



A History of the Montgomery County, Maryland Community Action Agency



Helping People, Changing Lives



1960s



- On August 20, 1964, President Johnson established the Community Action Program through the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 – declaring “unconditional war on poverty.” This Community Action Program established Community Action Agencies (CAAs) throughout the United States to coordinate poverty relief programs. The Community Action approach emphasizes local priorities and maximum feasible participation – a requirement that individuals from the communities served are represented in the decision-making body of the agency. Including individuals who are struggling in the community’s problem-solving process ensures collaboration among the community’s stakeholders in determining the community’s priorities and actions. CAAs administer Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding and, often, Head Start programs. The first Community Action Agencies (CAA) were established in 1965.
- CAAs serve 99 percent of counties in the United States. In Maryland, there are 17 community action agencies, 14 of which are nonprofits, and three public agencies – in the City of Baltimore, in Frederick County, and in Montgomery County.
- Locally, Head Start initiated in 1965, providing an early intervention, pre-kindergarten program for low-income children and their families.
- In 1966, the Montgomery County Council appointed 29 members to serve on the Community Action Committee (CAC). At the time, Montgomery County’s population was ~425,000, and 97 percent Caucasian.
- Information and referral services started, and the CAC engaged in an advocacy campaign on behalf of families/individuals in need, to assure that eligible households received food stamps.
- CAC coordinated a “Quality of Life” seminar that led to the establishment of the Takoma-East Silver Spring (TESS) Center in 1968, directed by Frederick S. Anderson. Staff included four neighborhood workers, three information referral interviewers, a social services aide, a public health nurse, and a manpower aide. TESS was the first DHHS walk-in site with Spanish speaking staff.
- The Transportation Demonstration Program provided low-income residents with access to social services, food stamps and medical care.
- Mobile Medical Care was established in Ken Gar in 1969. Low-income residents received medical services within their own community.
- The Neighborhood Youth Corps, for youth ages 14 - 21, provided summer and out-of-school work experience.
- The Holiday Food Basket Program was initiated to provide food for Thanksgiving and December holidays to low-income families.
- The CAC advocated for, and assisted in, the rehabilitation of the Mt. Zion Day Care Center, one of two area centers serving low-income families.
- The CAC coordinated the use of an emergency shelter in a County-owned house for families who lost their homes and rehabilitated a resident’s home in Beallsville to meet housing standards.



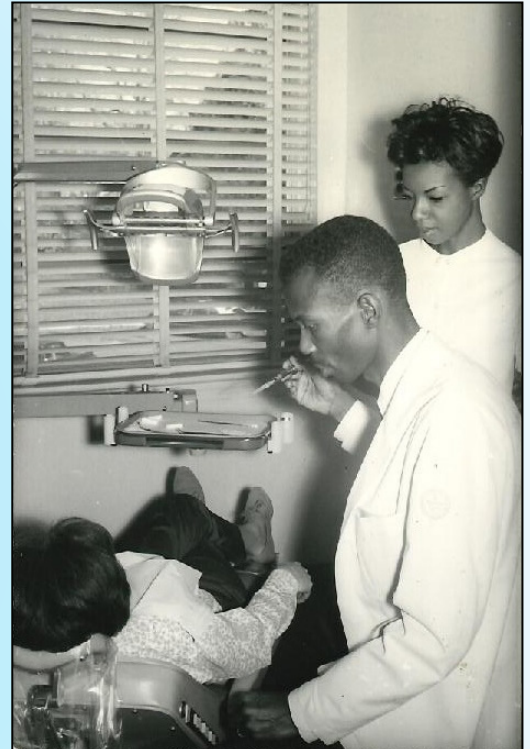
The Community Action Agency reduces poverty and increases self-sufficiency among Montgomery County residents through services, partnerships, and advocacy.



