

MEMORANDUM

May 1, 2018

TO: Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Amanda Mihill, Legislative Attorney *A. Mihill*
Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst *LMcMillan*

SUBJECT: **Expedited Bill 14-18**, Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity
Special Appropriation to FY18 Operating Budget, Department of Health and Human Services - \$90,000 for implementation of Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity

PURPOSE: Worksession – Committee should make recommendations on Bill and Special Appropriation

Expedited Bill 14-18, Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity, sponsored by Lead Sponsor Councilmember Berliner and Co-Sponsor Councilmember Hucker, was introduced on April 3. A sponsor memorandum is on ©9-10. A public hearing was held on April 24 (see testimony and correspondence on ©16-31).

Bill 14-18 would require the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to develop a Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity in Montgomery County which must include certain area-specific plans. It would also require DHHS to submit the first area-specific plan by November 15, 2018.

Public Hearing testimony

At the public hearing, all speakers testified in support of Expected Bill 14-18. The Council has also received letters from nonprofit organizations in support of the Bill. Nonprofit Montgomery suggested 2 amendments, which are discussed in the section below. The County Executive has not taken a position on the bill.

Issues for Committee Consideration

1. *Should the organization participants include nonprofit communities that specifically address only poverty?* Expedited Bill 14-18 identifies a list of groups and people that the Department should consult with to develop the Strategic Plan, including:

- County departments and offices (Transportation, Housing and Community Affairs, Recreation, Regional Services Center Directors, and Community Partnerships);
- County agencies (Montgomery County Public Schools, Montgomery College, and the Planning Department);
- Specific nonprofit communities (Collaboration Council for Children, Youth, and Families, WorkSource Montgomery, and Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation);
- Unspecified organizations whose mission is to reduce and eliminate poverty that serve the region being addressed in the Strategic Plan; and
- Individuals who have experienced living with a household income below 300% of the federal poverty level, who live in the region being addressed by the Strategic Plan.

Nonprofit Montgomery urged the Council to include other nonprofit organizations whose missions do not specifically address poverty, but nevertheless address burdens of poverty, including food security, affordable housing, healthcare, and legal assistance. At the outset, Council staff notes that the language of the bill is broad enough to allow DHHS to consult with other organizations or individuals not specifically listed in the legislation. If the Committee wants to amend the Bill on this issue, Council staff suggests the following amendment (©5, lines 87-88):

(13) organizations whose mission is to reduce and eliminate poverty, or address burdens of poverty, including food security, affordable housing, health care, and legal assistance, that serve the region being addressed in the Strategic Plan.

2. *Should the legislation specify the dates for the remaining area-specific plans?* Expedited Bill 14-18 would require the development of a Strategic plan, to include area-specific plans for each area served by a Regional Services Center. Building upon work done in the East County Opportunity Zone, the first area-specific plan must be focused on the Eastern Montgomery County area and must be submitted by November 15, 2018. Expedited Bill 14-18 requires this first plan to include “a structure and timeline for developing a similar Strategic Plan in each of the other regional service center areas” (©4, lines 70-71), but does not specify the timeline for the other plans.

Nonprofit Montgomery urged the Council to include a specific timeline and process for the other area-specific plans (©27-28). Council staff does not recommend amending the bill to add dates for the other plans. Council staff believes that the timeline for completing the other plans will be informed through the completion of the county-wide information and the enhanced work on the East County Opportunity Zone. There is nothing in the legislation that would prohibit the

Department from moving forward with planning if it determines it has the structure and resources in place to do so.

3. Clarifying amendments. The Office of the County Attorney has raised a question about specific language that Council staff believes warrants a clarifying amendment. Council staff recommends the Council adopt the following amendment (©3, lines 49-52):

- (4) estimates of the number of rent-burdened households, including households paying more than 30% and 50% of income for housing;
- (5) distribution by zip code or other available measurable area of households participating in the State's Child Care Subsidy Program and the Working Parents Assistance Program;

Council staff recommendation: enact Expedited Bill 14-18 with the clarifying amendment described above.

Special Appropriation

On April 2nd, the Council introduced a Special Appropriation for \$90,000 that would support the work needed to provide the Plan required in Bill 14-18. A public hearing was held on April 24th. The Fiscal Impact says that the funding would allow the Department to hire a consultant (\$80,500) and to conduct a focus group (\$9,500). It also notes that when additional regional plans are developed, additional resources will be required. As previously noted, Council staff believe the first requirements will inform the Executive and the Council about what is needed to develop the other plans. There is no need to provide additional resources for these other plans at this time.

Council staff recommendation: if the Committee recommends approval of Expedited Bill 14-18, then Council staff recommends the Committee recommend approval of the special appropriation.

This packet contains:

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Expedited Bill No. 14 -18
Concerning: Economic Development --
Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity
and Increase Opportunity
Revised: 3/22/2018 Draft No. 4
Introduced: April 3, 2018
Expires: October 3, 2019
Enacted: _____
Executive: _____
Effective: _____
Sunset Date: None
Ch. _____, Laws of Mont. Co. _____

COUNTY COUNCIL FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

Lead Sponsor: Councilmember Berliner
Co-Sponsor: Councilmember Hucker

AN EXPEDITED ACT to:

- (1) require the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity in Montgomery County, which must include certain area-specific plans;
- (2) require the Department of Health and Human Services to submit the first area-specific plan by a certain date; and
- (3) generally amend County laws related to economic development.

