

County Executive Ball, Council Chair Jones, Vice-Chair Rigby, Members Walsh, Jung, and Yungmann,

Howard Progressive Project's central organizing principle is community. We envision a more just and equitable Howard County, a place where every person can grow to their fullest potential. Therefore, we were pleased to see so many budget items that will continue to build a thriving and just community in Howard County.

First, we are pleased with the increased investment in our schools, especially the increase in mental health services for our students. It is no secret that the pandemic caused tremendous emotional hardship for students. We believe the increased mental health resources will be beneficial for not just students but educators who are often made to fill in the gaps.

We are also pleased with the investments in non-profits included in the budget, particularly those that will do work to lift up those with the gravest needs, such as the \$5 million in initial funding to create a Housing Opportunities Trust Fund and the \$50,000 investment in the Human Services Transportation Program which will improve access for adults with disabilities to health care, employment and social services. We are thrilled about the \$1.3 million investment in maternity initiatives to support underinsured and uninsured mothers' access to quality prenatal care.

In the area of public safety, we are pleased about the investment in body-worn cameras and believe this program will benefit law enforcement and the citizens of Howard County alike. We are even more pleased to see an investment in the mental health resources that will be made available to our police force. This is an important way to ensure that the stresses of the work do not have a negative impact on these vitally important members of our community. We are also happy to see a commitment to supporting Howard County residents who are entering the community after a period of incarceration. This investment shows that our county believes in the potential of all our residents.

Finally, our needs in Howard County are great. When the county council failed to pass the progressive recordation tax we lost upwards of \$25 million dollars or more in revenue. What else could we have funded? Even more competitive educator salaries? More housing for our low income friends and neighbors? Should an opportunity for this kind of revenue come up again, we hope the council will consider supporting it.

Thank you for your time and for your service to the people of our county.