waiting list placements which are anticipated to grow. Over the past two fiscal years, as a result of Maryland's fiscal crisis, providers have seen record reductions to DDA revenue resources, which results in making it even more challenging to recruit and retain talented Direct Support Professional (DSP) staff. We recommend that this supplement be used for increased wages for these workers. The minimum wage in Montgomery County is the highest in the state due to the County having a higher minimum wage of \$17.65/hr and talent is often sought for by other employers in the area offering wages higher than nonprofits that provide supports to individuals with disabilities can support.

The Commission respectfully recommends that Montgomery County, Maryland take steps to increase the availability of affordable **and accessible** housing throughout the County. As part of this effort, the Commission encourages the Council to initiate and adopt legislation requiring the incorporation of universal design features in new residential construction, like the approach implemented in Prince George's County, Maryland. Specifically, Prince George's County Council Bill CB-65-2023, later revised under CB-085-2024 and signed into law on December 18, 2024, mandates the inclusion of universal design features in at least 50% of newly constructed single-family and multifamily homes beginning January 1, 2026. CB-65-2023 is a **forward-looking accessibility law** designed to expand housing that supports **aging in place, inclusivity, and long-term usability**, while still allowing flexibility for developers in certain situations. Expanding the availability of this housing is an important step toward meeting the needs of older adults, individuals with disabilities, and the broader community. We respectfully urge the Council to explore legislation that would:

- Require a percentage of new residential construction to include universal design features
- Establish clear, practical guidelines for implementation
- Provide flexibility where site conditions present challenges
- Engage stakeholders, including builders, designers, and accessibility professionals, in the development process.

In addition to pursuing new legislation, the Commission recommends increased promotion and public awareness of existing programs that support accessibility improvements, including the Design for Life Program and the Home Accessibility Rehabilitation Program (HARP). Greater visibility of these programs can help ensure residents are aware of and can access resources that improve safety and livability within their homes.

According to the Montgomery Planning Research and Strategic Projects Division, in Montgomery County, roughly 42% of working-aged adults with a disability are unemployed and there are 6% actively seeking work. These percentages are higher than the county's employment averages. The Commission will be reviewing existing County, state and private sector employment options and making recommendations to the Council and will be asking for any budget support. Employment for people with disabilities should be inclusive and mainstream. Not targeted to one type of disability. Over the years, we have found that small private sector employers hire and retain the highest number of people with disabilities. We will be encouraging Worksource Montgomery and the Division of Rehabilitation Services to assist people with disabilities in training opportunities and applying for jobs.

The Commission recommends that the funds for designated bike lanes be shifted to primarily focus on pedestrian initiatives and increasing the installation of sidewalks in communities that do not have any sidewalks. Currently, people with disabilities have to maneuver in the street among vehicles when no sidewalks exist. The FY27 Recommended Budget states "improved sidewalk connectivity to transportation, commercial and employment areas, and medical facilities throughout the County" and "New funding is focused on accelerating sidewalk construction near schools and future Purple Line stations" and "Provided curb ramps for sidewalks and other accessibility enhancements on County roadways through the ADA compliance program." The Commission applauds these budget focus areas. The Commission has been voicing our concerns over the specific barriers and hazards designated bike lanes pose for people with various disabilities such as low vision and blindness, hearing loss, mobility limitations or intellectual disabilities for years now. Designated bike lanes prohibit us from navigating the community in a manner comparable to our non-disabled peers, which could be considered a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Designated bike lanes are expensive to install, and we ask, does this cost justify their installation with such little observed use? With the plague of bikeways clogging up County roads, we are sending the wrong message to our community because people with disabilities don't feel safe navigating the sidewalks and streets because of the over installed designated bike lanes.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations and for your continued leadership in fostering an inclusive and accessible community. The Commission welcomes the opportunity to provide further input as the County evaluates potential policy initiatives impacting people with disabilities.