By renumbering

Montgomery County Code
Chapter 30B, Economic Development

By adding

Chapter 15A, Economic Development
Article III, Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity
Section 15A-15

Boldface	<i>Heading or defined term.</i>
<u>Underlining</u>	<i>Added to existing law by original bill.</i>
[Single boldface brackets]	<i>Deleted from existing law by original bill.</i>
<u>Double underlining</u>	<i>Added by amendment.</i>
[[Double boldface brackets]]	<i>Deleted from existing law or the bill by amendment.</i>
* * *	<i>Existing law unaffected by bill.</i>

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland approves the following Act:

1 **Sec. 1. Chapter 30B is renumbered and Section 15A-15 is added as**
 2 **follows:**

3 **Chapter [30B] 15A. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.**

4 **Article I. Economic Development Corporation.**

5 **[30B-1] 15A-1. Policy objectives.**

6 * * *

7 **[30B-2] 15A-2. Designation.**

8 * * *

9 **[30B-3] 15A-3. Board of Directors.**

10 * * *

11 **[30B-4] 15A-4. Status; incorporation; bylaws.**

12 * * *

13 **[30B-5] 15A-5. Economic development program.**

14 * * *

15 **[30B-6] 15A-6. Staff; support from County Government.**

16 * * *

17 **[30B-7] 15A-7. Report.**

18 * * *

19 **Article II. Workforce Development.**

20 **[30B-8] 15A-8. Policy objectives.**

21 * * *

22 **[30B-9] 15A-9. Designation.**

23 * * *

24 **[30B-10]. 15A-10 Board of Directors.**

25 * * *

26 **[30B-11] 15A-11. Status; incorporation; bylaws.**

27 * * *

28 **[30B-12] 15A-12. Workforce development program.**

* * *

[30B-13] 15A-13. Staff; support from County Government.

* * *

[30B-14] 15A-14. Report.

* * *

Article III. Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity.

15A-15. Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity.

(a) The Department of Health and Human Services must develop a Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity in the County. This Plan must include area-specific plans for each area served by the Regional Services Centers. The first area-specific plan, which must be focused on the Eastern Montgomery County area, must be submitted to the County Executive and County Council by November 15, 2018. The Strategic Plan must at least include:

- (1) demographic information on household income and household size presented both county-wide and for areas served by the Regional Service Centers by zip code or other available measurement area;
- (2) employment rates for adults and youth;
- (3) average rents and house prices;
- (4) estimates of rent-burdened households, including households paying more than 30% and 50% of income for housing;
- (5) distribution of households participating in the State's Child Care Subsidy Program and the Working Parents Assistance Program;
- (6) a review of the 2016 Report on the East County Opportunity Zone, including:

- 55 (A) revised recommendations to be implemented during Fiscal
 56 Years 2020-2022;
- 57 (B) how the revised recommendations are expected to increase
 58 the incomes of low-income households in the East County
 59 as measured by household income and the percentage of
 60 households with incomes at or above 300% of the federal
 61 poverty level; and
- 62 (C) performance measures for the recommendations and
 63 recommendations on how to measure and evaluate impacts
 64 on household prosperity;
- 65 (7) information on innovative programs and strategies that have been
 66 shown to increase the income of low-income households in the
 67 County and other jurisdictions;
- 68 (8) recommendations on how to leverage State and Federal funds and
 69 investment from private philanthropy; and
- 70 (9) a structure and timeline for developing a similar Strategic Plan in
 71 each of the other regional service center areas.
- 72 (b) In developing the Strategic Plan, the Department must consult with:
- 73 (1) individuals who have experienced living with a household
 74 income below 300% of the federal poverty level, who live in the
 75 region being addressed by the Strategic Plan;
- 76 (2) the County Department of Transportation;
- 77 (3) the County Department of Housing and Community Affairs;
- 78 (4) the County Department of Recreation;
- 79 (5) the Regional Service Center Directors;
- 80 (6) the Office of Community Partnerships
- 81 (7) Montgomery County Public Schools;

- (8) Montgomery College;
 (9) the County Planning Department
 (10) the Collaboration Council for Children, Youth, and Families;
 (11) WorkSource Montgomery;
 (12) Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation; and
 (13) organizations whose mission is to reduce and eliminate poverty
that serve the region being addressed in the Strategic Plan.

Chapter 30B. Reserved.

Sec. 2. Expedited Effective Date.

The Council declares that this Act is necessary for the immediate protection of
the public interest. This Act takes effect on the date when it becomes law.

Approved:

 Hans D. Riemer, President, County Council

 Date

Approved:

 Isiah Leggett, County Executive

 Date

This is a correct copy of Council action.

 Megan Davey Limarzi, Esq., Clerk of the Council

 Date

LEGISLATIVE REQUEST REPORT

Expedited Bill 14-18

Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity

DESCRIPTION:	Expedited Bill 14-18 would require the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity in Montgomery County which must include certain area-specific plans. It would also require the Department of Health and Human Services to submit the first area-specific plan by a certain date.
PROBLEM:	The County does not have a strategic approach to follow to promote greater economic opportunity and prosperity for residents.
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:	To promote greater economic opportunity and prosperity for County residents.
COORDINATION:	Department of Health and Human Services
FISCAL IMPACT:	To be requested.
ECONOMIC IMPACT:	To be requested.
EVALUATION:	To be requested.
EXPERIENCE ELSEWHERE:	To be researched.
SOURCE OF INFORMATION:	Amanda Mihill, Legislative Attorney, 240-777-7815
APPLICATION WITHIN MUNICIPALITIES:	N/A
PENALTIES:	N/A

Resolution No.: _____
Introduced: April 2, 2018
Adopted: _____

**COUNTY COUNCIL
FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND**

Lead sponsor: County Council

SUBJECT: Special Appropriation to the Fiscal Year 2018 Operating Budget
Montgomery County Government
Department of Health and Human Services
Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity
\$90,000 (Source of Funds: General Fund Reserves)

Background

1. Section 308 of the County Charter provides that a special appropriation is an appropriation which states that it is necessary to meet an unforeseen disaster or other emergency, or to act without delay in the public interest. Each special appropriation shall be approved by not less than six Councilmembers. The Council may approve a special appropriation at any time after public notice by news release. Each special appropriation shall specify the source of funds to finance it.
2. On April 3, 2018, the Council introduced Expedited Bill 14-18, Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity. The Bill requires the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a strategic plan and, by November 15, 2018, to forward certain elements of the plan to the Council.
3. The Department requires additional resources to develop the required plan. The Council estimates that \$90,000 will provide sufficient resources for the Department to engage any needed consultants and develop the required data.
4. On XXX, XX, 2018, the Council adopted Expedited Bill 14-18, Economic Development - Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity.
5. Notice of public hearing was given and a public hearing was held.

