

REMARKS *(as prepared for delivery)*

Gavel Exchange of Leadership

The Honorable Todd M. Turner

Chair, Prince George's County Council Legislative Year 2020

Tuesday, December 1, 2020

SERVICE. COMMUNITY. PROGRESS.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Good morning everyone!

Thank you for joining the Council's first-ever virtual Gavel Exchange. We are especially honored by the presence of our County leader, Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks.

We can all take pride in how well the executive and legislative branches have worked together over the past two years, to move Prince George's County forward. Madam County Executive, the Council appreciates your comments today, and we thank you and your entire executive team, led by Chief Administrative Officer Major Riddick, for their remarkable efforts, service and work with the Council, especially as we continue to coordinate the County's COVID-19 response.

We've all heard it said - pictures are worth a thousand words. The photos shared in our brief presentation, offer a snapshot of Legislative Year 2020 – from the Council's January Retreat discussing legislative priorities; to adopting a County Budget addressing the substantial impacts of COVID-19 on our residents and communities; to responding to the County's ever-growing need for healthcare, food security, housing, jobs, education and economic development support, in the face of a global pandemic that is causing tragic loss of life, and threatening businesses, jobs, and finances.

This Council extends its thoughts and prayers for the health and safety of our residents in these difficult times, and we express our profound gratitude to all who continue to serve selflessly on the front lines of the coronavirus crisis.

This is a time in history like none other.

Unprecedented and historic, this year has been tough and heartbreaking, and we do not yet know the true depth or duration of this pandemic. But amid such adversity, residents can take comfort in knowing that leadership in Prince George's County is listening to them, seizing opportunities, and charting a path forward.

(Former) First Lady Michelle Obama gave some great advice when she said, "You should never view your challenges as a disadvantage. Instead, it's important for you to understand that your experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of your biggest advantages."

Over the past Legislative Year, this Council and our County can reflect upon a Legislative Year that is also marked by consistent leadership; strong partnerships; and our resilient communities.

My own sense of leadership is guided by the maxim that only through Service to the Community can we achieve Progress in Prince George's County. I am grateful and truly humbled to have been entrusted by my Council colleagues with the Gavel of Leadership for Legislative Years 2019 and 2020, and it remains my proud honor to serve as the Council Member for the Fourth District.

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It has been said that good legislative bodies are composed of innovative and committed leaders who, when faced with extraordinary times and circumstances, have problem-solved throughout history. I have been blessed to serve alongside such leadership champions.

To my County Council colleagues – Mel Franklin, Calvin Hawkins, Tom Dernoga, Deni Taveras, Dannielle Glaros, Jolene Ivey, Derrick Leon Davis, Rodney Streeter, Monique Anderson-Walker, and Sydney Harrison – it has been my honor to lead such a dedicated, gifted, hardworking and passionate assembly of public servants through this incredibly challenging and pivotal point in our history.

Individually and collectively, you have demonstrated your strengths and unwavering commitment to improving the quality of life for our residents. Whether through your legislative advocacy; hosting food drives and giveaways; distributing PPE or gift cards; or sharing critical resource information with our residents, you have risen above and beyond the call of duty.

I want to express a very personal thank you to my co-captain, Council Vice-Chair and At-Large Council Member Calvin S. Hawkins, II, also known as “The People’s Champ.”

In the immortal words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

Vice-Chair Hawkins, I know I speak for all of us on the Council, when I say how highly we value your leadership, partnership, sacrifice, and unique insight, all contributions which have helped to advance this body and Prince George’s County, especially through such a tumultuous year. Your experience and team spirit have been critical components to achieving our legislative, budgetary and community goals, and we look forward to your gifts having an even greater impact in the future.

Please join me in thanking Legislative Year 2020 Vice-Chair Calvin S. Hawkins, II.

TEAMWORK

Recognizing early in the term the value of the strong collaborations the Council established with the County Executive, federal and state lawmakers, regional and municipal government leaders, our communities, businesses, nonprofits, and other County stakeholders, we were able to battle the impact of the COVID-19 on our communities, and coordinate critical resources and information to support our residents.

Together, we worked with our outstanding Schools CEO, Dr. Monica Goldson, Board of Education Chair Dr. Alvin Thornton and school board members, and community stakeholders, to advance our joint education interests while navigating closed schools, distance learning and virtual operations.

We appreciate the strong support of our Annapolis partners during this year’s abbreviated Maryland General Assembly Session, particularly with the enactment of the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future for Education Funding; and the continued support for the Prince George’s County Alternative Construction Financing (ACF) program.

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This unique public-private partnership approach to school construction in the County, to finance, build, renovate and maintain six new middle schools, which advanced this year with the support of the County Executive, Council, and Board of Education. We will bring those experiences, issues and needs to Annapolis again in 2021.

A few other notable team efforts:

Achieving the Fiscal Year 2021 County Budget. County Executive Alsobrooks and her budget team handed the Council a thoughtful fiscal plan in early March that, because of the public health emergency, was amended. The adopted Budget offered a strong statement of our community priorities for education, public safety, healthcare, quality of life, economic and transit-oriented development, infrastructure and the environment, while also addressing fiscal challenges posed by COVID-19. This successful work, combined with our ability to work well together remotely, and our shared commitment to sound financial planning, also won the County another top credit rating from Wall Street.

