

April 12, 2019

Interagency Commission on Homelessness
Montgomery County Health and Human Services
Services to End and Prevent Homelessness
401 Hungerford Drive, Fifth Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Interagency Commission on Homelessness:

I am writing to you to advocate for more supplemental rental vouchers for low income seniors. Montgomery County does a lot for their residents, and it is not taken for granted. It is also very much appreciated, but with the rising housing costs, I have heard heart breaking stories of seniors trying to maintain housing. The county's cost of living is one of the most expensive in Maryland which poses a problem for low-income seniors to afford and keep (rent increases) rental housing. According to its website, SSI provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. Although if needed, the money can be applied to housing cost, but it was not intended to pay in full for eligible recipients' housing needs, so additional housing assistance is sometimes necessary. An Affordable Housing Fact stated that rent affordable with SSI is \$225, and Fair Market Value for a 1 bedroom is \$1504.

Many seniors struggle to make ends meet. Low-income seniors are not looking for a hand out, but they would be grateful for a hand up. A supplemental rental voucher to supplement their income in the amount of \$300 to \$500 would help tremendously to reduce homelessness for seniors. Pilot programs like DC Flex are being conducted because the creators feel it would yield a large increase in stability and add another layer to the housing safety net.

According to a study reported by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), one in five Americans will be older than age 65 in 2030, and one in eight will be older than age 75 by 2040. Healthier living and advances in medical treatment help to support an expanding lifespan. According to the Commission on Aging, the older adult population of Montgomery County, Maryland is rising at an unprecedented rate. By the year 2030, more than 25 percent of the residents in Montgomery County will be over the age of 60. One of the major expenses that seniors face is housing. AARP has also stated that one-third of adults (20 million) older than 50 put more than 30 percent of their income toward housing, and 9.6 million adults older than 50 put more than 50 percent of their income toward housing.

Individuals who spend more than half of their income on housing spend an average of 40 percent less on food and 70 percent less on health care, notes AARP. These individuals may cut back on necessities, such as a healthy diet and medical treatment, to pay for their housing. We can stop this from happening with additional funding.

Please let our seniors enjoy life and not have to worry about not being able to afford a place to live and possibly becoming homeless.

Montgomery County can be proactive instead of reactive for the low-income seniors that will need a rental supplement to meet the increasing cost of housing.

I am truly thankful that “Montgomery County is committed to making the experience of homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring through a range of strategies”. Let’s implement this program into the current range, so that homelessness is not an issue for this population. This program will add to the common vision of "**Housing for All=A Stronger Montgomery**". Ending and preventing homelessness for low-income seniors is achievable with your help. Please consider adding this to the list of priorities in preparation for HUD's release of the 2019 Notice of Funding Availability for the Continuum of Care Consolidation Application.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Nicketa Lewis