Action

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland approves the following resolution:

A special appropriation to the FY18 Operating Budget of the Montgomery County Government in the amount of \$90,000 is approved as follows:

	<u>Personnel Expense</u>	<u>Operating Expense</u>
Department of Health and Human Service	\$0	\$90,000

The Source of Funds is General Fund Reserves. This appropriation is needed to act without delay in the public interest.

This is a correct copy of Council action.

Megan Davey Limarzi, Esq., Clerk of the Council



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

ROGER BERLINER
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 1

CHAIRMAN
TRANSPORTATION, INFRASTRUCTURE
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM

March 30, 2018

TO: Council Colleagues

FROM: Councilmember Roger Berliner
Councilmember Tom Hucker

RE: Legislation to Create a Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity

Colleagues, we are writing to ask you to join us in co-sponsoring legislation that we are introducing next week. The goal of the bill is straight forward and one that we are confident all of us have a strong interest in achieving.

Currently, Montgomery County has the fourth lowest poverty rate in the State of Maryland. In a county as wealthy as ours, with one of the highest median household incomes in the entire country, we believe that we must do better. Our goal, at a minimum, should be to have the lowest poverty rate in the state.

We believe that the best way to lift people out of poverty is to not only maintain a strong safety net, but also promote greater ladders of opportunity for economic mobility and prosperity. That is why we worked together in creating the County's new microloan program, which will ensure that all our residents who have an idea and the work ethic to match it have a chance at fulfilling their dream. And that is why all of us have been supportive of the work that our Department of Health and Human Services and non-profit community has been doing with the East County Opportunity Zone.

However, while our county has an array of programming to address poverty, administered by various government departments and non-profit organizations, what we are lacking is a strategic approach for our county to follow as we seek to promote greater economic opportunity and prosperity for all our residents. That means our County needs a plan, a plan we own. While a plan in of itself will not eliminate poverty, we believe that plan should – at a minimum – provide recommendations on how to place more residents facing poverty on a path to greater economic success. This will require data. It will require broad input from community stakeholders and individuals who have firsthand experience with poverty. And it will require a thorough review of innovative approaches – both here in Montgomery County and across the nation – that are producing real results in moving individuals and families towards a path of greater economic self-sufficiency.

That is why we are introducing this legislation, which would mandate the creation of a strategic plan for promoting prosperity and increasing opportunity. It is modeled after the legislation that created a strategic plan to reduce hunger in our county, a plan that was well received and has put us on a positive path to achieving our

goal. It is also the outcome of three meetings with a broad array of community, non-profit, and county leaders that began six months ago focusing on our efforts to date and what we need to do going forward.

To make this plan a reality, we will be requesting that the Council approve a Special Appropriation of \$90,000 to the Department of Health and Human Services so they can contract with an outside organization to develop the plan. We would be grateful for your co-sponsorship on this legislation, which we believe is long overdue and would greatly assist in consolidating the existing efforts in our county to address the critical issue of poverty and economic opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration.

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ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

MEMORANDUM

April 30, 2018

TO: Hans Riemer, President, County Council

FROM: Jennifer A. Hughes, Director, Office of Management and Budget *JN*
Alexandre A. Espinosa, Director, Department of Finance *AE* *for JAH*

SUBJECT: FEIS for Expedited Bill 14-18 Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity

Please find attached the fiscal and economic impact statements for the above-referenced legislation.

JAH:mc

cc: Bonnie Kirkland, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
Lisa Austin, Offices of the County Executive
Joy Nurmi, Special Assistant to the County Executive
Patrick Lacefield, Director, Public Information Office
Jason Rundell, Department of Health and Human Services
JoAnn Barnes, Department of Health and Human Services
Becky Bolat, Department of Health and Human Services
Robert Hagedoorn, Department of Finance
Peter McGinnity, Department of Finance
Dennis Hetman, Department of Finance
Joshua Watters, Office of Management and Budget
Felicia Zhang, Office of Management and Budget

Fiscal Impact Statement
Expedited Bill 14-18
Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity

1. Legislative Summary

Expedited Bill 14-18 requires the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to develop a Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity in Montgomery County. The Strategic Plan must include area-specific plans for each region of the County. The first area-specific plan will be focused on the East County area and is due by November 15, 2018. The bill outlines the information the Strategic Plan must include, and who the Department must consult with.

The bill is silent regarding the timeline for the other four area-specific plans, nor does it require the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

2. An estimate of changes in County revenues and expenditures regardless of whether the revenues or expenditures are assumed in the recommended or approved budget. Includes source of information, assumptions, and methodologies used.

The cost to develop a Strategic Plan for the East County area totals \$90,000 in FY19. This amount includes: \$80,500 to hire a consultant to develop and write the Strategic Plan, and \$9,500 to convene focus groups, hold a retreat, and conduct follow-up meetings for the Plan's development.

This estimate only includes the cost to develop the Strategic Plan for the East County area, as the bill is silent on the timeline to develop plans for the remaining geographic areas. Should those plans be developed, it is assumed that the cost to develop a plan for each of the remaining four areas could be up to \$90,000 each.

3. Revenue and expenditure estimates covering at least the next 6 fiscal years.

Not applicable. See #2.

4. An actuarial analysis through the entire amortization period for each bill that would affect retiree pension or group insurance costs.

Not applicable.

5. An estimate of expenditures related to County's information technology (IT) systems, including Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems.

No additional expenditures for IT or ERP systems would be necessary; however, the consultant would need in-kind support from DTS and CountyStat in developing the Plan for the East County area.

6. Later actions that may affect future revenue and expenditures if the bill authorizes future spending.

The bill is silent on the timeline to develop plans for the remaining four geographic areas. Should those plans be developed, it is assumed that the cost to develop plans for the remaining geographic areas could be up to \$90,000 each.

7. An estimate of the staff time needed to implement the bill.

In FY19, additional staff time would be necessary to solicit a vendor to complete the plan. This solicitation could be done within the current DHHS complement.

