



Testimony before the Montgomery County Council on the County's Proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Operating Budget

Jen Schiller, Chief Executive Officer

April 9, 2026

Good afternoon, Councilmembers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the County Executive's proposed FY27 Operating Budget.

For 35 years, Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH) has been a trusted partner to the County as we work together toward a shared goal of making homelessness in Montgomery County rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

Today, MCCH provides more than one-third of the County's Permanent Supportive Housing, which represents 541 households; that's 154 families and 387 individuals living with physical or intellectual disabilities. We serve some of the most vulnerable residents in our community, and they rely on MCCH not only for housing but for the stability and dignity that come with a home.

MCCH ensures these individuals and families can remain safely housed by providing rental assistance, paying for their water and electricity—expenses that rise year after year. In fact just last week, Pepco announced another rate hike, which, if approved, would be a 130% increase since 2016, according to People's Counsel David Lapp. [Source: [The Montgomery Banner](#)]

In addition to our supportive housing programs, MCCH operates nearly half of the County's emergency shelter beds for individuals. We just wrapped up hypothermia season at Nebel Street Emergency Shelter where we were at capacity almost every night serving 270 men in crisis. Last year, more than 820 men came through the shelter. We were encouraged to see the proposed \$1.9 million in Homeless Services to sustain existing county contracts for emergency shelter and outreach.

Last year, we served more than 1,700 people in need across all our programs. Sixty percent of the people we serve are Black—a reflection of the deep racial inequities in employment and housing across the region. These disparities drive our commitment to advancing equity and social justice by providing non-discriminatory support and individualized resources that help each person overcome the systemic barriers they face.

We have two requests for the Council:

First, to continue delivering these essential services without interruption, MCCH respectfully requests an 8% inflationary adjustment. This would allow us to offset rising

rent and utility costs in Montgomery County, an adjustment that simply keeps pace with the cost of providing housing.

In the FY27 recommended budget, the County Executive provides a 2.5% inflationary adjustment for nonprofit contracts across County government. Without an 8% increase, we would be forced to send five households back into homelessness, including one medically vulnerable adult, one Veteran, and three families with children.

We are also deeply concerned about the well-being of our own staff and the workforce stability of safety-net nonprofits. Many of our dedicated employees, 62% of which are Black and most of whom are Montgomery County residents themselves, struggle with rising costs of living. It is alarming to know that some could easily require homeless services if current trends continue. Paying minimum wage is not the same as paying a livable wage in Montgomery County, and the people doing this life-saving work deserve to earn enough to live securely in the community they serve.

With the County's commitment to advancing racial equity and social justice, surely this lens can be focused on an organization that both serves *and* employs a majority Black population?

Our second request is for the Council to support what we call *common-sense funding* that sustains both the services MCCH provides and the workforce that delivers them. We ask the Council to support moving from reimbursement-based contracts to stabilize safety-net nonprofits' operations and prevent potential service disruptions that result from delayed reimbursements.

