

## **Testimony in favor of Special Appropriation #25-42 to the FY25 Operating Budget**

Hearing Date: December 10, 2024

**TO:** Montgomery County Council

**FROM:** Roman Gomez

I'm Roman Gomez. I have been a resident of Montgomery County since first moving here almost 30 years ago. For many years I taught carpentry to students at Burnt Mills Elementary school, sharing the skills I learned from decades in the building trades with my community. Now, I am struggling to continue living in the community I made my home 30 years ago.

I am asking Montgomery County to allocate \$3.6 million additional dollars in Emergency Rental Assistance and Rapid Rehousing programs. In 2021, during the pandemic, I had to give up my dream of owning my own home when I had to leave the house after my divorce. Then, I could no longer afford my rental unit, which had increased to \$2500 a month.

Two months later I lost my job in construction due to health problems, aggravated by the stress of couch surfing for two years. I found a room in a shared apartment and rented it for 6 months, before receiving an eviction notice. Having no other option, I left this apartment and with nowhere else to go I came to the Nebel Street Shelter in Rockville.

Shortly after arriving, I was again overcome by the stress and instability of not having housing and ended up in the hospital after suffering a heart attack. Many of the struggles I experienced happened like dominoes falling after losing my home. I heard the Crisis Center could help me, but when I went, I was offered only \$300 and my landlord refused to accept it. This made me sad because it was not enough to help. In this County you cannot rent a room for \$300. With a fully funded rental assistance program, many county residents like myself can get the assistance they need before things spiral out of control. This way we can stay in our homes, find productive work, and continue contributing to our communities with pride and dignity.

In light of all this, I respectfully ask the Council to vote in favor of giving \$3.6 million dollars to Emergency Rental Assistance. For many of us it can mean the difference between sickness and health, life, and death.

Thank you for your time.