



**Commission on People with Disabilities
Montgomery County Council
FY26 Operating Budget Priorities for April 7, 2025
Tonya Gilchrist, Chair**

The Commission on People with Disabilities recommends that the County eliminate or greatly minimize the installation of designated bicycle lanes on main artery streets. This needs to be done as they cause serious safety concerns for pedestrians who have a disability and drivers from teenagers to older adults. Designated bike lanes present specific barriers to people who have low vision, blindness, hearing loss, mobility limitations or intellectual disabilities.

The FY26 Recommended Operating Budget includes \$62.9 million for Vision Zero initiatives which include increased bicycle and pedestrian initiatives. Designated bike lanes are expensive to install, and we ask, does this cost justify their installation with such little observed use? “The average cost of designated protected bike lanes can range from from \$133,170 to \$536,680 per mile¹. During a resurfacing project, the average cost to add bike lanes is approximately \$20,000 per mile” according to STREETS BLOG USA. If even some of these funds were used for services for people with disabilities, instead of bike lanes, think of the difference that could make for people with disabilities.

The State has installed poorly designed bicycle lanes on Old Georgetown Road, among other roads, and we recommend they be taken out. The County could and should do more to prioritize safety for people with disabilities as the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) which is a federal civil rights law, prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities. The ADA mandates accessibility in employment, public services, and transportation for people with disabilities. People with disabilities are covered as a protected class, whereas cyclists are not a protected group. With the plague of bikeways clogging up County roads, we are sending the wrong message to our community because people with disabilities don’t feel safe navigating the sidewalks and streets because of designated bike lanes. The Commission has been voicing our concerns over the hazards designated bike lanes pose for people with disabilities for years now, but for reasons beyond our comprehension, the County refuses to heed our concerns or take any tangible steps to minimize the impact designated bikeways have on our vulnerable residents including people with disabilities and prohibits us from navigating the community in a manner comparable to our non-disabled peers, which could be considered a violation of the ADA.

The Commission supports full funding of the Developmental Disability Supplement. The County Executive’s current budget includes a 3% increase for the supplement, and the request from InterACC/DD was an 6.6% increase which the Commission supports. If approved, the FY26 DD-Supplement of 6.6% would increase to \$23,125,845 to be distributed to between 41 provider agencies. The full request includes an increase for the cost-of-living that is projected, and is critical for program expansion, transitioning youth and waiting list placements which are anticipated to grow. Providers tell us that it is difficult to recruit and retain Direct Support Professional (DSP) staff and we recommend that this supplement be used for increased wages for these workers. The minimum wage in Montgomery County is the highest in the state, due to the County having a higher minimum wage and talent is often sought for by other employers in the area offering wages higher than nonprofits can support.

We recommend preserving the Public Library funding. Cuts to library staffing, hours, or resources would negatively affect many people with disabilities, who use the computers, check out different book formats, and go to meetings and socialize at their community libraries. The Commission supports the County Executive’s allocation of \$800,000 to reduce long-standing waitlists and increase capacity in programs serving vulnerable populations. The CE Recommended budget increases capacity for the following programs, each of which have over 150 waitlisted individuals: Adult Protective Services case management (\$197,000); Home Care Services (\$161,000); and Coordination of Community Services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (\$63,000). Some Commissioners have recommended great outreach for the My Turn Program. The Medicaid Community First Choice Nurse Monitoring program budget increases by \$180,000 and is fully offset by revenue. Almost \$200,000 is allocated to continue services that were previously made possible with federal funds, including Senior Lunch site at the Silver Spring Recreation and Aquatic Center (\$148,000) and prenatal engagement initiatives for vulnerable populations (\$50,000). Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. Your consideration of this testimony is greatly appreciated.