Montgomery County Community Action Board's Priorities

County Council HHS Committee Boards, Committees, and Commissions Meeting
October 21, 2026

DaVida Rowley, Chair

Thank you for the opportunity to share the priorities of the Community Action Board, the County's federally, state, and locally designated anti-poverty body. The Board oversees the Community Action Agency and the County's Head Start program. Both are part of a nationwide network of Community Action Agencies dedicated to reducing poverty and increasing economic mobility in their communities . We support residents in reaching the Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard, which 2025 data sets at $158,349 for a family of four consisting of two adults, an infant, and a preschooler[1]—almost five times the Federal Poverty Level. The agency's programs include the Takoma-East Silver Spring (TESS) Community Action Center, Navigation Unit, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), contract and grant monitoring, and MCPS Cluster Projects. The Board's Community Advocacy Institute is beginning its eleventh year with 35 participants in the 2026–2027 cohort and close to 200 graduates since the start of the program.

Today, we ask the Council to address two urgent priorities affecting residents served by the Community Action Agency. These priorities remain unchanged from FY26 because federal actions continue to cause significant harm. First, immigrants in our community need stronger protections and support. Community Action programs continue to receive inquiries daily from community members who fear immigration enforcement. We appreciate the Council's efforts to safeguard the County's immigrant community and stand ready to support further action.

Recent policy developments have placed additional strain on immigrant residents. In addition to the daily threats confronting undocumented neighbors, new restrictions on lawful residents—including the end of Temporary Protected Status for people from Haiti and El Salvador coupled with reduced Medicaid and SNAP eligibility for refugees and other immigrant groups—have heightened hardship and uncertainty. We expect more residents to seek County assistance and we continue to encourage the Council to prioritize funding for immigration legal

[1] Self-Sufficiency Standard

services and programs that provide food, housing, health care, and other basic needs for those impacted.

We are highly concerned about a proposal to exclude certain lawfully present immigrants from tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit. Those affected could include people with Temporary Protected Status, asylum applicants authorized to work, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, and others. Our Board has consistently supported tax credits for residents with modest incomes because the EITC, Child Tax Credit, and related credits are among the strongest tools for reducing poverty. If federal access to these benefits is restricted, we ask the Council to consider expansions of local credits like the Working Families Income Supplement that are available for all income eligible filers, regardless of immigration status.

We are also troubled by a proposal to add a citizenship question to Form 1040, which is already causing anxiety and confusion before tax season. The Community Action Agency's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program remains available to all filers, including those who use an ITIN, and will continue sharing accurate information. Last year, the program generated nearly $8.9 million in free tax impact for County residents through refunds, tax credits, and estimated savings on paid preparation services. We ask the Council to consider funding an outreach campaign to counter the likely chilling effect of this unprecedented change in tax filing.

Our second priority is the broad impact of changes to federally funded programs. This month, thousands of residents lost SNAP and Medicaid coverage because of tighter eligibility rules for lawful residents and new work requirements for many SNAP participants. Additional cuts are expected next year, when more than 1 million immigrants nationwide could lose Affordable Care Act plan subsidies and Medicare coverage.[2] These programs are essential to many of our neighbors. We expect the changes to worsen food insecurity and health outcomes across the County while also increasing pressure related to housing, utilities, mental health, and other needs. We ask the Council to expand support for free County clinics, food distribution, eviction prevention, emergency utility assistance, and free behavioral health services.

Finally, the Board is closely watching proposed revisions to Head Start. We fear these changes would fundamentally undermine the quality and identity of programs nationwide. Eliminating core features—including teacher certification standards, bilingual education support, and parent participation—would weaken a program with a strong record of success. If current federal regulations are rescinded, we ask the Council to help maintain existing standards so the

[2] Over 100,000 lawful immigrants are losing Medicaid coverage as 'Big Beautiful Bill' cuts begin

County's Head Start program can continue delivering high-quality early childhood education to local children.

Thank you for considering our priorities. We value our continued partnership with the County Council as we work together to support neighbors experiencing economic hardship.