

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Jennifer Solpietro of Columbia, and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Howard Progressive Project.

Last fall, a woman contacted Columbia Community Care with a question. She had lost her job at the beginning of the pandemic, and she was homeless and sleeping in her car, which was parked in west Columbia. However, her car battery was unreliable, and she needed advice on a place to park overnight that was closer to her new job in Ellicott City in case she needed to walk to work. Columbia Community Care acted quickly to assist and managed to secure a spot at a local homeless shelter for the woman, who was a veteran of the U.S. Army.

I don't know if she ever found permanent housing. But I do know that there are many others like her. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the economic crisis it has wrought, means that the need for affordable housing in Howard County is greater than ever.

Housing is a basic human need and is the foundation for all else in life. Many of us take for granted that we will have a place to rest and to seek shelter from the elements. But for some, housing is not a given. A dearth of affordable homes, limited resources for housing assistance, and the risk of eviction weigh heavily on many of our Howard County neighbors who find themselves spending as much as half of their income or more on housing. Many families are one financial crisis away from eviction, which can trigger a downward spiral into poverty. As sociologist Matthew Desmond said in his book, *Evicted*, "without stable shelter, everything else falls apart."

Howard County must ensure that affordable housing gets every possible dollar. Every dollar spent on affordable housing initiatives can provide a secure and stable home for a veteran, a health care worker, a student, a teacher, a person with a disability, or a family. Every dollar spent on affordable housing can not only change a life, it can *save* a life. We must not continue to treat housing as though it is a luxury reserved only for the affluent.

We at the Howard Progressive Project ask the Howard County Council to treat affordable housing as the fundamental human need that it is. Please ensure that affordable housing initiatives are fully funded this year and every year. Thank you.