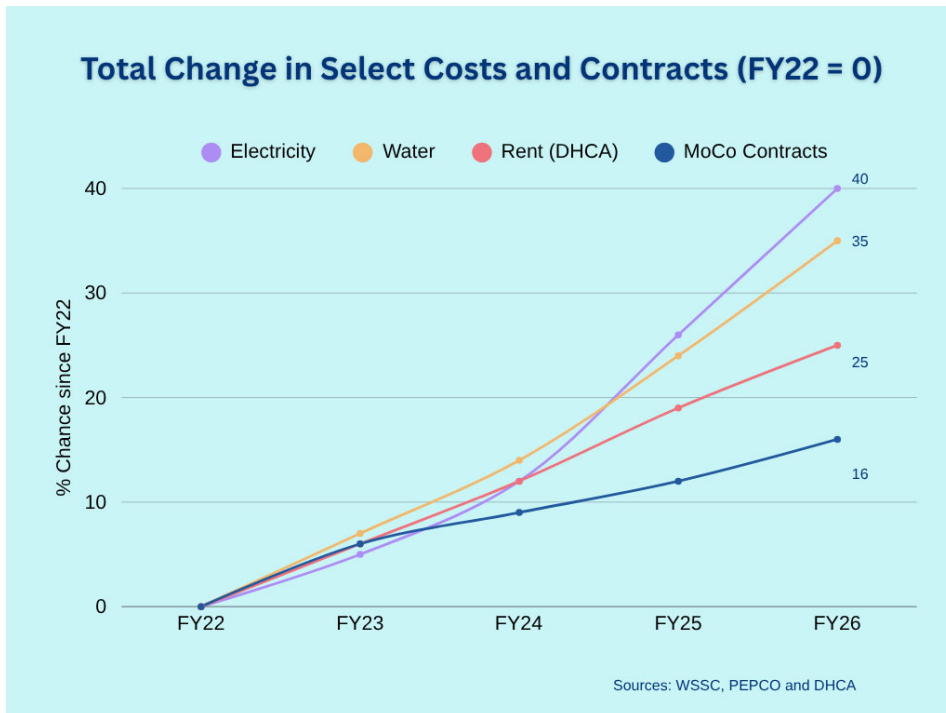
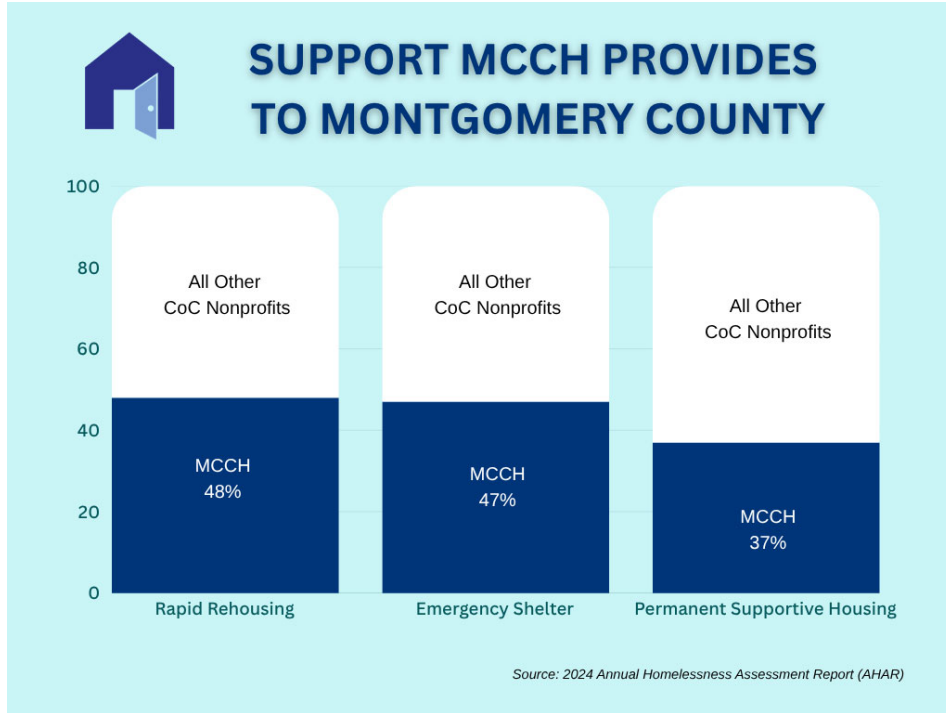
Montgomery County has long been a leader in partnering with nonprofits to meet community needs and depends on us to deliver critical safety-net services on the front lines. To keep that partnership strong, we need payment policies that reflect how this work really operates. Allowing reasonable payments upon invoicing is a practical, equity driven step that will help us maintain quality, expand access, and ensure that when residents need us, we are there, fully staffed, stable, and focused on their success, not on managing a cash-flow gap. **Updating our payment practices is a practical step to ensure that essential services provided by safety-net nonprofits remain strong and sustainable. Other jurisdictions provide grant or contract funding based on nonprofit invoicing, including the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland's Baltimore City and Howard, PG, Calvert, Anne Arundel, St. Mary's, and Wicomico counties.**

Before I close, I'd like to share a brief reminder of what this funding truly means. I brought with me a sign made by one of our clients. It's a recreation of the sign he held while begging for help when he was living in the woods. (You can read more about him in a *Washington Post* article included in this packet.) Thanks to MCCH and County support, David has now lived stably in one of our Permanent Supportive Housing programs for seven years. Please, don't send him, or anyone like him, back outdoors to once again beg for help.

