



COUNTY COUNCIL FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

APPROVED

Wednesday, January 19, 2022

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland convened via video conference on Wednesday, January 19, 2022.

PRESENT

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| Councilmember Gabe Alborno, President | Councilmember Evan Glass, Vice President |
| Councilmember Andrew Friedman | Councilmember Tom Hucker |
| Councilmember Will Jawando | Councilmember Sidney Katz |
| Councilmember Nancy Navarro | Councilmember Craig Rice |
| Councilmember Hans Riemer | |

The President in the Chair.

DISCUSSION – Meeting with U.S. Senator Van Hollen

Senator Van Hollen briefed the Council on recent federal laws that impact the country and County residents. Topics of discussion included the American Rescue Plan, including COVID relief efforts, school funding, and rental assistance; the infrastructure bill, and the Voting Rights bill. He noted that the infrastructure bill will help to support transit and high-speed internet and universal broadband access to connect all students, businesses, and residents to the internet. He noted that Maryland will receive over \$7 billion over the next five years, along with other federal funds that the County and other entities may receive for infrastructure modernization. Social justice, racial equity and economic opportunity are also a strong focus of the Senator's agenda.

Summarizing recent Congressional action, Senator Van Hollen noted that the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) received over \$1.4 billion emergency funding to maintain capacity and employees due to loss of ridership funds. Congress also passed an extension of over \$150 million per year for the next nine years to help provide stability, improve safety, and address the 7000 car series issues.

Due to the Purple Line contract mismanagement, the total cost of the project is now expected to be \$9.3 billion and the target for completion is Fall 2026. Senator Van Hollen stated that he is committed to completing this project and

looks forward to partnering with the Council to continue to address issues along the right-of-way, such as trails, bike lanes, businesses, and residents.

“Build Back Better” legislation is still being developed that would significantly reduce the cost of childcare for families. Senator Van Hollen stated that infrastructure improvements include access to affordable childcare, reducing the cost of prescription drugs by allowing Medicare to negotiate the cost of the prescription drug process, universal early education, and climate change provisions.

The Congress’s annual appropriations process is still in progress and on February 18, 2022, Congress will need to pass a budget for the next fiscal year.

Senator Van Hollen spoke about the upcoming voting rights bill and the desire to reform the Senate rules to ensure that a minority cannot block action on legislation, like the Freedom to Vote Act, which is overwhelmingly supported by the American public. Later in the meeting he requested that the Council share his recent comments from the Senate floor on the Constitution framework regarding the voting process, electoral college, and legislative voting process.

He acknowledged the recent one-year anniversary of the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol with the intent to disrupt the election. He stated that since then, voting rights, especially for Black and Brown populations, is being restricted. Congress has a responsibility to ensure voter access and highlighted the importance of ensuring voting rights that are currently being limited, however there are significant hurdles expected for the Senate’s vote on the Freedom to Vote Act.

Mr. Albornoz asked about the Federal response to challenges to mental health resources, rising crime rates, and an increase in crimes involving “ghost guns”. Senator Van Hollen acknowledged the need for more robust mental health funding, primarily provided to the States. The Senator suggested that the County request funds from the State to put toward those needs. Senator Van Hollen noted his support for universal gun laws and acknowledged that there is federal legislation being proposed to and help address this and empower the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms to address “ghost guns”.

Ms. Navarro noted that the COVID-19 omicron wave has created staffing difficulties across industries and education challenges. In response, Senator Van Hollen shared that The American Rescue Plan included substantial funds for the schools; its purpose is to provide safety equipment, upgrade ventilation systems, provide masks and tests, and other locally needed resources to address COVID-related needs.

In response to Mr. Friedson’s question about federal efforts to reduce the rise in antisemitic violent trends, Senator Van Hollen noted that the State Department is working to help reduce the trend internationally. He also noted that there is a

federal program that provides approximately \$90 million in funding grants for security for religious organizations and non-profit organizations and hopes to significantly increase those funds to \$300 million.

Regarding small businesses, especially restaurants highly impacted by COVID, Senator Van Hollen noted that the American Rescue Plan provides resources to small businesses, especially restaurants, to put COVID safety protections in place. He shared that the Senate is attempting to provide another round of funding for these efforts and is working to find additional Republican votes to pass this.

Mr. Rice encouraged Senator Van Hollen and his colleagues in Congress to continue to support school food programs to provide children with meals. Senator Van Hollen shared that he supports this and funding to create a universal school meals program and summer school program.

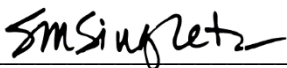
Mr. Hucker noted an article in today's Washington Post that Virginia has been more successful in obtaining federal funds to improve local mass transit. Senator Van Hollen shared that Maryland has not provided information and unified leadership regarding this issue, making it challenging to support Maryland's needs in the Senate.

Senator Van Hollen shared his continued support for Green Banks and his hopes that Congress can pass the Build Back Better bill to further support environmental efforts.

In response to Mr. Jawando's question about the Child Tax Credit, Senator Van Hollen noted that he supports extending a tax cut and making it permanent at the federal level.

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 P.M.

This is a correct copy of Council action.



Selena Mendy Singleton, Esq.
Clerk of the Council