

EMBARGOED UNTIL November 16, 2021 at 6:00 P.M.

Progress Together, Through Adversity

Acknowledgements and Welcome

Good evening and welcome. It's an incredible honor and privilege to serve as your Howard County Executive. I want to thank all of you for your support, those who are watching at home and here at the Applied Physics Laboratory.

The fact that we are gathered here in this space together represents the transformative progress we've made over the last 20 months.

I also want to say thank you to my family, distinguished guests and all the Howard County employees here tonight and watching at home. I appreciate your work and tireless efforts to move Howard County forward.

Introduction - Progress together, Through Adversity

Over the last three years, I've been proud of what our community has accomplished together. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, our resilience has never wavered. Though we are not immune to challenging times, the state of Howard County remains strong.

We have made progress together, through adversity. We have invested in our schools, become a regional leader in protecting our environment, built inclusive and accessible infrastructure, grown more innovative, and advanced the health and well-being for our residents of all ages and abilities.

Recently, Howard County was *one* of only four communities in our nation to win the prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 'Culture of Health Prize' for our commitment to the well-being and improved life outcomes of our residents.

At its core, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation works with communities across the nation to build a Culture of Health that is rooted in equity and advancing the common cause of better health for all.

After almost 20 months since our first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Howard County and the 268 lives lost that we still mourn, the pandemic has tested our strength; but our response and recovery efforts have been swift and significant.

As of today, 96% of our residents 12 and over have received at least one shot. Our data-informed and people-driven strategy has been regarded as among the best in the state and the nation.

Please join me in thanking the Health Department, first responders, healthcare workers and hundreds of volunteers across our County who have been on the front lines of the pandemic from day one. Their tremendous efforts and perseverance brought us to where we are now.

This time last year, I announced the formation of the HoCo Rise Collaborative. Nine months into the pandemic, I knew that we needed an early roadmap to ensure we emerged from this crisis stronger.

This initiative was organized into five workgroups which proposed recommendations that helped us create our own roadmap to recovery.

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I want to thank former Howard County Executive Ken Ulman for his commitment to this effort and bringing together some of the best and brightest industry leaders in our county.

Throughout the pandemic, we provided more than \$20 million in grants to *nearly 2,000* businesses across the county. From restaurants, farms, childcare, nonprofits and arts venues, these grants helped sustain these vital entities in our community.

I want to especially thank Larry Twele and our Economic Development Authority, Amanda Hoff and our team at Visit Howard County and Leonardo McClarty along with the entire Chamber of Commerce.

Each of their teams worked closely with us to help ensure those grants were quickly deployed to our small, local businesses, especially to those most in need.

Through these grants we were able to support businesses across many sectors, including more than 571 childcare providers who received nearly \$4.3 million in grants, helping to keep the industry afloat and serving our families.

Ready and Successful Students

Howard County continues to be one of the best places to live and grow in our nation in part because of our incredible educational opportunities.

After over a year of virtual learning, students and educators are now back in school buildings full-time, learning and growing and again, making progress together, through adversity.

We could not have gotten to this point without the parents, guardians and loved ones who transformed into educators overnight, turned their dining room tables into virtual learning spaces and often sacrificed productivity at their jobs to help with classwork.

Our educators have served as a lifeline to our students and community throughout this period of uncertainty. We know that many of our educators are exhausted and overwhelmed, working through their own anxiety while trying to help our kids feel safe and comfortable in addition to maintaining their own families.

Over the last three years, I'm proud that we have provided record funding for the Howard County Public School System. Although we have exceeded the state-mandated Maintenance of Effort funding level by an average of more than \$5.8 million annually, we know there is much more work to be done.

We are committed to long-term investments in supporting the needs of our educators and schools throughout Howard County. Which is why I am announcing nearly \$2 million in funding for enhanced mental health services in our schools.

In partnership with the Horizon Foundation, the Kahlert Foundation, and the Howard County Public School System, all 78 of our schools will now have direct access to a social worker.

We are committed to strengthening linkages to community-based mental health resources.

For far too long, our schools have remained overcrowded which is why we have allocated an average of over \$58 million annually for capital projects and systemic renovations.

