

Good afternoon!

On behalf of my Council colleagues, I want to thank each of you for being here today as we adopted our County's balanced 5.46 billion Dollar Budget. I also want to thank every Prince Georgian who took the time to engage in our budget process. Your feedback has been invaluable in shaping a spending plan that best serves the needs and demands of our residents.

Our budget shortfall this year is \$171 million due to factors including higher interest rates that have hurt home sales and reduced tax income, the ending of federal pandemic funds, rising inflation, the increasing impacts of climate change, and increasing state requirements for education funding.

The budget will be the biggest challenge facing our county this year and over the next few years.

I've compared it to managing a family budget...which many of you, I'm sure, can relate to. As parents, we can't ignore one child's needs over another's, and we're responsible for ensuring needs are met before we start looking at the family's wants. The key word is "responsible," and it's a word that's been top of mind as we make financial decisions that, at times, can be difficult. The shortfall is a considerable obstacle, and we must address it with a sense of urgency, creativity, and collaboration, just as we do in our own households. Families have to plan for the future and save for emergencies, and our county also needs to consider long-term sustainability. We must continue to ask ourselves, "Is this a need, or is this a want?" That's vital for us as we prepare to face challenging years ahead...and we're far from alone, with other counties across the state and country also dealing with the impacts of budget shortfalls.

Despite our challenges, I'm proud to present to you a strategic spending plan that reflects our county's priorities and values and **does not compromise** public safety and education. We've been committed to finding solutions to address the shortfall while minimizing impacts on our citizens. Countless hours of hard work and collaboration have gotten us to this point. I want to personally offer my sincere gratitude to County Executive Angela Alsobrooks and her Executive and Budget teams, as well as Council Administrator Jennifer Jenkins and the Legislative Branch budget team, including Budget Director Josh Hamlin and County Auditor Turkessa Green. Thank you to Chief Administrative Officer Tara Jackson and Budget Director Stanley Earley for their thorough and diligent work. And, of course, I want to acknowledge my colleagues on the dais for their teamwork and commitment: Vice-Chair and District 9 Council Member Sydney Harrison; District 1 Council Member Tom Dernoga; District 2 Council Member Wanika Fisher; District 3 Council Member Eric Olson; District 4 Council Member Ingrid Watson; District 6 Council Member Wala Blegay; District 7 Council Member Krystal Oriadha; District 8 Council Member Edward Burroughs; and At-Large Council Members Mel Franklin and Calvin Hawkins.

I'll now share some of our most significant budget enhancements.

- We've allocated an additional **\$200,000** to assist the Prince George's Police Department in filling vacancies. Public Safety is top of mind for our citizens and for the council. We know we need to hire more police and first responders and make the hiring process more efficient. The County Executive's budget already provided funds for 100 new recruits for the police and fire departments. The Council has negotiated with the Executive Branch **to create an additional 50 firefighter positions**. We have the 16th busiest fire department in the U.S., and we must support our hardworking women and men who protect our county each day.
- We've provided an **additional \$3 million** in non-departmental grants to help fund our nonprofits. Our nonprofits do indispensable work throughout the county, and they depend on this grant money. We're delivering on that for them.
- We've also added **\$100,000** for Animal Services in the Department of the Environment. Animal services workers and volunteers spoke up at our budget hearings, and while this money won't solve every issue, we want those dedicated employees to know they were heard. We believe investing in animal services is investing in compassion and community safety.
- An additional **\$250,000** will fund a sickle cell machine and equipment at the University of Maryland Capital Region Medical Center. I recently had the opportunity to tour the Sickle Cell Unit to witness the incredible work happening there, and this new, state-of-the-art machine will only enhance the quality of care. Out of 5,000 sickle cell patients in MD, 40% are residents of Prince George's County.
- We've increased funding for warm nights shelter support (**\$1,855,000**)
- Increased funding for PAYGO funding for the Bus Mass Transit Access 2 capital project to support the low-no/emissions buses and a bus facilities grant program.
- And increased operating expenses to fund the Cannabis Reinvestment and Restoration Fund by **\$2M**.
- We decreased funding for the MNCPPC building by **\$10M**.

There are a few disappointments I do have with the budget, but it boiled down to what we need now versus what I wanted to see:

- The Prince George's County Memorial Library System did not get additional funding, and those workers deserve more pay. My stepmom and mother-in-law were both librarians; I know the critical function they serve for our communities. We also need to hire more people to staff our libraries because we have been building new and bigger libraries, but without the people to staff them, they end up as beautiful museums.
- There is a Health Clinic in the southern part of the county I was hoping to bring more resources to that is severely understaffed, which means fewer people will be tested for HIV.
- The Fair Election Fund is important to help people run for office but need financial help to do so, but we couldn't commit funding to it in this budget.

As we look ahead, we must focus on building new revenue streams to ensure long-term financial health and unburden our residents. Prince George's County has the most undeveloped land in the region, and our choices about utilizing this resource will shape the County's future and the quality of life for generations to come. I am committed to working with stakeholders, community members, and local businesses to encourage smart growth and transit-oriented development. We have much to look forward to with the completion of the Blue Line Corridor, relocation of the FBI

Headquarters, and redevelopment of Hospital Hill.

I want to emphasize again the collaboration and collective effort that got us here today. While these may be fiscally challenging times for our County, I know we can emerge stronger and more resilient than ever before.

Thank you all for making Prince George's County a place we are proud to call home!