8. **An explanation of how the addition of new staff responsibilities would affect other duties.**

Not applicable. See #7.

9. **An estimate of costs when an additional appropriation is needed.**

See #2.

10. **A description of any variable that could affect revenue and cost estimates.**

This estimate only includes the cost to develop the Strategic Plan for the East County area, as the bill is silent on the timeline to develop plans for the remaining four geographic areas. Should those plans be developed, it is ~~assumed~~ that the cost to develop plans for the remaining geographic areas could be up to \$90,000 each.

11. **Ranges of revenue or expenditures that are uncertain or difficult to project.**

Not Applicable.

12. **If a bill is likely to have no fiscal impact, why that is the case.**

Not Applicable.

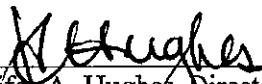
13. **Other fiscal impacts or comments.**

Due to the County's procurement processes and laws, a solicitation for the strategic plan is not feasible within FY18.

While the bill does not require the implementation of the Strategic Plan, implementing such a plan could require a part-time Program Manager II position (0.5 FTE) at an annualized cost of \$54,000 for each region of the County.

14. **The following contributed to and concurred with this analysis:**

JoAnn Barnes, Children, Youth and Family Services, DHHS
Becky Bolat, Children, Youth and Family Services, DHHS
Jason Rundell, DHHS
Joshua Watters, OMB



Jennifer A. Hughes, Director
Office of Management and Budget

4/28/18

Date

Economic Impact Statement
Bill 14-18E, Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity

Background: Bill 14-18E would require the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to develop a Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity (Strategic Plan) in the County. The legislation would require the inclusion of certain specific plans for each area served by the Regional Services Centers. Finally, Bill 14-18E would require DHHS to submit the first area-specific plan with a focus on Eastern Montgomery County to the County Executive and the County Council by November 15, 2018.

The Strategic Plan must include but not be limited to demographic information on household size and income, employment data for both adults and youth, real estate prices and rents, recommendations that are expected to increase the incomes of low-income households, and performance measures. The legislation also requires DHHS to consult with County Departments, Montgomery County Public Schools, and other organizations.

1. The sources of information, assumptions, and methodologies used.

The Department of Finance used no sources of information, assumptions, or methodologies in the preparation of the economic impact statement.

2. A description of any variable that could affect the economic impact estimates.

There are no variables that could affect the economic impact estimates. Bill 14-18E requires DHHS to prepare and submit the Strategic Plan as specified in the legislation.

3. The Bill's positive or negative effect, if any on employment, spending, savings, investment, incomes, and property values in the County.


Bill 14-18E requires DHHS to prepare and submit the Strategic Plan to the County Executive and County Council. The plan does not have a direct effect on employment, spending, savings, investment, incomes, and property values in the County. However, the recommendations proposed to increase the incomes and employment of low-income households could have a direct and positive impact on incomes in the County.

Economic Impact Statement
Bill 14-18E, Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and
Increase Opportunity

4. If a Bill is likely to have no economic impact, why is that the case?

Bill 14-18E would have no direct economic impact on the County's economy but the recommendations presented in the Strategic Plan could have a positive economic impact particularly on the incomes and employment of low-income households.

5. The following contributed to or concurred with this analysis: David Platt, Rob Hagedoorn and Peter McGinnity, Finance;



Alexandre Espinosa, Director
Department of Finance

4/18/2018
Date



Testimony submitted by Andy Burness, President, Burness

Expedited Bill 14-18, Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity

April 24, 2018

My name is Andy Burness, and I am President of Burness, a 60-person, mission-oriented communications company dedicated to helping extraordinary people tell their stories for the good of the world. We have been operating in Montgomery County for the past 32 years. All of our clients – locally, nationally, and globally -- are non-profit organizations, and much of our work is about raising the profile of people and organizations seeking to reduce poverty in one way or another.

Through this work, I have become educated about the devastating impact that poverty has on people's lives and on the economic vitality of the communities in which they live. It is for this reason that Burness is joining with Sodexo to launch Business Leaders Fighting Hunger in the coming months. And, it's why I serve on the Leadership Group of Montgomery Moving Forward, focused on early care and education as a critical component of preparing tomorrow's workforce.

Here are three data points that underscore the need for a plan to address poverty. Note that these trends are nearly universal across our country. Montgomery County is not alone, but your willingness to face and challenge them stands out.

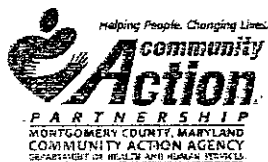
** There are more school-aged children on free and reduced meals in Montgomery County than all students who attend public school in the District of Columbia.

** Between 2005 and 2015, childhood poverty has more than doubled in Montgomery County.

** More than 70,000 county residents live below the federal poverty line, and approximately 200,000 live below 200 per cent of the federal poverty line.

I am proud to do business in a community that is committed to reducing poverty -- promoting prosperity and increasing opportunity for all. Our future literally depends on whether we answer this call. We must act now, because absent aggressive and relentless attention to poverty the County's tax base will be at risk – not to mention the profound human suffering that accompanies chronic poverty.

This plan is a start. I support Expedited Bill 14-18, and applaud Councilmembers Berliner and Hucker for having the vision to introduce it.



Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony
Bill 14-18 – Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase
Opportunity
Tuesday, April 24, 2018

Pamela Luckett
Chair, Community Action Board

Good afternoon President Riemer, Vice President Navarro and members of the Montgomery County Council.

I would like to begin by thanking Councilmember Berliner for taking the lead in this initiative, and for your collective commitment to address the needs of lower-income residents. Our Board's Vice Chair and I have appreciated the opportunity to participate in workgroup sessions with Councilmember Berliner, stakeholders, and colleagues from the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Executive Director of the Community Action Agency, and we support the development of a comprehensive strategic plan to reduce poverty and increase economic opportunity.

For over 50 years, the Community Action Board, with 1/3 of its membership comprised of low-income individuals, has advocated for policies and services that improve the lives of low-income families. While the proposed legislation does not specifically mention the Community Action Agency, the agency is in an excellent position to move the strategic plan forward.

