

Montgomery County Council Testimony for the FY26 Budget

April 9, 2025

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Thank you, Montgomery County Councilmembers, for the opportunity to speak today. Community Reach of Montgomery County, now in our 58th year of serving this community, appreciates the support the Council and our county has given to our organization as we offer healthcare, housing, financial emergency assistance, education for immigrants, and eldercare for the underserved. Our organization has been a member of Nonprofit Montgomery for many years and strongly believes in collaboration between nonprofit organizations, our local governments, and the community at large.

Together we have embraced people from all walks of life and every corner of the world. We have helped residents plant roots, raise their families in this welcoming community, and move closer to financial security.

Community Reach of Montgomery County provides five areas of service.

Rockville Emergency Assistance Program (REAP) helps those who face eviction or utility turn-offs, or need referrals for food, clothing, dental and vision care. Ms. L, a single mother of 3 young children, lost her job through a reduction in force. She fell behind on rent and was facing eviction. Through funding from REAP, her family was able to remain in their home while she concentrated on finding new employment; her children could remain at their schools with their network of teachers and friends, her credit was not irreparably damaged. Most importantly, her family did not face the very real, complex, and expensive difficulties an eviction creates in securing future housing. County costs for providing shelter for the unhoused family was also avoided.

Our Senior Reach Program provides free homecare services and repair and maintenance for lower income seniors so they can remain in their own homes. We have also recently begun offering “Tech Socials” where student or adult volunteers work individually with seniors who bring laptops, tablets, smartphones, and other devices, and ask questions so they may learn new skills. A recent Senior Reach success story begins with Ms. G, an 80-something resident living in the Lincoln Park home where she raised her children. For over a decade, she has received homecare services through us. Recently she mentioned to our staff that her water bills had been unusually high, and she thought her water heater might be leaking. Senior Reach hired a plumber to determine if there was a problem. He confirmed there was a hot water leak that might cause the tank to burst and cause an expensive flood

if not repaired. We paid for the installation of a new water heater, and Ms. G was also able to get a partial refund of her water expenses with a letter from the plumber.

Our Housing Program with Jefferson House and Rockland House offers a safe place to call home for men and women who were previously unhoused and includes case management to help them move toward independence. One resident has not only rebuilt her life but has become a leader and advocates for others facing similar challenges through continued Reach support. It is a powerful testament to resilience, faith, and the impact of community that she provides guidance and support to fellow residents, actively engages in community service as a member of the City of Rockville's Human Services Advisory Commission board, and volunteers in many other ways.

Language Outreach Program (LOP) provides a way for immigrants to be more engaged with our community through English Language (ESL) classes and US Citizenship Test Preparedness classes. Workers who don't speak English don't have the same opportunities for career advancement and generally earn lower wages than their English-speaking colleagues. LOP helps students gain confidence in using English in practical day-to-day situations. Non-citizens are unable to participate or advocate to the same degree as citizens, and, especially in the current environment, are less assured of their ability to remain in the US permanently. Our classes are unique as we also provide childcare and tutoring for children of our students. Children of non-English speaking parents are at a clear disadvantage in school; their parents are less able to assist with schoolwork or effectively communicate with teachers. We work closely with the children's teachers to provide much-needed support, help build clear communication between parents and teachers and offer the specific additional assistance each child needs.

Mansfield Kaseman Health Clinic (MKHC) is a healthcare home for lower income residents who are uninsured or enrolled in Medicare or Medicaid. Ms. M became an MKHC patient when she experienced pain and depression while staying in a shelter with her young daughter. Our medical staff and patient navigator listened to her concerns and connected Ms. M with a behavioral therapist for her depression and a specialist for pain management. Additionally, the patient navigator helped Ms. M access career services so she could get training and find a job. This connection gave her a laptop and provided access to online classes. In addition to helping Ms. M become healthy enough to return to the workforce, she was able to find career training without an additional search for those opportunities. We expect she will soon find work that will allow the family to live independently.

As you make the tough budget decisions for FY2026, we ask you to continue to include safety net services in the base budget at funding levels from FY25 plus 3% cost of living to partially cover rising costs. We ask you to consider the increasing need for our services we have seen over the past few years and the expected high increase we expect to see with federal worker layoffs, attacks on immigrants, and more. We ask that you also continue to provide community grants, including 2025 Legacy grants that have allowed Reach to continue to provide free citizenship classes, childcare and tutoring at LOP, and offer some of the most important services at MKHC.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.