

Testimony of Dr. Luqman Safai

Montgomery County FY26 Budget Hearing – April 7, 2025

Good evening, members of the Montgomery County Council, County Executive, and fellow residents.

My name is Luqman Safai, and I am a community leader representing the Afghan community in Silver Spring. I rent at the Enclave apartments and help many refugees in our community. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on the FY26 Operating Budget.

I want to begin by acknowledging the efforts of this Council and County leadership in managing our resources to support vital services for our residents. The cost of living in Montgomery County continues to rise, making it difficult for working families, seniors, and young professionals to afford housing.

As we consider the FY26 budget, I urge you to prioritize affordable housing and rental assistance. In particular, I call on the County to fund:

- \$50 million in emergency rental assistance to support the 4,723 households projected to need help in FY26, with an average grant of \$10,581 per household.
- \$2.4 million for item storage up to 6 months after eviction.

These are not just budget numbers — they are lifelines for people in our community. \$50 million will help me and many others who have the same condition to stay at their apartment and prevent eviction. Right now, the level of assistance and quantity of affordable housing nowhere meets the need. Just think about the amount of apartments you can think of that have two bedroom apartments for under \$1,500. Practically, none.

I'd like to bring your attention to the real human impact of recent stop orders that have led to thousands of layoffs in our county — including myself. The abrupt nature of these layoffs has left many of us without a safety net. We were dedicated to our work and to serving the residents of this county, and now we are struggling with uncertainty while trying to cover basic needs like rent, food, and healthcare.

I urge the Council to allocate emergency funding to support those affected — whether through extended benefits, direct relief, or bridge employment programs. This isn't just about budget math. It's about protecting the people who have faithfully carried out the work of this government and now find themselves left behind.

I kindly request the Council to ensure that the FY26 budget reflects our shared priorities: equity, sustainability, and economic opportunity for all. I appreciate your time and commitment to Montgomery County's future, and I look forward to your leadership in making these investments a reality.

Thank you for your attention and support.