According to its enabling legislation, attached, the agency is tasked with encouraging the use of resources to enable low-income people to become self-sufficient; reducing poverty; and making government more responsive to the needs of low-income people.¹ Likewise, the agency's mission is to reduce poverty and increase self-sufficiency among County residents through services, partnerships, and advocacy.

As a federally funded community action agency, the entity and board are mandated to conduct assessments, and to identify specific improvements, or results, to increase the well-being of individuals, families, and of the community. The agency and Board must organize its work with the goal of moving towards accomplishing these improvements, or outcomes, while linking with other agencies and partners.

¹ Community Action Agency Enabling Legislation: Montgomery County Code, Part II, Article IV, Section 27-41

A principle of Community Action is "maximum feasible participation," engaging residents most affected by the condition of poverty, those striving to attain self-sufficiency, and those who are most vulnerable, who often require public and private resources to be safe and secure.

The Board's key issues have included expanding pre-k, utilization of the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a more accurate measure of the cost of living, increasing the minimum wage, enhancing work supports, expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit, and improving access to food and nutrition programs.

Our Community Advocacy Institute was honored with a NACo Award for delivering advocacy training to low-income residents. Most of the participants have testified before you, met with you, or submitted letters to advise you of their needs, including affordable housing, early care and education, and senior issues.

Since an effective strategic plan to reduce poverty will first examine the most significant needs of residents, the Community Action Agency's extensive experience conducting needs assessments would be greatly beneficial to this process. I would like to share a few examples of how the Community Action Agency, through its services, increases economic opportunity, and engages in planning to reduce poverty:

- The agency and Board have advanced the use of the Self-Sufficiency Standard, providing dozens of trainings, including to nonprofits with contracts to serve the poor, and to the County's Boards, Committees and Commissions.
- The agency has engaged with CountyStat to launch an interactive website to better define the demographic characteristics of those living below the Standard, and earlier this month conducted a focus group with over 50 public and private providers to consider how to use the Standard with clients.
- Nationally, the Standard has been used by service providers in conjunction with a crisis to thriving scale to show progress to address a continuum of needs. Interestingly, Maryland has engaged Mathematica to promote this scale among its WIOA agencies to track the progress of clients.
- As a consortia partner with WorkSource Montgomery, CAA has provided in-kind services to increase the financial empowerment of County residents. With HHS and nonprofit colleagues, the agency's leadership participates in the development of East County Opportunity Zone services, including the development of metrics to track services and better understand their impacts, and is working with County and state leaders on developing new two-generation poverty strategies.
- The Takoma-East Silver Spring (TESS) Community Action Center delivers social services assistance to low-income residents, through on-site senior programs, the Judy Center's early learning program for children and parents three times a week, English classes, health workshops, legal assistance, summer meals, and civic engagement.
- Indeed, both TESS and Head Start have been pioneers in implementing a "2-gen" approach in service delivery, engaging consumers and stakeholders directly so programs are responsive to critical needs.

- Through a partnership with the National Hispanic Council on Aging, TESS helped to bring a two-day leadership training for seniors and caregivers, with 50 participants, which recently led to a senior planning group with Aging & Disability Services, to follow through with the recommendations.
- As the grantee for Head Start, the agency partners with low-income parents, MCPS, and stakeholders to provide governance through the Board and Policy Council, and engages them while conducting community needs assessments.
- We have collaborated with Early Childhood Services to better understand child-care needs, and with Montgomery Moving Forward.
- The agency's Head Start manager co-chairs the Early Childhood Coordinating Committee, and participates in state and regional groups to support strategic planning. She also participates in the implementation of WorkSource Montgomery's two-gen Kellogg grant.
- The agency has a long history in addressing food insecurity, providing data and delivering service, and collaborated in the development of the Food Security Plan. Today one of the agency's program managers participates on the Food Council, and is a member of the Food Recovery and Access Working Group, bringing her expertise in working with many of the nonprofit providers funded by the County.
- Our Community Action Board has joined staff and partners through forums at TESS, East County and Gaithersburg so low-income residents could generate ideas to solve problems affecting their communities.
- The Community Action Agency's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program remains the only year-round free tax preparation program, and the agency continues to lead its partners (public entities and private organizations and volunteers) to better coordinate and increase access to EITC and free tax outreach.

To sum it up, the Montgomery County Community Action Agency and Board bring great expertise and a willingness to play a key role in advancing a strategic plan, at the micro level to understand the immediate needs of residents, and at the macro level through the Board's advocacy work.

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Council and with DHHS staff to explore new and innovative approaches to reducing poverty and increasing self-sufficiency.

Montgomery County Code
Part II, Chapter 27, Article IV. Community Action Agency.

Sec. 27-40. Statement of policy.

It is the public policy of the County to promote programs to create an awareness of poverty; promote coordination among private and public agencies concerned with poverty; promote better use of existing resources and develop leadership among poor citizens to solve community problems; and develop broad community strategies to attack the basic causes of poverty. (1976 L.M.C., ch. 1, § 1; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 28, § 10; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 30, § 15; 1997 L.M.C., ch. 25, § 1.)

Sec. 27-41. Creation and organization.

(a) Established; purpose. There is a Community Action Agency within the Executive branch of the County government. The Agency creates and maintains community action programs to encourage the use of public and private resources to enable low-income people to become self-sufficient; to reduce poverty in the County; to involve the low-income population in developing and carrying out anti-poverty programs in the County; and to make government more responsive to the needs of low-income people.

(b) Governing board and staff. The community action agency consists of:

- (1) the Community Action Board; and
- (2) merit system employees of the County government, including an executive director and other staff necessary to assist the Board. The Board generally directs and supervises the staff.

(c) Board-Composition; membership.

- (1) The Community Action Board consists of not more than 24 nor less than 15 members.
- (2) At least one-third of the members must be representatives of low-income persons in the county, and one-third must be public officials or their representatives. The balance of the Board must be composed of officials or members of business, industry, labor, religious, private welfare, private education, minority, civic, and other major private organizations interested in activities of the agency.

