



**Howard County Council Public Hearing Testimony
July 18, 2016
CB 50-2016, Multi-Year Grant Agreement for Nonprofit Center**

On behalf of the Association of Community Services and our hundred plus member organizations, I strongly encourage you to support CB 50-2016. As you may know, over the past 17 years there have been several attempts to create such a center where multiple service providers are co-located and can offer a range of services to residents in need all in one location. A variety of factors have coalesced to make this current effort the most successful so far. An important factor is the willingness of County Government to support the Center. This legislation providing a rent subsidy, along with the start-up funds, is critical for the Center to be successful. The guarantee of a subsidy for the 10-year duration of the lease will provide the support necessary to help make rent at the Nonprofit Center affordable for participating nonprofit organizations, and provide them with the assurance that this will be available for the entirety of the 10-year lease.

ACS has been the champion for the development of the Nonprofit Center. We believe that bringing together our nonprofit service providers will both improve the capacity of these organizations to provide services effectively and efficiently, and allow transportation-challenged residents to access multiple providers and address multiple needs in a single location. Moreover, the Center will set the stage for more coordinated responses to residents with complex needs.

Over the past three years, ACS, with support from County Government and the Horizon Foundation, has worked with consultants from the international Nonprofit Center Network to determine the feasibility of establishing a center in Howard County, and consultants from Howard County's Synthesis, Inc. to help us determine the size and features required in the space based on the needs of the organizations who had expressed interest in becoming tenants. A commercial real estate broker assisted us in identifying properties that meet these requirements and offer both a central location that is served by public transportation and the opportunity for growth. This effort has been aided significantly by the efforts of the Housing Commission that has offered to serve as Master Tenant and has provided expertise in the development phase of this project. Howard County Government has been very supportive throughout this project, recognizing the opportunity to provide a more coordinated and accessible approach to serving residents in need.

There are currently 11 organizations that have expressed an interest in occupying the Nonprofit Center on a full-time basis. There are additional organizations that are exploring a part-time presence at the Center, and others that have expressed interest in securing space at a later date for programs that are in their infancy.

Occupancy at the Nonprofit Center is completely voluntary. Organizations choosing to be part of this Center are doing so to better meet the needs of their clients and their staffs. The decision to locate at the Nonprofit Center will be made by the Board of Directors for each organization.

The Center's location at 9770 Patuxent Woods Drive in Columbia provides some distinct advantages. It is centrally located in the County and is well-served by public transportation. There are several buildings that are being vacated adjacent to 9770 that will allow for growth. Efforts are being made to bring the Department of Social Services to this location and it is our hope that the Center will become the human services hub for the county.

Fortunately, we are not recreating the wheel, we are following the example of many other jurisdictions in developing the Nonprofit Center. ACS belongs to the Nonprofit Center Network, which provides a forum to communicate with and learn from the over 390 centers that have already chosen this model of service delivery. Data collected from these existing centers clearly demonstrate the advantages of this model for both staff and clients.

Improving the capacity and sustainability of Howard County nonprofit organizations, and helping them better serve the needs of their clients, are the core goals of ACS. We know that the County also shares these goals. We ask that you support the next steps in the development of the Nonprofit Center by voting to approve CB 50-2016.

Joan Driessen
Executive Director