

By Edwige Tebou for Rental stabilization

Good morning. My name is Edwige Tebou. I arrived in the United States during the icy cold winter of 2008—a shock to my system, to say the least. I honestly wasn't sure I'd make it through that season, let alone build a life here. But I did. I've proudly called Montgomery County my home ever since.

Like many immigrants, I came with dreams—to finish my education, build a stable future, support my family, and give back to the community. But the road has been anything but smooth. I've worked every job you can imagine cashier at McDonald's, home health aide, pharmacy tech, nurse assistant, financial producer, community health worker—and today, I serve as the coordinator for a nonprofit in Gaithersburg.

In my role, I work directly with families every day. I hear their struggles, and they often mirror my own. One issue that comes up repeatedly is the **unaffordable cost of housing** in Montgomery County. This county is one of the wealthiest in the country, but rent prices here are rising faster than wages, and it's pushing working families to the edge.

Let me give you a personal example: I recently tried to find a two-bedroom apartment because my sister and her two children just immigrated here. Up until February of this year, they're were living in one bedroom in someone's basement—sharing space, living without privacy, and barely getting by. I wanted to help by providing them a better place to live. But the prices I encountered were shocking.

Even with my full-time job and steady income, I simply couldn't afford the majority of available rentals. Listings for two-bedroom apartments were averaging \$2,000 or more per month—often not including utilities. That's more than half of my monthly income, before I even factor in other basic expenses like groceries, transportation, and childcare. It's just not sustainable.

Today we are 3 adults and 2 kids living In a 2 bedrooms 1 bath apartment, just so we can afford the rent.

And it's not just me. I see clients every day who are forced to make impossible choices—pay rent or buy diapers, pay rent or put gas in the car. Families are doubling up, moving far away from jobs and schools, or living in unsafe conditions because they can't find anything affordable.

We need stronger rent stabilization and protections for tenants. Without them, we're not just losing homes—we're losing our sense of safety, stability, and community. We are forcing people to move out of the county they've helped build. We're watching essential workers—home care aides, teachers, bus drivers—get priced out of the very place they serve.

This is a moral issue. Housing is not a luxury—it's a human right. Montgomery County has the resources, the vision, and the leadership to set the example for what fair housing should look like. We need to support legislation that controls rent hikes, funds emergency rental assistance, and protects families from displacement.

Let's make sure every resident—regardless of income or background—can afford to live with dignity in Montgomery County.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Edwige Tebou

Montgomery County Resident.