(d) Appointment; term of office.

(1) Public Official Members. The County Executive must appoint, subject to confirmation by the County Council, officials of the County government and other public agencies in the County, or voting representatives of the officials, to serve on the Board. The Council may, in its discretion, recommend a Councilmember or other Council representative to serve on the Board. The Executive must consider for appointment public officials recommended by the Board. The Executive (who is not subject to confirmation), or the Executive's designee, is a public member of the Board. Public-official members, or their representatives:

- (A) collectively must comprise at least one-third of the membership of the Board; and
- (B) serve at the pleasure of the Executive.

(2) Private Organization Members. The Executive must appoint, subject to confirmation by the Council, representatives of the private organizations to serve on the Board. These members serve either a 1-, 2-, or 3-year term, as designated by the Executive. In appointing members under this subparagraph, the Executive must consider individuals and organizations recommended by the Board. The terms of private organization members end October 1 of the appropriate year.

(3) Low-Income Representatives.

(A) The Executive must appoint, subject to confirmation by the Council, members who represent low-income County residents. In making an appointment under this subparagraph, the Executive must consider the recommendation of the Community Action Board regarding a candidate selected by low-income County residents. Low-income representative members serve either a 1-, 2-, or 3-year term, as designated by the County Executive. The Board must recommend to the Executive an individual to fill any vacancy on the Board. The terms of all members representing low-income residents end October 1 of the appropriate year.

(B) The Board must establish a democratic procedure for low-income residents to select candidates for nomination, each of whom must live in a specific geographic area of the County. Individuals

participating in the selection of a candidate must be at least 18 years old, reside in the specific geographic area of the County, and have income that does not exceed the limits established under subparagraph (D).

(C) For each person nominated under this paragraph, the Executive must explain in writing to the Council how the nominee was selected by a democratic method designed to ensure that the nominee is representative of the poor in the area the nominee would represent.

(D) A low-income person, for the purpose of this article, is a person whose income does not exceed amounts set by Executive Order after considering the recommendations of the Board.

(4) Vacancies. Except as provided in paragraph (5), each member of the Board continues to serve after the member's term expires until the Council confirms a successor, who serves the remainder of the member's term.

(5) A private-organization member selected under paragraph (2) or a low-income representative selected under paragraph (3) must not serve on the Board for more than 5 consecutive or 10 total years.

(e) Officers of the Board. The officers of the Board are the chair, vice-chair, and secretary, elected annually by the Board under procedures adopted by the Board.

(f) Compensation. The members of the Board serve without compensation.

(g) Meetings; quorum. The Board holds meetings at regular intervals at least 6 times per year. A majority of the members of the Board is a quorum for conducting business. The Board may act on a majority vote of those present. The Board or its designated members should meet from time to time with the County Executive, the County Council, and other public officials to promote the Board's functions.

(h) Nonpartisan nature. The Community Action Agency must not participate in partisan political activities or sectarian activities. The Agency may advocate on behalf of, or discuss public issues affecting, low-income people. (1976 L.M.C., ch. 1, § 1; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 28, § 10; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 30, § 10; FY 1991 L.M.C., ch. 9, § 1; 1997, L.M.C., ch. 25, § 1; 2005 L.M.C., ch. 24, § 1; 2012 L.M.C., ch. 7, § 1.)

Editor's note-1976 L.M.C., ch. 1, from which this article was derived, became effective September 9, 1975.

Sec. 27-42. General powers and duties of Board.

To accomplish the purposes for which the Community Action Agency is established, the Community Action Board may:

- (a) Make recommendations on the initiation and development of the community action program;
- (b) Recommend to the county executive an annual budget to support the community action program and develop grant applications in support thereof;
- (c) Decide changes in the community action program within the limits of the annual budget;
- (d) Recommend expenditures within available appropriations or budgetary allocations for the community action program;
- (e) Recommend transfers between and within programs within available appropriations or budgetary allocations;
- (f) Give general advice on the administration of projects carried out in implementation of the community action program;
- (g) Accept, use and account for contributions of property and services from organizations or individuals for purposes consistent with the community action program;
- (h) Participate in recruiting and screening candidates for the position of executive director; and recommend a candidate or candidates for executive director; participate in the performance evaluation of or any personnel actions concerning the executive director;
- (i) Recommend the type and number of personnel required to staff the organization and carry out approved projects;
- (j) Adopt, amend and repeal bylaws, and adopt regulations under method (2) of section 2A-15 of this Code governing the manner in which its activities may be conducted and the powers vested in it may be exercised;
- (k) Provide advice and recommendations to the county executive, county council and other public and private agencies;

(l) Establish communications with the community concerning programs and policies affecting low-income persons;

(m) Perform all lawful actions as may be necessary or appropriate to achieve the purposes for which the community action agency is established, including the selection of low-income representatives;

(n) Carry out such operations as the county government may specifically authorize or provide. (1976 L.M.C., ch. 1, § 1; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 28, § 10; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 30, § 15; 1984 L.M.C., ch. 24, § 30; 1997, L.M.C., ch. 25, §1.)

Sec. 27-43. Committees and advisers.

(a) The Board must establish an executive committee and other subcommittees necessary to assist in performing the functions of the Board.

(b) The chair of the Board may appoint a person to advise the Board from public agencies not represented on the Board or from interested citizens in the county. An adviser may participate in meetings of the Board and the executive committee but is not entitled to vote. An adviser may serve as a member of a subcommittee and vote at subcommittee meetings. (1976 L.M.C., ch. 1, § 1; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 28, § 10; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 30, § 15; 1997, L.M.C., ch. 25, §1.)

Sec. 27-44. Authority of executive director.

The executive director may, after considering the Community Action Board's recommendations:

(a) recommend to the Chief Administrative Officer appointment of Agency staff; and

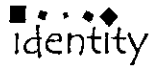
(b) authorize the expenditure of funds. (1976 L.M.C., ch. 1, § 1; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 28, § 10; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 30, § 15; 1997, L.M.C., ch. 25, §1.)

