



Dear Councilmembers,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify during this budget cycle. We recognize the difficult choices ahead and we deeply appreciate your leadership in shaping a budget that prioritizes the well-being of all Montgomery County residents, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Sixteen months ago, Housing Justice Montgomery (HJM) was born out of necessity. Our movement, led by over 160 of Montgomery County's most marginalized neighbors and coordinated by organizations including CASA, Everyday Canvassing, Jews United for Justice, and Shepherd's Table, exists because our community is in crisis. Our members are being evicted from their homes, forced into unsafe and inaccessible housing, or shuffled through shelters in one of the wealthiest counties in the country. We have come to understand that regardless of race, zip code, or how long they've lived in Montgomery County, many of us face the same housing insecurity.

Our members came together for a year to learn how to organize and build a campaign. We also learned the power of moving together, rather than individually. No single member speaks for all of HJM; our decision-making process is intentional and strategic, designed to protect and uplift our most marginalized members. At the same time, we built our values and dreams, always being open-minded and committed to learning so our North Star is clear and we are intentional on how we show up in our community and in our advocacy.

Through months of political education, leadership development, and collective organizing, our members crafted a 27-point platform grounded in their lived experience. For this budget cycle, we have identified five critical demands that will stabilize families and create pathways to permanent housing:

1. **Emergency Rental Assistance (ERAP):** No one should lose their home due to an unexpected financial hardship. We are asking for **\$50 million** to ensure all 4,723 households who requested rental assistance receive the support (average grant of \$10,851) they need to stay housed.
2. **Rapid Rehousing:** This program provides short-term rental assistance and case management to those experiencing homelessness. We seek **\$9.47 million** to fully fund

current clients and expand assistance to 642 current and 200 additional households in 2026.

3. **Permanent Supportive Housing:** For those with chronic mental and physical health conditions and disabilities, stable housing is healthcare. We request **\$13.7 million** to ensure both current clients and new applicants receive the long-term support they need to remain housed.
4. **Moving and Storage Assistance:** No family should lose everything they own due to eviction. We propose a **\$2.4 million** investment to provide six months of storage assistance for families displaced by the Sheriff's Office, giving them time to rebuild.
5. **Disability Retrofitting:** Many apartment complexes remain inaccessible, forcing disabled residents to navigate unsafe living conditions. We urge the County Council to allocate **\$150,000** for nonprofit retrofitting programs to make homes safe and accessible for all residents with disabling conditions.

We recognize that our demands are bold. We are not asking for what is politically convenient but what our members and the larger housing-insecure community in Montgomery County need to live with safety and dignity. Our funding requests reflect the actual needs of these programs, ensuring that every household and individual seeking life-altering housing support can receive it. The families in HJM have done everything in their power to stay housed, now learning how to advocate and organize for themselves and their community. We are workers, parents, and neighbors who know what it is like to *not know* where they will sleep that night, who have witnessed their belongings piled onto the curb after an eviction, and whose experiences have equipped them with the knowledge to know how to fix the problem. Even while we work on our budget platform, several of our members have been displaced from the most basic necessity, shelter. Surviving the housing crisis is a daily struggle that so many Montgomery County residents face. We know that by meeting our asks, Montgomery County can move toward a future where housing insecurity is the exception, not the norm.

We also want to be clear that we are here as partners in creating that future. We know that meaningful change happens when elected leaders and community members work together. That's why we're committed to organizing in a way that reflects our values of kindness, courage, and care. We are united not only by a vision of housing justice but also by a shared belief in collective power and long-term relationship-building.

Housing is not just a line item in a budget. It is the foundation of a thriving community and the first step in every individual's path towards a meaningful and healthy life. By investing in our solutions, from fully funding schools to housing, you have the opportunity to ensure that every Montgomery County resident has the stability to build a better future. We urge you to be bold and work with us in making this vision a reality.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the people of Montgomery County.

Sincerely,

Housing Justice Montgomery