1970s



- The Community Action Committee is formally designated as the “Community Action Agency” (CAA).
- Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) services begin at TESS.
- With the Maryland Bar Association, legal aid clinics began providing free legal advice to low-income individuals in Rockville and Takoma Park.
- Twenty-six low-income housing units were built in Tobytown. This federally subsidized housing project provided sanitary and safe housing to original settlers of Montgomery County.
- Summer jobs and the “Opportunities Industrialization Center” program were initiated.
- Summer meals programs initiated, serving 51,000 free and reduced summer lunches to eligible children at 28 recreation centers and schools.
- The Maryland Energy Assistance Program was initiated to provide assistance with fuel bills to low-income citizens.
- The Scotland Neighborhood Center opened to provide a central place for community activities and recreational programs.
- The Weatherization Program was initiated, installing storm windows, weather stripping, and insulating eligible low-income residents’ homes.
- The Leadership Development Unit conducted workshops and forums to train individuals exhibiting leadership potential in community organization, resource identification, voter education, and parental stress management.
- Community organization programs were initiated, offering technical assistance to tenant/civic associations in low-income communities to redress their problems in Emory Grove, Sandy Spring, Poolesville, Rockville, Ken Gar, Lyttonsville, Mt. Zion, Stewartown, and Good Hope.
- The CAA Job Mobile traveled into neighborhoods in various parts of the County with a year-round job training, recruitment and counseling service.
- CAA played an important role in the Emory Grove Urban Renewal Project.
- The Transportation Demonstration Program grew with County support into the beginning of the Ride-On commuter bus system.
- In 1979, the Community Action Board grew to its peak of thirty-nine members.





1980s



- On behalf of low-income County residents, CAA promoted human service coordination of advocacy, policy development, contract management, program monitoring, and brokering services to assist the underemployed and unemployed.
- Coordinated, monitored, and provided technical assistance to human service contracts, including Head Start, Hire-One Project, Manna Food Center, Inc., Legal Aid Project, Grant Assistance Program, CMMC/Truck Program, Interfaith Clothing Center, Foreign Student Assistance Program, Summer Food Program, C-4 Clothes Closet, Shepherd's Table Soup Kitchen, and Emergency Community Service Homeless Grant (ECSHG)/Stuart B. McKinney Act.
- In 1981, the Economic Opportunity Act, along with its Community Services Administration expired. Congress authorized the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), the federal funding for community action agencies, through the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981, consolidating 77 existing anti-poverty grants into nine. Community services programs were moved to the Office of Community Services, Administration for Children and Families in the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Maryland's Department of Housing and Community Development administers and monitors CSBG funding, and supports technical assistance to its grantees.
- In 1989, local Head Start serves 1,100 children and their families, including County-funded Head Start classes.
- In 1985, an Educational Task Force of the Community Action Board (CAB) examined "problems facing socio-economically disadvantaged students in the school system" and made 14 recommendations for improvement.
- CAA coordinated the County-wide employment and training efforts, including teen summer jobs fairs and an employment & training directory.
- CAA designed various programs including preventing early pregnancy, fatherhood, AIDS, drug & alcohol abuse, and related social health.
- CAA continued to advocate and provide technical assistance to low-income areas, including: Wheaton/Connecticut Avenue Estates, Quince Orchard (Fellowship Lane), and Damascus Gardens.
- CAA offered a series of human services workshops/conferences, including Annual SERV Symposium for volunteers, employment and training workshops, including the Children in Poverty and Women in Poverty Conferences, and workshops to address housing, health, voter education, consumer rights, parenting, sensitivity awareness, and welfare.





1980s



- CAA pioneered activities which benefit the low-income multicultural communities throughout the County.
- The CAB monitored legislation and its effects on low-income workers of Montgomery County, including coordinating the deliberations and report of the County Executive-appointed “Special Committee on Hunger.”
- CAA initiated the County’s emergency food efforts through the coordination of FISH and HELP groups, churches, Manna food boxes, USDA Surplus Food Distribution and the weekly surplus food program.
- The Helping a Neighborhood Develop (HAND) Program is developed by CAA to recruit and train low-income residents to serve as peer counselors in their respective communities, i.e.: Emory Grove, Sandy Spring and Tobytown.
- CAA established Citizens Actively Developing Resourceful Empowerment (CADRE) to train grassroots individuals exhibiting leadership potential and ability to advocate for programs and services in their communities, such as substance abuse prevention activities and resource identification.
- The CAA researched and published the first Minimum Standard of Need Report, detailing the actual dollars needed to sustain a family of four in Montgomery County.