Sec. 27-45. Reports.

The Community Action Board annually must report to the County Executive, the County Council, and the public on the Board's activities. (1976 L.M.C., ch. 1, § 1; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 28, § 10; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 30, §15; 1997, L.M.C., ch. 25, §1.)

Sec. 27-46. Repeal of current resolution.

Resolution No. 6-1332, dated June 18, 1968, the current resolution establishing the community action committee, is hereby rescinded, and any section therein inconsistent with this article is hereby declared null and of no effect or force. (1976 L.M.C., ch. 1, § 1; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 28, § 10; 1977 L.M.C., ch. 30, § 15.)



Testimony submitted by Diego Uriburu, Executive Director, Identity, Inc.

Expedited Bill 14-18, Economic Development –

Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity

April 20, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Expedited Bill 14 -18 which calls for the creation of an anti-poverty strategic plan.

We applaud those who have taken the initiative to not just alleviate poverty, but to end it by creating opportunities for economic mobility and prosperity.

Promoting prosperity and increasing opportunity is vitally important to the Latino community, who make up 19% of Montgomery County's residents and 32% of the county's public school students. Thirteen percent of Montgomery County Latinos live below the poverty level as compared to 3.6% of Montgomery County Caucasians/Whites (or as compared to 7.5% of Montgomery County residents overall). Latinos also have the highest unemployment rate, and 60% of those who are employed work low wage jobs that do not offer health insurance.

We understand that the intent is to start by creating a plan focused on Eastern Montgomery County to place more poor residents on a path to self-sufficiency. We further understand that subsequent plans will be developed for each area served the County's Regional Service Centers.

We also understand that each area plan will include input from low-income residents as well as from organizations such as Identity that seek to create opportunities for low-income residents to reach their highest potential. To that end, Identity stands ready to help ensure that the voice of the Latino community is heard and reflected in the plan(s) and to share culturally competent, proven strategies to create "greater economic opportunity and prosperity for residents".

Thank you again for focusing attention on reducing poverty in Montgomery County, MD.



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www.iworksmc.org

**Testimony of Shane Rock, CEO of Interfaith Works
Expedited Bill 14-18, Economic Development –
Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and
Increase Opportunity
Montgomery County Council
April 24, 2018**

Good afternoon, Council President Riemer, and Council members.

Two years ago this week, Interfaith Works announced a goal of leading Montgomery County in becoming the lowest poverty rate county in Maryland. Setting that goal enabled us to quantify the number of people living in households earning less than the Federal Poverty Line who would have to move above the line to achieve the goal in a given year. Two years ago, Montgomery County had the sixth lowest poverty rate in the State. The latest American Community Survey estimates released last September revealed a lower poverty rate in the county, and improvement to the fourth lowest poverty rate in the State. Some 7,000 of our neighbors were estimated to have moved out of poverty between 2015 and 2016. We're hopeful that the next release in September will show continued improvement in 2017.

Of course, in this expensive place, earning more than the poverty level is far from enough to afford to live here. Sustained economic mobility for families earning less than about 300% of the Federal Poverty Line is absolutely essential for those families to be able to afford Montgomery County.

Expedited Bill 14-18 is an important step in better defining our community's future efforts to foster greater economic opportunity for our lower income residents living in high poverty geographic pockets. By focusing on data collection in East County in concert with ongoing East County Opportunity Zone efforts, this Bill will gather necessary information to make good resource investment decisions in the East County area. Interfaith Works supports this strategic planning effort.

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**TESTIMONY OF MANNA FOOD CENTER
OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND**

**BEFORE THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ON EXPEDITED BILL 14-18, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-STRATEGIC PLAN
TO PROMOTE PROSPERITY AND INCERASE OPPORTUNITY**

APRIL 24, 2018

Good afternoon, my name is Mitchell Glassman, Board Member of Manna Food Center. I appreciate the opportunity to present our testimony before the Council. The proposed legislation to create a strategic plan to help reduce poverty in Montgomery County is a timely next step by leadership to move the needle on this issue. We thank you for your efforts.

As you know, Manna has been a partner to the community for more than three decades. Our origins reflect the shared efforts of community, civic and faith leaders to eliminate hunger in Montgomery County – and our history is just as remarkable as the people we serve. Manna has made a concerted effort of mobilizing partners throughout the community in order to provide food to approximately 32,000 of the estimated 60-70,000 residents who are experiencing hunger and food insecurity in our county. Even though the economic recovery has helped many in the county reach food security, there are still too many of our neighbors who do not always know where their next meal will be coming from.

When Manna endorsed our ambitious 2017-2020 Strategic Plan, we reaffirmed our Mission, “to strive to eliminate hunger through food distribution, education, and advocacy”. Through a grass roots planning process, Manna articulated an ambitious new vision: “Our Community is a place where all people at all times have access to safe, sufficient, nutritious food in order to lead fulfilling lives and contribute to making Montgomery County, Maryland a place where all live in dignity.”

I am proud that Manna and its network advocated strongly for Montgomery County to create its own Strategic Plan for Food Security. Manna was honored to serve on the Advisory Committee that drafted this plan. Much of the County’s objectives complement our own strategic blueprint.

Manna is a trusted partner of Montgomery County, and has witnessed first-hand tens of thousands of our neighbors who are food insecure and live in poverty, many without hope. Manna’s own strategic research shows pockets of need exist amid the great wealth in Montgomery County. The pockets of poverty are getting broader and deeper, part of a “suburbanization of poverty” that demographers say is happening throughout the United States.



We strongly believe, similar to the Montgomery County Food Security Plan, that a concerted effort by Montgomery County to develop a well-researched, community coordinated, and Council supported strategic plan to promote greater ladders of opportunity for economic mobility and prosperity for our residents living in poverty is long overdue. Manna is doing its part by taking a leadership role in building our presence and non-profit coalition in East County which closely aligns with the Department of Health and Human Services East County Opportunity Zone initiative.

In conclusion, I leave you with this quote from Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd President of the United States, ***"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."***

Manna Food Center strongly supports Expedited Bill 14-18.



