



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

April 20, 2020

County Executive Marc Elrich
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear County Executive Elrich:

Thank you for your ongoing efforts during this time of crisis. As we hear from constituents about their growing concerns, being able to stay in their homes is among the top of their list.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council stated that housing security was a central goal for all of our residents. Housing insecurity is especially acute for Montgomery County renters, who make on average 70% of the area median income and half of whom are cost burdened, notwithstanding the current economic climate. While the statewide eviction moratorium is temporarily helpful for some renters, we must also increase direct housing assistance and expand the qualifications for existing County housing programs so that more Montgomery County residents are able to recover from this economic crisis and its lasting effects.

As you know, thousands of Montgomery County families do not qualify for federal or state financial assistance and these households are disproportionately renters. Once the current eviction moratorium is lifted, households that have been unable to pay rent will still be vulnerable to displacement.

To mitigate the current crisis and prepare for the reality that is ahead, we are recommending a four-part solution:

1. Put in place temporary administrative changes to expand eligibility standards for rental assistance programs, such as the Housing Stabilization Fund and Emergency Eviction Assistance Program. Accessing housing assistance programs should be simplified and

streamlined during this crisis. This includes waiving requirements, such as eviction and court orders, and expanding the qualifications to be more inclusive of those financially impacted by COVID-19.

2. Support an initial \$2 million supplemental to cover the expected demand from expanding qualifications for eviction prevention, housing stabilization and rapid rehousing; in addition to providing temporary rental assistance to additional households by modifying the income requirements, and allowing assistance grants more than once in a 12 month period.
3. Leverage private sector investment and partnerships with landlords to ensure that renters have a six month transition after the emergency evictions are lifted.
4. Establish a multilingual hotline within the Housing Stabilization Unit. As you know, this unit has three regional offices, with three different points of entry, and the cultural and linguistic proficient services offered at each of these three offices is not always consistent. We have received feedback from nonprofit organizations and County Council staff who have had a difficult time accessing services on behalf of non-English dominant constituents. Therefore, establishing a multilingual hotline with Spanish as the main language, and other languages as needed, will ensure that language is not a barrier for constituents who need information and access to the vital services that this Unit provides.

As the next rent due date of May 1 is right around the corner, we ask that you move swiftly in ensuring that these expanded guidelines and rental assistance are immediately available to renters impacted by COVID-19 financial losses.

Renter households now make up close to 40% of county residents and in many parts of the county are a majority of the population. This year the County Council unanimously committed to the Council of Governments' affordable housing goals and we have committed to reducing the waitlists for our housing programs by increasing funding to the Housing Initiative Fund. While we recognize the need for residents to apply for unemployment, this targeted approach helps the county efficiently leverage resources fulfilling our affordable housing obligations has never been more important. We look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Evan Glass
Councilmember, At-Large



Sidney Katz
President



Tom Hucker
Vice President



Gabe Albornoz
Councilmember, At-Large



Craig Rice
Councilmember, District 2



Nancy Navarro
Councilmember, District 4



Will Jawando
Councilmember, At-Large



Hans Riemer
Councilmember, At-Large



Andrew Friedson
Councilmember, District 1

cc: Rosie McCray-Moody, DHCA
Dr. Raymond Crowell, DHHS
Aseem Nigab, DHCA
Stacy Spann, Housing Opportunities Commission