

## **Testimony For Housing Justice Funding**

To The Honorable Council

Greetings

My name is Robert Stubblefield and I am a lifelong resident of Montgomery County. I am also a lay minister, activist-organizer with a variety of groups such as DSA, BACC, RJN, and Housing Justice Montgomery. I am writing to urge you all to fully fund housing rental assistance, cover the costs of sheltering and housing current and new clients so people can exist out of homelessness, fund retrofits and to look at alternatives such as cooperatives and community land trusts.

Why funding housing and rental assistance are important because we are in a crisis in this county. Homelessness is on the rise and people are being evicted at levels not seen before. While we as a community were able to get emergency rental assistance in the last quarter of 2024, it did not go far enough. Now especially with federal employees getting laid off and uncertainty at the federal level, it is vital that this Council do everything within its power to protect our most vulnerable.

While I have not had the fear of facing eviction personally, I have whether it is talking with my neighbors, congregation or organizing in several communities that eviction as well as displacement are some of the top concerns. Many of the families work full time jobs and despite working full time, the wages have not kept up with the rising cost of rent despite the passage of the rent stabilization bill that was passed back in 2023. Once removed from housing, some of the families struggling to find new housing as well as are forced to take their children out of schools which causes trauma. In other words, communities are torn apart and it makes it easier for communities to cease to exist but to be plundered by developers. If many of these families had not only access to rental assistance but moving assistance and costs to cover shelter and rehousing, families can stay in their apartments, keep their children in schools as well as keep the community intact.

To be clear these are all steps, another alternative is to look into forming housing cooperatives and community land trusts. These work because not only do they keep building communities but also gives the people ownership of their housing. In addition you see the rates of displacement are very low in contrast to their counterparts. these are things that are very practical that must be developed now with the input of the most marginalized.

In closing you the Council must vote in favor of allocating funds for rental assistance, rehousing, moving assistance and looking into cooperatives and community land trusts. Failure to do so means more displacement and exacerbation of homelessness.