Providing Solutions to Ensure Homelessness in Montgomery County Is Rare, Brief, and Nonrecurring

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Thank you for your time and continued partnership as we work together to end homelessness in Montgomery County. Attached are some graphics on the funding disparity, the *Washington Post* article, and background information on MCCH.



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The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

In Maryland, a blind homeless man gets a second chance

January 6, 2019 **More than 7 years ago**

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David Voith lived in the woods of Montgomery County, Md., and had severe vision problems until an intervention by a nonprofit case manager. (Cheryl Diaz Meyer/for The Washington Post)



By [Tara Bahrapour](#)

HOMELESS AND BLIND

That's what was written on the cardboard sign David Voith would hold as he stood at an embankment along the Hillandale strip mall in Silver Spring, waiting for cars to slow.

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Sometimes, motorists would hand him a little money. Sometimes, they'd look at his eyes and offer medical advice.

They'd say to him, "Cataract surgery, my wife got it, it works."

But to Voith, 58, a tall, rangy man with craggy features, the world of doctors and hospitals was a distant land. He had been homeless nearly 30 years, living for most of it in the nearby woods or in the dank clump of trees in the cloverleaf where the Beltway meets New Hampshire Avenue.



Voith, 58, was homeless for 28 years. (Cheryl Diaz Meyer/for The Washington Post)

One day about four years ago, when he was lying in that spot, a slug fell into his left eye and leaked liquid into it. At first, his eye just felt irritated. Then he began losing vision in it. Then the other eye began to go. Eventually he could see only a gray fog, his eyes shrouded in cataracts likely caused by years of welding and other traumas (and not the slug).

Still, he felt his way each day to his panhandling spot. He had lived in the area since childhood, and

his body knew its pathways and parking lots.

But it's hard to grow old in the wild. The "swamphole," as he called his clump of trees, would flood when it rained, soaking his cushions and ruining his possessions. During big snowstorms, he fashioned an igloo around himself and then lay inside as it melted. Sometimes, church people would come by with food.

One night, a year ago, when the temperature had sunk below freezing, someone else came along. Katie Millford, a case manager at EveryMind, a Montgomery County-based nonprofit mental-wellness organization, was out doing [hypothermia checks](#), looking to offer coats, blankets or shelter to people sleeping in the open.

Under the trees, she spotted the tarp Voith had set up beside his mound of belongings. She yelled to wake him up and shined a flashlight on herself to show who she was.



But he couldn't see her. And he was wary. Who was this voice in the night, asking his name, inquiring whether he needed anything?

It took a few months of her coming around for him to trust her, and even then, he didn't want help.

"He was very much against housing," Millford said. "He didn't think anyone could help him with anything."

For Voith, it was the hope of seeing again that eventually led him to accept permanent shelter.

Voith at the time he was homeless. (Pathways)

That is not atypical, said Christy Respress, executive director of Pathways to Housing, a nonprofit group that helps chronically homeless people with mental-health problems in the District and Maryland move into their own apartments. The organization also helps people get medical care while they are still living on the streets.

"Often the need for health care is an entree into housing," Respress said. Especially for older adults who remember the days when psychiatric care was a requirement to qualify for permanent housing, she said, accepting medical care carries less stigma.

Voith had plenty of medical needs. At 16, he had started doing sheet-metal work with his father, and he is still proud of the ductwork he did at Baltimore-Washington International Marshall Airport and at the courthouses in Rockville. But after damaging a nerve in his left wrist, he had to stop working. He began picking through dumpsters for scrap metal and decided it was easier to live in the woods than to pay rent.

By the time Millford found him, along with his eyes and his disabled hand, he had back problems, hip problems and long-untreated Lyme disease.

In the spring, he got a Medicaid insurance card. In the summer he got a photo ID. Voith was still living on the streets in the fall, when a surgeon at MedStar Washington Hospital Center operated, pro bono, on his left eye.

"He said it was the worst cataracts he'd ever seen," Millford said. The doctor told him not to get his hopes up because the surgery might not work.

But when Voith peeked out from behind the bandage, he found that it had.

“Whee, I could see again!” he said. “All you can do is thank God. I could see again!”

The surgery on his right eye, a month later, was also a success.