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Our current capital budget includes nearly \$60 million to support the construction of the top three priority projects of our school system: Hammond High School, Talbot Springs Elementary and the new High School #13 in Jessup. When completed, High School #13 will be the first new high school constructed in Howard County since 2005.

By the end of 2023, the completion of these three projects will create additional capacity for nearly 2,400 of our students which will aid us in lowering our class sizes for students and educators.

This past fiscal year, we also worked with the Board of Education to ensure that High School #14 in Elkridge would be reinstated into the Capital Budget Long-Range Master Plan.

Moreover, I'm grateful for our partnership with our State Delegation and their support of the Built to Learn Act, which is anticipated to provide more than \$145 million in State Aid for school construction projects over the next 10 years in Howard County.

To alleviate school overcrowding, we also invested \$5.75 million to secure 10 acres of land to bring a new elementary school to Turf Valley.

Though the need for this school was identified by our school system as far back as 2016, little had been done to advance this effort prior to 2019. Working with our school system and our County Council, we secured \$4 million and negotiated agreements to take ownership of this land, allowing us to successfully close on the property this past July.

In this year's School System's operating budget, we also fully funded the Board of Education's request for special education and instruction.

Allocations for special education have increased by more than \$28 million over the last three years. In fact, we have increased special education funding by nearly \$10 million more than over the previous four years combined.

Our educators have continued to support our children despite challenging circumstances throughout the pandemic, and we are committed to showing our appreciation for their dedication to continually improving the state of our County both now and into the future.

We have placed an emphasis on confronting our County's fiscal challenges head on by addressing our School System's Health Fund Deficit, which sat at nearly \$40 million.

In July, we were able to announce that we had eliminated this deficit and turned it into a surplus of over \$5 million. This was made possible by our partnership and shared efforts with Superintendent Dr. Michael Martirano and our school system.

Beyond our significant investments in pre- K through 12th grade, our support for community institutions like our nationally ranked and award-winning Howard County Library System and Howard Community College are vital to creating and retaining life-long learners.

And I want to congratulate my longtime friend Dr. Kate Hetherington on her recent retirement from HCC. I'm so appreciative for our partnership and our shared dedication to improving the educational outcomes for all students.

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Dr. Heatherington's leadership and legacy will have a lasting impact on HCC for generations to come as we move toward a brighter future. I would also like to welcome HCC's new President, Dr. Daria Willis and want to say thank you to Lynn Coleman for serving as Interim President. Lynn, would you please stand to be recognized?

At our Howard County Library System, we've been hard at work to ensure equal access to resources throughout the pandemic.

To encourage life-long learning, last year we committed \$550,000 to renovate our Glenwood Library Branch. We can't wait to show you the improvements in just a few weeks that includes larger classrooms, a new café area, a passport office, an outdoor space, and much more.

I want to thank our President and CEO of the Howard County Library System Tonya Aikens for being instrumental in keeping our community connected.

These valuable community partners continue to ensure these resources remain accessible to our entire community.

We have continued to invest and facilitate learning, including about our own communities past.

The Harriet Tubman School will serve as a historic, educational and cultural space. Our investments over the years reflect our commitment to learning from our past and creating an even brighter future, full of more opportunity for all.

We have expanded initiatives to effectively and efficiently address achievement gaps and academic opportunity.

In 2019, we launched our Strategies to Reach an Inclusive Vision and Equitable Solutions or, HoCo Strives initiatives- to help address the learning gaps that families in some of our more vulnerable communities face.

We now invested approximately \$1.5 million for HoCo STRIVES to expand social and emotional learning supports for our most vulnerable students. This included our Summer Scholars program, which helps middle school students prepare for high school and provides them with academic and social emotional skills. This past summer alone, we served nearly 200 students most in need. One student recently stated, "this program brought much needed hope back into my life."

We know that empowering students and families means providing necessary resources and services to meet the challenges they face. And we will continue to progress together, through adversity.

Head Start, an early childhood education program, is another valuable way we can help our vulnerable children have access to critical learning at a young age. This summer, we proudly opened a new location in the Long Reach Village Center growing our capacity from initially serving 38 children to nearly 80. I've spent time with these incredibly bright students who are in an inclusive and productive environment enabling them to grow into our leaders of tomorrow.

