

Tuesday April 7, 2025

Montgomery County Council  
Stella B Werner Council Building  
100 Maryland Ave  
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Members of the Montgomery County Council,

My name is Ebony Cox, and I am a resident of The Laureate, situated at [REDACTED] Gramercy Blvd., Derwood, MD. I have had the privilege of residing in this community for the past five months. As an African-American young woman dedicated to advocating for housing rights and equitable treatment, I actively participate in Housing Justice Montgomery.

I am writing to urge Montgomery County to allocate the essential \$50 million needed to ensure that the 4,723 households seeking rental assistance receive an average grant of \$10,581. This funding is critical for protecting the most vulnerable members of our community.

We require \$9,475,427 to adequately cover the costs associated with sheltering and providing housing for approximately 642 current clients, along with an additional 200 new clients projected by 2026. This support is necessary to ensure that all individuals receive the assistance required to escape homelessness. Furthermore, an additional \$13,735,903 is vital to assist both existing clients and new individuals who face severe challenges in achieving stability.

I also advocate for the expansion of moving assistance. An investment of \$2.4 million is necessary to provide families who have experienced eviction by the sheriff's office with a minimum of six months of storage. This support allows them the opportunity to recover and rebuild their lives.

Additionally, I strongly recommend that Montgomery County allocate \$150,000 to fund essential retrofitting through nonprofit organizations such as Rebuilding Together, which will ensure that all residents can live with dignity and safety.

It is imperative that we prioritize funding for Interfaith Works, specifically for staff training that addresses the challenges faced by residents with mental health issues in shelters.

Training staff to effectively manage behavioral issues, rather than escalating conflicts, is essential in creating a supportive environment. Annual training sessions should be mandated at least once or twice a year to equip staff with the necessary skills to handle these situations compassionately. Furthermore, it is crucial that all employees at Interfaith Works possess the required certifications and skills to support residents with moderate to severe conditions, thereby fostering a positive atmosphere for individuals experiencing homelessness and minimizing frustrations.

My own experience with housing instability began on September 29, 2019, when I faced an abatement in my apartment due to a roof leak. I was instructed by the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) to vacate my unit by the end of the month, under the threat of being held financially responsible for rent if I failed to comply. During this time, shelters were fully occupied, leaving me no choice but to reside in my vehicle and occasionally in motels until I secured a new unit.

This experience made me feel undervalued, particularly as a participant in the Housing Choice Voucher program, which is designed to ensure that residents take proper care of their units. Unfortunately, the management company failed to adhere to HUD's standards for maintaining units suitable for Section 8 voucher holders, thereby violating state rules and regulations.

Ultimately, I had to secure employment quickly while living in a hotel, incurring significant expenses that could have otherwise been allocated toward my college tuition.

I firmly believe that stable, affordable housing is the cornerstone of a good quality of life. It alleviates mental, emotional, and physical stress, enabling individuals to seek employment and enroll their children in school. Without security from eviction, none of these opportunities can be realized.

I benefitted from emergency rental assistance, which enabled me to transition into my current stable living environment. This stability allows families to thrive, ensures children can attend school without the emotional distress stemming from their parents' struggles, and supports families in obtaining employment and fulfilling monthly rental obligations.

I respectfully request that the Council vote in favor of allocating \$5 million to emergency rental assistance and \$2.4 million for the expansion of moving assistance to strengthen our community.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Ebony Cox

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]