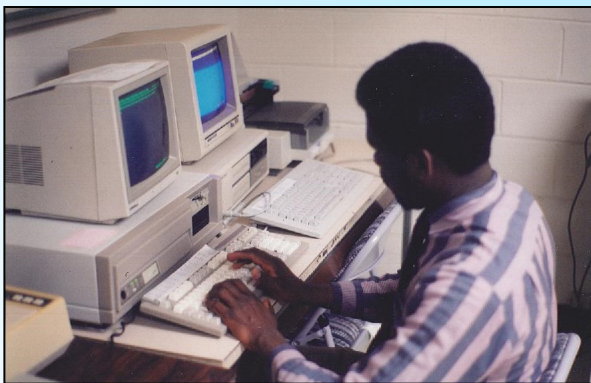
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1990s



- With the 1989 - 1993 recession, the low-income population increased and became more diverse. Middle class and working poor families lost earning power. Low-income minority and multicultural persons, mostly Spanish-speaking, moved into Montgomery County at the highest rate in Maryland, and often lacked work, education, and language skills to thrive in an increasingly competitive & technical society.
- CAA initiated quarterly poverty statistics reports to the County Government and residents in 1990. County cases for AFDC, food stamps and Medicaid increased 24 percent from 1989 - 1993, then leveled in 1994. Children eligible for FARMS increased from 13,000 in 1989 to 25,000 in 1994.
- In 1991 and 1994, CAA produced the first Minimum Standard of Need (MSON) reports for families of three and four people. With the Commission on Aging, CAA produced a MSON for the Elderly (MSON-E) for a two-person household.
- In 1991, federal funds were awarded to CAA for the MCPS and Montgomery County School Health, to implement the Head Start Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project to assist a group of children of low-income families in the early grades of elementary school. The project was one of 32 in the nation.
- In cooperation with the Montgomery County Public Schools, the Head Start Parent Policy Council and the Head Start staff conducted a "Head Start Needs Assessment." As a result, the federal Head Start Office increased Head Start slots to 1,469 children and their families in 1995, including County-funded classes. The children were placed in 99 classes in 60 locations throughout the County.
- CAA received a State grant to provide all day, all year Head Start for an additional six weeks to 75 children with critical needs.
- The Community Action staff and CAB continued to support CADRE and HAND projects for low-income residents' advocacy training and work skills development. In 1995, CADRE members focused on community empowerment and voter education, and met with State legislators to voice concerns about Welfare Reform.



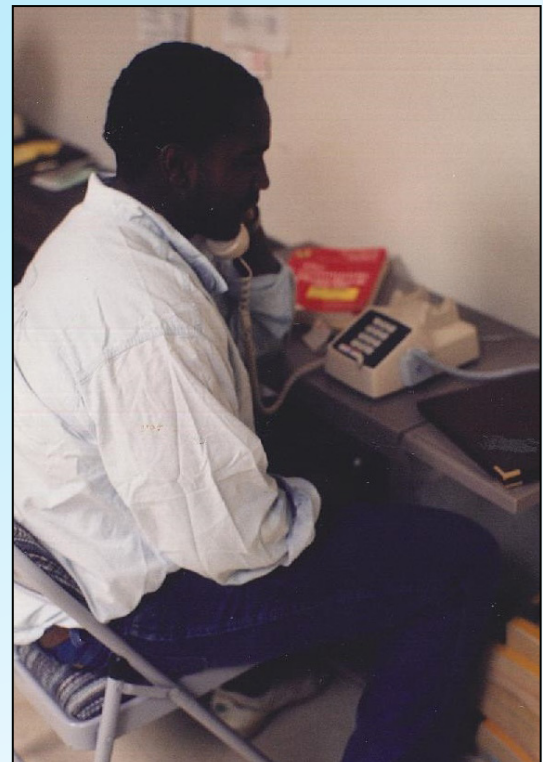
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1990s