This effort would not have been possible without the leadership of Dr. Bauder and the Community Action Council's President, Bitia Dayhoff.

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Over the last 32 years, Bitia has tirelessly dedicated her efforts to supporting some of our most vulnerable neighbors. Throughout the pandemic, the CAC continued to provide critical support and distributed 1.3M meals to more than 53,000 of our neighbors. Bitia, would you please stand and be recognized. Although her official retirement isn't effective until June of next year, I know she will work until the very last second assisting our residents in need.

Thriving and Healthy Residents

Access to affordable health care has remained a priority for me. In Annapolis, I've advocated for bipartisan, solutions to support our vision of healthy communities for all.

The Maryland Health Equity Resources Act will now provide \$15 million in statewide resources and grants to reduce health disparities, improve health outcomes, and expand access to primary care by establishing the Pathways to Health Equity Fund.

Additionally, working with a bipartisan coalition of regional leaders, we *now* have the state's first prescription drug affordability board which will help reduce the high costs of necessary and life-saving medications.

We all know a family member, friend, or neighbor with a mental health disorder or challenges with substance misuse. We increased the availability of treatment services for those struggling with addiction or with mental illness. We have comprehensively addressed the continuum of care that has been so badly needed for years.

We are making progress together which is why we are growing our Mobile Crisis Teams to ensure 24/7 coverage for anyone who finds themselves in an emergency mental health situation. I'd like to thank Dr. Mariana Izraelson of Grassroots and the Howard County Police Department who lead this effort.

This pandemic has taken a major emotional toll on all of us. Some of us are experiencing grief or feeling overburdened. These initiatives will help to address the gap in mental health services available to our residents particularly at this time when more than 1 out of 3 adults in our nation report feeling anxious or depressed.

Last month, we announced a record \$1.5 million investment of County dollars in our residential treatment facilities to create a safe and accessible continuum of care for those recovering from substance use disorders.

Over the next three years, Sheppard Pratt, Hilda's Place and Howard House will be using these funds to hire case managers and peer support specialists and implement reliable transportation services so clients can maintain their appointments and be connected to care more easily.

We also recently completed our residential continuum of care with the opening of Sheppard Pratt's new campus in Elkridge, which contains 17 medically managed detox beds for people with co-occurring mental health challenges.

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We believe that ensuring access to a full spectrum of housing affordability is another way we can help residents and families thrive. We have made significant progress on making Howard County an affordable and accessible community.

Co-chaired by Bill McCormack Jr. and Dr. Caroline Harper, we established the Housing Opportunities Master Plan Task Force to develop Howard County's first housing master plan in more than a decade.

In April, the taskforce released its recommendations which included strategies to improve the availability, accessibility, affordability and diversity of our housing stock. I want to sincerely thank Bill, Caroline and the entire taskforce for its dedication to such a critical issue in our community.

Last year, we broke ground on Robinson Overlook, a 48-unit mixed income rental housing development incorporating units reserved for residents with disabilities. Robinson Overlook is a perfect example of the transformative change that can happen in communities when federal, state and local governments work together.

And I want to thank members of the Howard County Council for recently approving the Roslyn Rise project. This 94-unit mixed-income project that will expand affordable housing opportunities and housing for our neighbors, including those with developmental disabilities.

To date, Howard County is number one in the state for getting rental relief and mortgage assistance funding into the hands of our residents in need. Despite this progress, many of our residents over the course of the pandemic have faced housing insecurity. As of today, our Department of Housing and Community Development and partners have served nearly 1,800 households and distributed more than \$14 million in rental and mortgage relief funding for those facing housing insecurity.

Even as individuals face personal adversity, as a community, we will continue to make progress together.

Safe and Engaged Communities:

Supporting our neighbors in need translates to creating safe and secure environments and I remain dedicated to ensuring the safety of our entire community.

I'm proud of community heroes like our Howard County Park Rangers Tabitha and Ian, who saved two lives in Rockburn Park this year by administering Narcan and first aid to two people experiencing drug overdoses. This year, Narcan was administered in every case of a non-fatal overdose.

