

Montgomery County Council, Maryland

Testimony in Support of a Special Appropriation for the Department of Health and Human Services FY26 Respite Care Program

This testimony is submitted in support of the request for \$250,000 increase to the Respite Care Program in Fiscal Year 2026. This funding is critical to providing short-term relief for so many families who care for loved ones in our most vulnerable population: individuals with disabilities, chronic medical needs, or age-related conditions. As a first time beneficiary of the Respite Program, I can't tell you how much it means to me to have the additional support provided by this program. In fact, when I was notified that my application had been approved for my 90 year old mother with dementia, I was in tears. The funding is very helpful of course, but it also means so much to have a program that really supports its residents at these critical stages in our lives and the lives of the ones we care for. It's an honor to know that there are supportive County Council members who truly understand the plight of this most vulnerable population and the endurance and sacrifices required by caregivers.

As a caregiver for my mother who has resided in this County since 1972, the program has provided additional support for her to participate in a respite program that has been fully vetted and approved by the ARC of Montgomery County, Respite Program. There are so many adult day programs and long-term care facilities in this area. However, we have read and heard the horror stories of abuse at many of these facilities. Thanks to the Montgomery County Respite Program, all facilities are fully vetted and regularly evaluated. The standards are high and as caregivers, we are confident and comfortable leaving our loved ones in the care of these approved facilities or programs. It is important to increase funding to give other caregivers an opportunity to have this same peace of mind for their loved-one's care and a much needed break.

Caregiving is practically a full-time job because when you are not actively taking care of the family member's daily needs, you are thinking about their needs. Your life is planned around their well-being and this involves daily sacrifices of your time to often include the inability to take a much needed vacation. Often, there are no family members or friends that can step in to help. Everyone's life seems to be on overdrive but you still have this very dependent person that needs you. This short-term respite support validates all that we do that many don't understand or recognize. It lets us know that it's ok to take a short break from caregiving to reset or rejuvenate. The program "has your back" and it means a lot to have a program that is built around supporting us as caregivers and truly understanding the stressors that we face from daily caregiving, to the need for support, and to finding appropriate resources and facilities to help with our loved-one's care.

Therefore, for the reasons discussed above in support of the tremendous value of the Respite Program, I hope that the County Council approves the recommendation to increase the funding

by \$250,000 in Fiscal Year 2026. This would allow the Respite Program to support more families who, like me, will find tremendous value in this short-term program that has a long lasting impact.

Thank You,

LaVerne Stringfield