“Oh, you can see again,” the motorists said when they drove up.

“Oh, I can see better than the eye doctor,” he told them. “I can see two miles away now: I don’t need glasses except for tiny print. It’s amazing now.”

Once the health care got rolling, Voith began opening up to the idea of permanent housing. Millford referred him to Pathways to Housing, which put him on its waiting list, and in October, he moved into an efficiency unit at Cordell Place, a 32-unit apartment building in downtown Bethesda that is owned and operated by the nonprofit Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless.

Although he said it took him some time to adjust (“I kept going back to the woods for a while”), it has become his permanent home. He still panhandles and dumpster-dives, but now he has a place to keep the treasures he finds — clothing, radios, umbrellas, a bottle of Nivea cream.

“Oh boy, this beats the woods where I was living,” he said, sitting on his twin bed topped with a thick mattress. “It’s a blessing after 28 years of fighting cold.”

He still takes the bus out to his old spot, a block from his old swamphole, to panhandle and sell scrap metal he collects, but he knows that at the end of the day, he can go home. And now that he has housing, he is starting to think about repairing other areas of his life, such as reconnecting with his siblings, mother, and other family he hasn’t been in touch with for years.

He also made a couple more adjustments. First, after his surgery, he took out his sign and drew a line through the word “*BLIND*.” That sign wore out, and he has a new one now. It no longer has the word “*HOMELESS*.”



montgomery county
coalition for the homeless

EMERGENCY SHELTERS

Nebel Street Emergency Shelter — Rockville

MCCH's Nebel Street Emergency Shelter is a facility with 200+ beds that is designed to have multiple services on site. This shelter serves as Montgomery County's main shelter for men, with the goal of setting each of them on the path to more permanent housing.

Specialized team members on-site include Employment Specialists, Youth Specialist, Peer Support Specialists, Harm Reduction, Housing Locator & Public Benefits Specialist

Services provided at the shelter include:

- Case management
- Support with locating housing
- Medical, psychiatric and dental care in private space
- Employment lab with Employment Specialist
- Breakfast, lunch, and dinner in dedicated eating area
- Bathrooms and showers
- Laundry facilities
- Beds in pods of six
- Outdoor space

800+ PEOPLE SERVED EACH YEAR

Safe Haven for Veterans — Silver Spring, Laytonsville

Each year, we serve over 44 Veterans who have a severe and persistent mental illness in three group residences located in Silver Spring and Laytonsville. MCCH cares for both men and women Veterans in our Safe Haven shelters.

Our on-site care team operates from a trauma-informed perspective and creates a safe and secure environment so those we serve can stabilize as we help them move forward towards a more permanent home. Our team helps connect them with essential services and supports that can continue after they exit homelessness.

Veteran Safe Haven homes: Silver Spring — 7 Veterans | Laytonsville — 11 Veterans

44+ VETERANS SERVED EACH YEAR



PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

SHARED SITES

Cordell Place
Downtown Bethesda
Began 2010

- 32 adults — 16 women and 16 men

Seneca Heights
Gaithersburg
Began 2004

- 17 families
- 40 single adults men/women

All our programs benefit from the Consumer Advisory Counsel, an ongoing group made up of MCCH program participants that provide regular guidance on MCCH services, policies and procedures.

This group is also involved in hiring new employees. Two CAC members sit on the MCCH board and on the MCCH Program Committee board.

SCATTERED SITES

Partnership for Permanent Housing (PPH)

Began 2003

- 116 families
- 43 single adults

Hope Housing

Began 2006

- 2 families and 40 single adults
- 5 single adults share a home

Home First

Began 2007

- 30 single adults
- all have significant mental illness

CHIP

Began 2008

- 16 single adults
- high use of hospitals/criminal justice system

VIP

Began 2014

- 15 single adults
- all have significant medical conditions

Keys First

Began 2016

- 3 families and 23 single adults
- experienced chronic homelessness

Operation Homecoming (Zero 2016 campaign)

Began 2015

- 25 Veteran-headed households

Archways

Began 2017 (Inside Not Outside campaign)

- 14 families and 83 single adults
- head of household has a disability

Care provided for all households:
Case Management, Harm Reduction, Peer Support, Nurse, Employment Support, assistance with Client Needs