These incredible acts of character and courage showcase the best of Howard County and our commitment to each other's safety.

This summer, we launched the Communications Initiated Referral to Crisis (CIRC), a dispatch diversion program which connects those who dial 911 for mental health crisis to a trained professional at Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center.

Tech Corporal and Wellness Coordinator, Meghann Holloway is a 20-year HCPD veteran who led the dispatcher trainings and implementation. Just 3 weeks ago, we hosted a roundtable with Senator Van Hollen to discuss this program and the need to expand federal resources for more services and trainings.

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Not only did this initiative win a National Association of Counties award, but Howard County is currently the *only* jurisdiction in the state to have instituted this program.

Meghann's commitment to creating a community-focused response for our residents in need is prime example of our law enforcement's drive to enhance relationships with the community it serves.

I want to thank our Police Chief Lisa Myers, State's Attorney Rich Gibson and our Sheriff Marcus Harris for their consistent partnership and dedication to public safety.

While serving on the County Council, I supported legislation in 2015 that tasked the Citizens Advisory Council to examine best practices in community policing that would foster positive and transparent outcomes.

One of those recommendations was the implementation of the body-worn camera program.

In 2017, challenges to implementing the program were cited as cost, personnel and equipment procurement.

After collaboratively addressing the implementation challenges during the last three years, I was proud to sign legislation last month to fulfil my commitment to fully fund the Body Worn Camera program.

Over the next year, the Howard County Police Department, State's Attorney's Office and the Sheriff's Office, will closely collaborate to implement this program which will uphold best practices in law enforcement, foster transparency and continue to strengthen relationships with our community.

I want to thank Police Chief Lisa Myers. After 31 years of service to the Howard County Police Department and our community, she will be retiring at the end of this month.

When I appointed Chief Myers in 2019, not only was she the first African American and first woman to hold this position, she was also the best person for the job. I want to thank her for joining us virtually.

Because of her leadership, we made progress together and have now seen declines in most major crime categories and continue to be considered one of the safest places in our Nation.

Reliable/Accessible Infrastructure

For our residents to be safe and *feel safe* – we also must ensure our infrastructure is finally prepared to handle intense weather conditions.

After a flash flood in 2011 and then subsequent flash floods in 2016 and 2018, we developed a comprehensive, multi-phase strategic plan to address flooding in Ellicott City.

The Ellicott City Safe and Sound plan includes storm water retention and flood prevention projects to reduce floodwater in Historic Ellicott City and surrounding areas.

We have continued to make substantial progress and I'd like to thank our Department of Public Works for its diligent work to get these projects completed.

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This past August, it was an honor to host Governor Hogan and members of our State Delegation to break ground on the EC Safe and Sound Flood Mitigation Pond. The H7 pond is a critical component of this project.

Last month, we were able to secure approval of the Quaker Mill Pond project from the Maryland Board of Public Works, which will allow us to break ground in the coming weeks.

I'd like to thank Senator Guy Guzzone, Senator Katie Fry Hester, Delegate Courtney Watson and the entire State Delegation for its continued partnership as these projects move forward.

Additionally, we recently received approval from our Historic Preservation Commission for the partial demolition of 6 buildings on lower Main Street. This approval will allow us to address channel constriction issues in Old Ellicott City.

Our Office of Transportation is rapidly advancing the implementation of Complete Streets beyond the initial projects that have already been constructed in Savage and at the intersection of Guilford and Oakland Mills Road.

Through the hard work of our Complete Streets Advisory Team of County Departments and community stakeholders, the County Council will be considering the first-ever Complete Streets Design Manual. This document will incorporate national best practices and proven methods to accommodate all users and increase the safety of our roadways.

And thanks to our State Delegation, we secured over \$5 million in funding to design an Alternate Bike Route for MD 32; a Patapsco Greenway connection in Elkridge; and construct 4 pedestrian safety improvement projects along Route 1.

Accessible infrastructure goes beyond streets and buildings and extends to our parks and playgrounds as well. This past summer, we opened Blandair Regional Park's "Play-for-All" playground, intentionally designed for our children with disabilities.