- As CAA staff decreased, volunteers and partnerships with other private and public agencies enabled services to a growing and increasingly diverse low-income population. CAA contracts for services included partnerships with: Manna Food Center, Inc.; Shepherd's Table, Bethesda Cares and other emergency shelters for people experiencing homelessness; the C-4 Clothes Closet and Interfaith Works Clothing Center; and grant assistance by Community Ministries and HOC furniture. The Holiday Basket Program served 1,000 residents.
- The Kensington Career Center (KCC), established by CAA, assisted people experiencing homelessness in obtaining jobs and gaining skills, with the aim of leaving shelters for more permanent housing.
- The East Silver Spring Employment and Training Center (ESSE&TC) was established by CAA to help day labor minority/multicultural residents obtain work and education to become self-sufficient.
- Nationally in 1994, community action agencies began utilizing a Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) framework to improve services and to communicate outcomes.
- In 1996, the CAA office relocated from 401 Fleet Street, Rockville, to 8210 Colonial Lane - Progress Place, Silver Spring.
- In 1996, the CAB organized a Dialogue on Poverty, led by Karla Hoffman, Chair, and Marcia Plater, Executive Director, with 106 participants.
- In 1997, the Rosemary Hills Foreign Student Center was established to register young adult foreign students for classes/workshops on adjusting to American culture. 2,546 individuals were served.
- In 1998, Welfare Reform/Regionalization created the HHS Welfare Reform Initiative and Community Vision.
- In 1998, the CAB supported increasing the eligibility cap for Working Parents Assistance to \$35,000 (first adjustment since establishing in 1986).
- In 1999, CAB testified about Maryland's Extended Elementary Education program (EEEP), under Head Start, and supported the Collaboration Council's Children's Agenda.
- In 1999, MCCA staff initiated on-site services at Quebec Terrace.



- In 2000, Head Start included County-funded classes (also called “Head Start”) for 862 children ages 3 and 4 and their families. Head Start partners included Silver Spring Presbyterian Children’s Center, the YMCA, Maryland Child Services and Montgomery College, for a total of 1,693 children served. The County program pre-dated the current State-funded pre-kindergarten program. Dozens of child-care partners provided before & after care, and summer services.
- In 2003, the CAB led a Head Start/Early Childhood Town Hall when the number of federally-funded Head Start students was reduced from 831 to 648 - the current enrollment level. The CAA also held a Housing Town Hall meeting.
- From 2001 – 2009, the CAA East County office on Briggs Chaney Road delivered emergency services, information and referral, immunization clinic, and assistance with child care subsidy and Rental Assistance applications. On-site partners included the People’s Community Wellness Center, Mobile Medical Care, and Manna Food Center, and other HHS agencies. CAA’s Community Services Aides partnered with Montgomery Housing Partnership by providing outreach at East County’s Good Hope Homes Community Center. Services discontinued in 2009 with budget cuts to staffing.
- In 2002, CAB member Ann Byrne was volunteer of the year. Founder of the Parent Connection and its Washington Parent newspaper, and the Board’s representative from the Crossway Community, Ms. Byrne was co-chair of the Montgomery County Early Childhood Initiative to improve school readiness.
- In 2003, CAA replaced the MSON through a partnership with Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), and later the University of Washington (UW), to obtain data to internally update Montgomery Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS), used by CAB, advocates and policymakers to advance initiatives on behalf of low-income people. The SSS continues to be regularly updated in partnership with UW.
- In 2005, the “Walk a Mile” project paired policymakers and low-income families for a month of “walking in each others’ shoes.” Participants included Congressman Chris Van Hollen; State Senator Leonard Teitelbaum; Delegates Jean Cryor, Henry Heller, Sheila Hixson, Anne Kaiser, Adrienne Mandel, and Karen Montgomery; HHS Director Carolyn Colvin; and MCPS board member Dr. Charles Haughey. Walk a Mile was also conducted in 2008, with State Senator Richard Madaleno and staff of Representative Van Hollen.
- CAA partnered with Georgetown University Medical Center to create the Community-Based Services for Low-Income Trauma Survivors. The focus is placed on developing models of detection and care for trauma related mental health needs of low-income women.



