



## Commission on Veterans Affairs

### Testimony on FY 26 Operating Budget

April 8, 2025

Michael Wilson, Chair

The Commission on Veterans Affairs wishes to thank the residents of the County and the County Council for their combined support for Veterans for funding programs that benefit the quality of life for Veterans and their families. We recommend the following:

**Vouchers for Homeless Veterans and their Families** - We commend the County for making a priority of the addition of permanent affordable housing for the homeless veteran population. HUD-VASH is a collaborative program which pairs HUD's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance with VA case management and supportive services for homeless Veterans. However, not all Veterans qualify for VASH vouchers due to receiving less than an honorable discharge and are therefore not eligible for VA programs. We appreciate the overall increase in funding for affordable housing and homelessness services and recommend that the appropriated \$650,000 with a 3% inflationary increase per year to serve those not eligible for VA programs. We also support the full funding of the Bethesda Cares contract for \$958,476. The program also has maintained a 100% housing retention rate for veterans who had moved off the streets or out of shelters into their own apartment units.

**Serving Together** – The County provides funding for Serving Together through Behavioral Health & Crisis Services. Veterans are able to work closely with a professional care coordinator who is knowledgeable about the resources and eligibility for any needed programs for service members, veterans, and military families. We recommend that the County continue to fund this program with a 3 1/2 % increase in FY 26 for \$182,333.42.

**Warrior Canine Connection** - This program works with recovering Veterans to train dogs to act as service dogs for other wounded Warriors. This program is based out of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and has a training location in Boyds. The County provided a Capital Cost Share Grant, and they were awarded \$500,000 in total from the 2024 and 2025 budget cycles. The funds are to be used to help design and construct a puppy breeding and enrichment center. We would ask consideration of any additional funding that may be needed,

The VA has been directed to reduce its workforce by some 80,000 positions, many held by Veterans. Montgomery County is home to 36,589 Veterans. We ask that the County assist with providing support to those may be losing their job.

We want to thank the Council for the passage of Bill 6-24 Property Tax Credit for Disabled Veterans, and we were pleased to receive the application from Councilmember Natali Fani-Gonzalez office this week that staff distributed to Veterans. The due date of April 15 for this credit has been extended to May 1 so Veterans who are eligible can apply.

The Commission is working in collaboration with the Maryland Military Coalition and the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) to establish a Veterans Treatment Court in Montgomery County. We would greatly appreciate your support for this important initiative.

The Council supported funding for the establishing of an accessible kayak launch that was built by Parks at Seneca Creek at Riley's Lock. Parks collaborated with Team River Runner and the Commission on this highly used project that serves Veterans and the general public. Parks recently established another adaptive launch at Black Hill Regional Park, and it is now operational. Thank you for your support of this.

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In conclusion, again thank you for your continued support.