

**TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARC ELRICH ON SUPPLEMENTAL  
APPROPRIATION OF \$13,647,000 FOR EMERGENCY HOMELESS SHELTER**

APRIL 6, 2021

Council President and Councilmembers, this testimony is on the behalf of County Executive Elrich and is in support of the Supplemental Appropriation of \$13,647,000 for the Emergency Homeless Shelter. This appropriation is an important step in restoring the dignity of our most vulnerable residents and in ending the acceptance of the policy that it's okay to live outside for two thirds of the year. Our plan is to use these funds to acquire and renovate a facility to provide more robust services for individuals who may find themselves without a home.

The County Executive recommends this supplemental appropriation based on input from the Homeless Crisis Response Recovery Group, the Interagency Commission on Homelessness and DHHS Services to End and Prevent Homelessness. This funding enables DHHS to develop a program for combating homelessness while also complying with public health guidance around social distancing and increasing capacity to help better handle a predicted 45% rise in homelessness over pre-pandemic levels.

Homelessness has always been a crisis; recently COVID-19 has served to only exacerbate the existing health concerns and racial disparities amongst those experiencing homelessness. The pandemic has boosted the urgency of keeping this population safe while also quickly helping individuals and families find permanent housing. We know that people experiencing homelessness were twice as likely to die from an infection prior to the pandemic and have a life expectancy 30 years less than the average American. Black families make up more than 60% of the homeless population and are disproportionately impacted by COVID in relation to job loss as well as COVID contraction and mortality rates. Investing in shelter and permanent housing is an effort to provide more equitable access to services and lead to better outcomes for people of color.

These funds are critical to our current strategies to respond to this crisis and the pandemic. While we were successful in our initial approach, that approach does not represent a permanent solution to ending homelessness in Montgomery County. Your approval will enable the County to expand year-round bed capacity to 300 people, with surge capacity of up to 400 people. While exact costs are forthcoming, capital costs are estimated between \$7-10 million and on-going operating costs of \$6 million for Fiscal Year 2022.

The current shelter facilities have been supplemented by the temporary use of recreational centers and 6 Taft Court; this has enabled the Continuum of Care to maintain pre-COVID level bed capacity. While the City of Rockville has permitted the continued use of 6 Taft Court through December 2021, this does not represent a permanent solution. Ongoing social distancing requirements in all facilities has greatly reduced the bed capacity in the existing facilities of 2 Taft Court and Crabbs Branch. In total, shelter bed capacity has gone from 390 beds to 93 permanent beds since the pandemic began. To further compound the limitation on the number of available beds, the Continuum of Care was facing a loss of bed capacity before the onset of the coronavirus: in May 2019, the location of the main men's shelter at 600 East Gude Drive was compromised due to environmental issues. The facility, which had the capacity

to serve up to 145 people, was evacuated and is no longer a viable location for an emergency shelter. An investment in a new shelter facility to meet the needs of County residents is timely and necessary.

On behalf of the County Executive, I urge the County Council to support this supplemental appropriation for the Emergency Homeless Shelter project.