- CAA staff assisted with training the residents of Connecticut Avenue Estates to resolve conflicts between long-standing residents and the newly arrived immigrants by partnering with the Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County.
- In 2005, CAB presented “The Face of Poverty in Montgomery County, MD: Bringing Poverty in View - Faces & Facts” to the Communities Ministries’ Annual Caregivers Conference.
- In 2005, a full-time CAA staff member provided resource and referral counseling to Hurricane Katrina survivors.
- In 2007, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program expanded to a second site, serving a total of 676 residents at TESS and Progress Place, and yielding a \$1M total to customers through federal and state refunds, including the EITC. In 2009 and 2010, the Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg joined as partners. In collaboration with the University of Maryland School of Social Work and Maryland CASH, student Community Fellows were added to the VITA program to enhance capacity.
- In 2008, the CAB and CAA participated in Interfaith Works “Conversations on Poverty” and the “Call to Action” response with DHHS. CAA co-led the data group, and produced a comprehensive 2009 “Faces of Poverty” report. The work led to the development in 2009 of three Neighborhood Services Centers, later known as Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NON) sites in high-need zip codes, including Gaithersburg at Family Services, Inc., in Wheaton at Catholic Charities, and at the TESS Center, with Mary’s Center for Maternal and Child Care.
- In 2008, the CAA hosted Understanding the Roots of Poverty, with author Fr. Clarence Williams discussing “Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good.”
- The Great Recession of 2007 – 2009 led Montgomery County into 2010 with its highest poverty rate in two decades, at 7.5 percent.



- The CAA office relocated from Progress Place to the Mid-County Regional Services Center in Wheaton in 2010, and to 1401 Rockville Pike in 2016.
- In 2010, the Faces of Poverty report expanded to become a key tool for the CAB and other advocates to advance understanding of the challenges facing low-income families. It is updated annually.
- In 2009 – 2010, ARRA funding expanded CAA’s VITA program to four sites, including the Cities of Gaithersburg and Rockville, and piloted a financial education program serving 339 residents through 69 free financial education classes (English/Spanish) and consultations to 106 customers with intensive needs.
- CSBG ARRA funding also supported HHS partnership with Montgomery College to train 63 TANF participants in the Pharmacy Tech and Physical Therapy Aide programs to address income needs for families experiencing homelessness.
- In 2009 – 2011, CAA placed University of Maryland School of Social Work graduate student interns at VITA sites at Progress Place and TESS. In 2011, the Maryland Community Fellows program partnered with the Maryland CASH Campaign with State CSBG support. In 2019, CAFE Montgomery continue the fellowship with United Way.
- In 2011, CAA, public and nonprofit partners, and volunteers created the Coalition for the Advancement of Financial Education (CAFE) Montgomery MD, supporting its annual financial education symposium for providers.
- In 2012, enabling legislation reduces the Community Action Board to no more than 24 members, nor less than 15 members.
- In 2012 and 2016, the Maryland Community Action Partnership, including the CAA, and the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development funded the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Maryland by the Center for Women’s Welfare at the University of Washington.
- In 2012 – 2014, CAA partnered with Maryland Hunger Solutions and HHS to host an intern to pilot SNAP outreach at VITA sites, and updated tools to assist community members in accessing food.
- When the County’s Working Families Income Supplement was reduced in 2010, the CAB advocated for a full restoration of this local tax credit. Bill 8-13 passed in November 2013, restoring the County’s 100 percent match of the state’s EITC.
- In 2014, TESS partnered with MCPS to become a summer meals site, serving over 1,000 free lunches to children. The program has continued in subsequent summers.
- In 2015, the CAB hosted Poverty Forums in Gaithersburg and East County, along with three sessions at the TESS Community Action Center, gathering input and recommendations from lower-income County residents.
- After decades of collaboration with the Board of Elections, TESS began participating in the annual National Voter Registration Day in 2015, providing on-site voter registration for residents. The partnership continues today.
- From 2015 - 2018, CAA partnered with Volunteer Maryland to engage an AmeriCorps member in VITA and SNAP outreach, and in 2016, received the Governor’s Volunteer Service Award.
- On August 10, 2016, a devastating explosion and fire at Flower Branch Apartments led TESS staff to join the HHS emergency response team and partners including the American Red Cross, the Department of Recreation, Adventist Community Services, Montgomery Housing Partnership (MHP), and CASA de Maryland to deliver and coordinate services. TESS was a key site for residents’ case management location for housing and mental health services. CAA worked with MHP to engage VITA, CAFE Montgomery and the Comptroller of Maryland to provide financial and tax information to victims, organizing two community events. Victim assistance continues today.



