

Dear Council President Stewart and Councilmembers:

My name is Christine Pendzich, and I am a long-time resident of Takoma Park (District 4). I also am on the Board of Shepherd's Table, where I regularly see the hardship and the growing size of the homeless population in our County. The homeless population in Montgomery County grew by 71% from 2020-2024. This is a dramatic and alarming increase, speaking to the hardship and marginalization of far too many people even during a generally prosperous period. The Council must fund the programs that help prevent and reduce the harsh condition of homelessness among us.

To that end, I urge that the Council support the following in its FY2026 Budget:

Rapid Rehousing provides short term rental assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness, as well as light case management. This is one of SEPH's most important programs to pull people out of homelessness. We must fund \$9,475,427 to cover the costs of sheltering and housing an estimated 642 current clients and 200 new clients in 2026, so that there is enough to fund everyone's exit out of homelessness.

For our neighbors with chronic health conditions and disabilities, housing is healthcare. Yet, too many are left without the long-term support they need. I urge the council to **fund Permanent Supportive Housing** with \$13,735,903 to support both current clients and new individuals that experience the toughest conditions to exiting homelessness.

No one should be left without a home because they can't afford skyrocketing rents. The council **must fund the Emergency Rental Assistance Program** with \$50 million to ensure all 4,723 households that asked for rental assistance receive an average grant of \$10,581.

In order to prevent homelessness and housing insecurity, we must address the housing shortage. I ask that the Council fully fund **affordable housing development** with \$121.3 million to continue addressing the gap.

If the government cannot adequately address housing struggles, at the very least they can support individuals as they transition to new housing. I support \$2.4 million in **Storage and Moving Assistance** to provide families who were evicted by the Sheriff's Office at least six months of storage to be able to recover and restart.

No one should be forced to risk injury just to enter their own home. Many apartment complexes in Montgomery County remain inaccessible, leaving disabled residents to navigate unsafe conditions daily. We need \$150,000 for the **Montgomery County government to fund retrofitting apartments through nonprofits like Rebuilding Together, ensuring that all residents can live with dignity and safety.**

More and more residents across the County are accessing food assistance providers while they struggle to make ends meet. I urge the Council to fund a 10% increase to **food assistance grants** to help providers address rising food costs and increasing need.

I believe in a county where both housing and food is safe, healthy, affordable, and available to everyone. Passing the budget items listed above would move us towards that goal. I warmly urge the Council to pass these items

Thank you for your time, consideration, and your leadership.

Respectfully,

Christine Pendzich
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Takoma Park