

Dear Council President Stewart and Councilmembers:

My name is Jan Weetjens, and I am a resident of Washington, DC. However, I am also a board member of Shepherd's Table and, as such, deeply care about the Montgomery County residents who experience homelessness and whom we serve every day.

Especially during my volunteering at the Resource Center at Shepherd's Table (where people can receive mail, toiletries, and basic hygiene products) I witness first hand what a difference it makes when people who are experiencing homelessness can secure a place to stay. Just from my own anecdotal observation, I notice how that shift increases people's likelihoods to find a job, maintain healthy habits, and improve their mental health.

With a 71% increase in homelessness in Montgomery County from 2020-2024, the council must fund the demands that our community has decided are most important, especially the ones that provide prevention and exits from homelessness. Indeed, it is hard to overestimate the direct impact housing has on the lives of our clients and, by extension, on the wellbeing of the entire community.

I ask that the council support the following in the FY2026 Budget:

Rapid Rehousing provides short term rental assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness, as well as light case management. This is one of SEPH's primary ways it exits people out of the homelessness system. We must fund \$9,475,427 to cover the costs of sheltering and housing of an estimated 642 current clients and 200 new clients in 2026, so that there is enough to fund everyone's exit out of homelessness.

For our neighbors with chronic health conditions and disabilities, housing is healthcare. Yet, too many are left without the long-term support they need. I urge the council to **fund Permanent Supportive Housing** with \$13,735,903 to support both current clients and new individuals that experience the toughest conditions to exiting homelessness.

No one should be left without a home because they can't afford skyrocketing rents. The council **must fund the Emergency Rental Assistance Program** with \$50 million to ensure all 4,723 households that asked for rental assistance receive an average grant of \$10,581.

In order to prevent homelessness and housing insecurity, we must address the housing shortage. I ask that the Council fully fund **affordable housing development** with \$121.3 million to continue addressing the gap.

If the government cannot adequately address housing struggles, at the very least they can support individuals as they transition to new housing. I support \$2.4 million in

Storage and Moving Assistance to provide families who were evicted by the Sheriff's Office at least six months of storage to be able to recover and restart.

No one should be forced to risk injury just to enter their own home. Many apartment complexes in Montgomery County remain inaccessible, leaving disabled residents to navigate unsafe conditions daily. We need \$150,000 for the **Montgomery County government to fund retrofitting apartments through nonprofits like Rebuilding Together, ensuring that all residents can live with dignity and safety.**

More and more residents across the county are accessing food assistance providers while they struggle to make ends meet. I urge the Council to fund a 10% increase to **food assistance grants** to help providers address rising food costs and increasing need.

I believe in a county where both housing and food is safe, healthy, affordable, and available to everyone. I'd like to thank the Council for your time, consideration, and your leadership.

Respectfully,

Jan Weetjens