- Following a 2016 EITC Roundtable, CAA launched the county’s CASHBACK website and expanded EITC and free tax awareness, including Ride-On ads and electronic signage and earning a National Association of Counties (NACo) award. In 2018, with United Way funding, information for all eight of the county’s free tax partners was produced in five languages for the first time.
- In 2016, Bill19-16 passed to require a countywide Food Security Plan to reduce hunger. CAA and the CAB collaborate with the Montgomery County Food Council and play major roles in advocating for, supporting and promoting Food and Nutrition programs such as SNAP, TEFAP, SFMNP, Summer Meals and School Breakfast.
- In 2016, CAA Head Start served 648 children in families that speak 60 languages; the VITA program filed tax returns for 2,204 county households through programs at five community locations, for \$5M in total refunds and credits; there were 7,250 client visits to TESS; and staff monitored \$3.8 million in contracts with 27 nonprofit partners. HHS sites, including TESS, adopt electronic Integrated Case Management (eICM).
- In 2016, the CAB piloted the Leadership Development Institute, earning a NACo award. By 2019, there are over 50 Community Advocacy Institute (CAI) program alumni. CAI – renamed in 2017 – is recognized as a best practice for engaging low-income residents by the Community Action Partnership and CAPLAW.
- In 2016, CAA and the CAB joined Montgomery Moving Forward, a Nonprofit Montgomery collective impact model, including Head Start parents’ participation in addressing early childhood and child care needs. In 2019, Head Start, CAA, and CAB leaders joined support for the County’s Early Care and Education Initiative.
- In 2017, CAA begins its partnership with WorkSource Montgomery; in-kind services include financial education & expanding VITA services to Germantown and East County.
- In 2017, the CAB advocated for expansion of part-day Head Start/PreK classes to full-day programs. Ten Head Start classes were expanded to full-day programs in 2017-2018, and an additional five Pre-K classes became full-day programs in the 2018 - 2019 school year.
- In 2018, CAA released the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Montgomery County, MD, with data from the University of Washington and contributions from CountyStat analysts to generate the NACo-winning online Interactive Self-Sufficiency Standard.
- In 2017 - 2018, CAA celebrated its 50th anniversary of services to Montgomery County’s low-income families. Today’s Montgomery County has over 1.1 million residents, with a “minority majority” population. Maryland’s 17 community action agencies deliver services to 221,453 low-income individuals, leveraging \$160,894,735 of non-CSBG funding.
- The 2019 CAA Community Needs Assessment details information gathered from public & nonprofit resources and identifies key CAA and CAB priorities and recommendations.
- In 2019, CAA received funding from a State grant to the Maryland Community Action Partnership to develop a “2-Gen” pilot program at TESS, with state leaders & national experts. At TESS, a Volunteer Maryland AmeriCorps member supports volunteer initiatives to strengthen Long Branch families, including Groceries to Go for seniors, with Capital Area Food Bank, and the Standby Guardianship Project.
- In FY20, CAA partners with 32 nonprofit partners, monitoring 54 contracts worth \$4.18 million from HHS, the County Executive, and County Council.



The Community Action Promise

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

With appreciation to the hundreds of Community Action Board volunteers, partners, and staff for their dedicated service.

Per the County Code, Enabling Legislation: Article IV. Community Action Agency, Sec. 27-40. Statement of policy: "It is the public policy of the County to promote programs to create an awareness of poverty; promote coordination among private and public agencies concerned with poverty; promote better use of existing resources and develop leadership among poor citizens to solve community problems; and develop broad community strategies to attach the basic causes of poverty." (1976 L.M.C., ch. 1 §1; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 28, §10; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 30 §15, 1997 L.M.C., ch. 25 §1.)



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MONTGOMERY COUNTY TAKOMA-EAST SILVER SPRING (TESS)

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