



Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony for FY27 Operating Budget

April 7, 2026

Good afternoon, Council President Fani- González, Council Vice President Balcombe, and members of the County Council. My name is DaVida Rowley and I am the Chair of the Montgomery County Community Action Board. On behalf of the board, thank you for the opportunity to share our board's priorities for the FY27 budget with you today.

The Community Action Board is the County's federally-designated anti-poverty group. Our Board is the governing body for the Community Action Agency and the County's Head Start program, along with the Head Start Parents Policy Council. We advocate for the needs of economically-disadvantaged residents at all levels. We are also very proud to lead the Community Advocacy Institute, a free advocacy training program for income-eligible residents. You will hear from several CAI participants in the coming days and we hope to see you at the CAI graduation ceremony next month.

We were very pleased to see the strong support for DHHS services and local non-profits in County Executive Elrich's proposed FY27 budget. This support acknowledges the challenges many in our community are facing and the significant positive impact that agencies like the Community Action Agency have.

Tonight we want to share our Board's key priorities for the year ahead. For our first priority, addressing the needs of the immigrant community, I want to thank the Council for your strong support. We hear regularly from staff at the TESS Community Action Center and the Community Action Agency's Navigation Program, along with participants in the Community Advocacy Institute, that many in our community are living in constant fear. They are afraid to walk their

children to school, afraid to go to work, afraid to go about their daily lives – all for fear of detention. Your leadership on the TRUST Act, The Values Act, and other important bills has helped to reduce some of this fear and remind residents that they are welcome here. The Community Action Board stands ready to continue to support the Council on additional bills and in support of funding for immigration legal services, mental health services, and other programs that can support members of the immigrant community who are experiencing unbelievable stress and fear right now.

As the advocacy group for residents with modest incomes, we know that too many in our County are struggling to make ends meet right now. There are numerous reasons for this, including the lack of affordable housing options and the cost of food, healthcare, child care, and utilities. Cuts and restrictions to federally-funded programs are impacting access to existing programs, which only compounds the issue. It is important to note that the cost of living in Montgomery County is so high that even someone working full-time earning a decent income, may still struggle to afford necessities. The Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard for a household with two working adults, one preschooler, and one school-age child is \$122,943, over four times the federal poverty level.¹

Fortunately, there are steps the Council can take to address these challenges in the budget. We encourage the Council to expand funds for emergency rental assistance, emergency energy assistance, and free clinics serving uninsured residents. We support the County Executive's proposal to increase funding for the Working Parents Assistance Program and convert five brokers to merit staff. With cuts to SNAP impacting residents who previously qualified for this support, we ask the Council to support effective food security programs here in the County such as the MC Groceries program and food distribution through our non-profit providers.

Finally, one of the best tools available to help residents move towards the Self-Sufficiency Standard is the Earned Income Tax Credit. We are extremely fortunate to have our own local

¹ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/OCA/CommunityAction/Self-SufficiencyStandard.html>

Working Families Income Supplement, a tool that reflects the County’s commitment to residents with modest household incomes. Research shows that the WFIS, the EITC, the Child Tax Credit, and other tax credits not only help recipients pay down debts and put money into savings, but also have a positive impact on health², family stability³, racial equity⁴, and other areas. We ask the County Council to support full funding for the Working Families Income Supplement so that it can return to a 100% match of the Maryland EITC. In the coming days, you will receive a sign-on letter requesting this increase. Many local and state-level organizations have joined the letter because we know through our direct work with residents that putting money into someone’s pocket to use however they choose is the best way to help that person move towards the Self-Sufficiency Standard. We also note that our agency’s Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, which served 2,397 households, with a free tax impact of \$7.7 million last year, will continue to promote the WFIS to eligible households.

We thank the Council for your ongoing support and leadership during these difficult times. The Community Action Board stands ready to support the Council in your work to address the needs of our neighbors who are struggling the most right now.

² <https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/pol.20120179> and https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/garthwaite/htm/EITC_Health_Final_Draft.pdf

³ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1077559519900922>

⁴ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-earned-income-tax-credits-help-build-opportunity-for-people-of-color-and-women>