The park includes ADA accessible equipment, non-verbal communication boards, fencing, sunshades and more. It is befitting to name this one-of-a-kind community space "Laura's Place," in remembrance of Laura Wetherald, our former Bureau Chief in the Department of Recreation and Parks who sadly passed away this February. Laura served as a dedicated advocate for the developmentally disabled in our community and helped make this project possible.

Just in the last two weeks, we unveiled two more inclusive playgrounds at Savage and Centennial Parks that include imagination tables, a sensory panel, braille and multiple music stations. These inclusive spaces truly bring people together and encourage our children and families of all ages and abilities to play together.

Clean and Sustainable Environment:

As we continue to make progress together, we work earnestly to remain a regional environmental leader. Our world faces an uphill battle to combat climate change, but here in Howard County we're

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leading the way and demonstrating how to make an impact at the local level. We are building a more resilient tomorrow.

Last year, we passed the strongest forest conservation law in Maryland to mitigate the loss of natural lands. This law hadn't been updated in Howard County since the 1990s, and we had been out of compliance with State law for years.

Now, 75% of trees replaced must be within a development project site and incentives are provided to encourage tree planting in the watershed and other areas that need it the most. As a community, we have worked together over the last three years to plant more than 53,000 trees, including giving away more than 4,000 trees for residents to plant on their properties.

Trees are some of the most effective tools we have to capture carbon and combat climate change. However, we must also shift to clean energy like solar.

Earlier this year, we broke ground in Howard County on Maryland's largest solar power purchase agreement. Thanks to the incredible work of our Office of Community Sustainability and Department of Planning and Zoning, this agreement will generate a monumental 44 million kilowatt-hours a year.

This will cover more than 50% of the County's energy usage and is the equivalent of taking nearly 7,000 cars off the road. The 11 solar projects will be on County-owned facilities and private property, including local businesses and farms.

We are taking energy independence seriously and we will keep our progress moving forward.

With 187 electric and hybrid vehicles in our police department, we now have the largest green fleet in the state. We have the ambitious goal of replacing every vehicle possible to electric or hybrid vehicles by 2025.

Not to mention, we expect to save more than \$200,000 a year, and are reducing fuel consumption by more than 85,000 gallons annually.

Our efforts to create a clean and sustainable environment put Howard County at the forefront in its fight against climate change and puts us on track to meet our aggressive renewable energy goals.

Innovative/Efficient Gov.

During COVID-19, our departments had to quickly mobilize and address the issues of today and embrace the opportunities of tomorrow. We have been and will continue to be innovators.

This year, many dedicated public servants working in and with Howard County Government received a record-breaking 27 NACo awards across 16 departments, bringing our grand total to 38 awards over the last 3 years. These awards highlight jurisdictions implementing effective, innovative solutions and operating efficiently.

These well-deserved awards are a testament to the tireless dedication of our employees especially during COVID-19 and beyond. A few of the award highlights include:

- Our Mobile Integrated Community Health team who brought vaccine to the home-bound- those living with disabilities, seniors and to communities who may not have easy access to a clinic;

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- Our Departments of Technology and Communication Resources for its multiple GIS mapping resources including the Restaurant, Food, Donations and Farms finders;
- And our Departments of Community Resources and Recreation and Parks, both of which won multiple awards for the critical programming they provided throughout the pandemic.

These are only some of the 27 awards and I cannot be more grateful to work with such a dedicated, innovative team.

Conclusion

This pandemic has been hard. However, Howard County's progress during the last three years as a regional and national leader has been a collaborative effort.

Together, we have helped sustain our community throughout one of the most challenging periods in our world's history.

Progress cannot be made alone. We must remember what is *most* important and the humanity that drives us forward.

I want to convey my deepest gratitude for your encouragement and support for my family when I unexpectedly lost my dad recently.

My father believed that family, character and service to others is what makes a person great, not their titles or the amount of money in their bank account. My dad was a Vietnam-era veteran who demonstrated his commitment to our country by serving in the United States Air Force.

My father was a great man who lived a great life. He believed in the power of people and their ability to make a difference in the lives of others.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank both him and all of you in Howard County.

Not only for believing in me but for believing in one another, as we build our community and continue to make progress for all.

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