April 24, 2018
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: Expedited Bill 14-18, Economic Development – Strategic Plan to Promote Prosperity and Increase Opportunity

Dear Montgomery County Council Members:

As the association representing nonprofit organizations of all sizes serving Montgomery County we greatly appreciate the importance of promoting prosperity and increasing opportunity for our residents and appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on expedited Bill 14-18.

The proposed legislation is admirable in its intent. Nonprofit Montgomery supports the concept and proposes, for your consideration, amendments that may strengthen the strategic planning process and subsequent recommendations and actions to promote prosperity in the county.

Make explicit the need to engage nonprofit organizations and other service providers from multiple sectors. Inter-sector and cross-sector work is central to the goal of reducing poverty. While we appreciate the recognition of the important contributions WorkSource Montgomery and the Collaboration Council for Children, Youth, and Families have to offer to this process, there are notable omissions from other sectors such as food security, affordable housing, health care, and legal assistance, to name a few. In Montgomery County a complex web of government and nonprofit organizations work in concert to address the burdens of poverty; yet, many of their missions are not specifically to “eliminate poverty” and therefore, as the legislation is currently crafted, could be left out of this important planning process.

Clarify the process and timeframe for creating similar plans for other regions. Areas of deep poverty exist in many different parts of Montgomery County and the dynamics and nuances of each region are different. We agree that each region should have an area-specific plan to increase opportunity in that area; however, there is little clarity about how the same rigor used in developing the East County area-specific plan will be applied in other regions. We respectfully recommend adding timelines for the creation of other region specific plans, including both targets for identifying the existing region specific research and stakeholders to be engaged and targets for completing each area specific plan. Adding these targets in the legislation, rather than waiting for a proposed work plan at a future date, will ensure the momentum of the planning process continues after the completion of the East County plan so that all area-specific plans are completed in a reasonable timeframe and can be analyzed together for cross-regional trends.

About us: Nonprofit Montgomery is an alliance of leaders of nonprofit organizations serving Montgomery County, Maryland. We represent the collective voice of nonprofits of all sizes, and work to strengthen nonprofit organizations, increase the visibility of their work and impact in the community, and advocate on behalf of nonprofits and the community members they serve. Our stakeholders include thousands of community volunteers, nonprofit board members and staff, and the multitude of county residents served by member organizations.

Addressing poverty is complex. Nonprofit Montgomery appreciates this move to look strategically at what can be done to increase opportunities for under resourced residents of Montgomery County and we are pleased to offer these comments for consideration by the Council and look forward to working with the Council, DHHS and other County Agencies, and our community stakeholders to increase opportunity for all residents.

Sincerely,

Lesley J. MacDonald
Interim Executive Director

A WIDER CIRCLE

A unique, holistic approach to ending poverty

April 24, 2018

Montgomery County Council Testimony

Good afternoon,

We may be tempted to say that today there are approximately 70,000 residents living in poverty here, but that does not nearly tell the story of need in Montgomery County. For example, we have 183,091 people living below 200% of the poverty line (or \$41,560 for a family of three), which is far below what is needed to raise a family here, and we have 297,310 residents living below 300% of the poverty line, which is still below what you would need to raise your family at a self-sufficiency level in this county.

Nearly 300,000 residents are not fully independent, but if you want to just talk about that inaccurate line that we use to measure poverty, we know that today, we have 22,731 more residents living below the poverty line in Montgomery County than we did in the year 2000. And when we analyze data at the census tract level, we see that the number of neighborhoods that could be categorized as high poverty has skyrocketed.

We have gone from having zero census tracts with a 20% poverty rate to five within the last 16 years. The number of census tracts with a 16% poverty rate has gone from only three to an alarming 14!

Poverty Rate Neighborhoods in 2000 Neighborhoods in 2016

> 20%	0	5
> 18%	0	11
> 16%	3	14

Why?

Those with the greatest vulnerability have not been our greatest priority. It is the age-old problem of contribution versus commitment, and what we clearly need - and on what we would insist if our children were in poverty - is the latter.

As a county, pockets of poverty and inequality persist: if we do not change this, our residents now living in poverty are vulnerable to becoming entrenched in generational poverty.

We can prevent this by increasing programming and services in a targeted fashion. It is true that there are many great programs here, with people doing excellent work. It is also true that this is not enough, and that we should not feel content with our approach to date.

At A Wider Circle, we continually analyze and improve our programs because we believe in having strong outcomes. We recently developed a neighborhood program that has been implemented in Washington DC, and while it is still early, we are beginning to see positive results such as a growing number of adults who have gone from chronic unemployment to sustainable work and more and more children who had nothing to do now engaging in community activities.

We have been asked to replicate the program in other neighborhoods throughout the region.

We have also developed an individualized approach that we are rolling out right now. We have studied and consulted with programs across the country and concluded that the results have, up to this point, not been enough. That is why this program will combine the best of our workforce development, health and wellness, and wraparound support programs - and place staff members in partnership with families. Together, they will develop long-term plans that help them gain greater stability and support as they move toward independence.

Having both neighborhood programs and individualized support programs is imperative for this county, as many families do not live in high-concentration neighborhoods but need support just the same.

That is why I support any effort we can make to shine a brighter light on poverty and move us as a county from poverty management to poverty eradication.

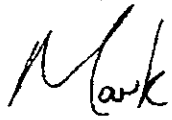
There is no question that we have the resources and skills to accomplish this. It is simply about our will, our belief that ending poverty is possible. Belief is critical to accomplishment. As Ibram Kendi so eloquently put it, "pessimism and cynicism are the kryptonite of change."

When people ask me if I really think we can end poverty; can we really ensure that every neighborhood is safe and filled with opportunities, I always ask in return:

What is okay for your child? And if poverty is not okay for your child, why is it okay for any child?

This can be a special moment for us; I hope we seize it.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark". The letter "M" is large and stylized, with the "ark" written in a smaller, cursive script.

Mark Bergel, Ph.D.
Founder and President
A Wider Circle