Working together with our partners, the Council continued its work to advance our priorities and serve the immediate needs of our economy, workers and residents during this once in a lifetime pandemic. Since March, and over the course of the year, during our continuing State of Emergency, the County lifted numerous programs and passed legislation to support growing numbers of residents impacted by the coronavirus, including the allocation of more than \$134 million in Federal CARES Act, State and other funding – critical dollars supporting first responders, hospitals, and other healthcare providers; preserve housing, provide rental and utility assistance for residents; assist County-based businesses, including for restaurants, child care providers, and small and minority-owned businesses; and workers impacted by COVID-19.

We will continue to look to our Congressional partners and the new, historic Biden-Harris Administration in the New Year to further support our efforts to manage the impacts of COVID-19, including the implementation of vaccines in the County and support for local governments.

As the County's Board of Health, the Council, strengthening the County and State partnership, continued to increase access to quality healthcare for our residents during this public health crisis. We look forward to the opening of the new Regional Medical Center in Largo in 2021 with the University of Maryland Capital Region Health and building on our strong relationships with healthcare partners in the County – including Kaiser Permanente, Luminis Health, MedStar Southern Maryland Hospital and Fort Washington Adventist Hospital.

We also received and embraced an updated report from the RAND Corporation, entitled "*Assessing Health and Human Services Needs to Support an Integrated Health in All Policies Plan for Prince George's County, Maryland*," a comprehensive study commissioned by the Council, adopting a resolution to institute "Health in All Policies" goals for County services. Additionally, we passed first in the nation Healthy Kids meal requirements, and legislation to provide incentives to establish grocery stores in targeted areas of the County to provide healthy food options for our residents.

We continue to provide opportunities for the County and our residents to engage in the important national and local conversations around the future of policing, dismantling the legacy of systemic racism and injustice, and addressing critical housing and climate change issues.

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Several work groups and task forces, including Prince George's Forward, the County COVID-19 recovery group, the Police Reform Group, the Re-Entry Task Force, the Responsible Legacy Task Force and the Climate Action Commission are working to achieve this mission. In addition, we seek to address *Housing Opportunities for All* recommendations, as we work to implement the County's first Comprehensive Housing Strategy. Finally, we look forward to completing in 2021 the second phase of the new zoning and subdivision ordinances – the Countywide Map Amendment – to complete the first update of the County Zoning Code in over 50 years.

Our teamwork with partners for Prince George's County, resulted in an increase in the County's Census 2020 self-response rate (during a pandemic no less!), which will mean more federal support for our communities in the future. Kudos to our Complete Count Committee, under the leadership of Planning Board Chairman Elizabeth Hewlett, and the County's Office of Community Relations for their extraordinary efforts.

Conducting a Presidential Primary and General Election was no small feat either, but our County's Board of the Elections Administrator Alisha Alexander and her team, under very new and difficult circumstances, including utilizing vote by mail, reduced polling sites and the use of drop boxes to keep our voters and election staff safe, performed exceptionally well. We are Prince George's Proud of our County's historic participation in the November Election. We learned to come together, to work as one and support our residents in a tough but rewarding Legislative Year of service.

APPRECIATION

In closing, I want to offer some special acknowledgements.

Sincere thanks to my family, and the families and loved ones of each of my colleagues. Without question, your love, support and encouragement continue to sustain us in our public service. We could not do this work without you.

I am especially grateful to the leading ladies in my life - my wife Anita and our daughters Rachel and Maya, as well as my sisters Athena Frederick and Teri Turner.

Unfortunately, this year has also brought great sadness to so many of our families and friends. As many of you know, I suffered the loss of my Mother and family matriarch - Diana Turner – this year, and many members of our Legislative Branch, County Government and our Prince George's family have also endured great personal loss.

May our love, faith and their memories provide us the strength to continue their legacies.

Our nation too mourns the loss of Congressman Elijah Cummings, Congressman John Lewis, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and my former mentor – former NYC Mayor David N. Dinkins. Historic leaders who worked ceaselessly to make this country a better place for everyone and to meet our stated ideals as the United States.

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I also owe a debt of gratitude to my Council District 4 (D4) Team – Tomeka, Evelyn, Rhonda, and Martin - as well as to all our remarkable staffs in all eleven Council offices - who generously support us daily in the delivery of outstanding service to our constituents, especially during this time of crisis and tremendous need.

Finally, I want to express the Council’s gratitude to our Council Administrators, and Legislative Branch administrative and committee staffs, for continuing to bring your very best every day for the Council, the County and our residents. Your expertise, professionalism, continued excellence and dedicated support are deeply appreciated and especially needed this year.

I especially want to thank the strong and adaptable Council Administration leadership - Council Administrator Robert Williams, Deputy Administrator Bill Hunt, Clerk of the Council Donna Brown and Communications Director Karen Campbell, and their respective staffs – for their efforts and partnership these past two years and dedicated support the continued excellent work and success of the Legislative Branch, especially this year.

SERVICE. COMMUNITY. PROGRESS.

Every act of my public service on behalf of Prince George’s County, the Legislative Branch, and our residents, especially as Council Chair over the past two years, is motivated by this motto.

Thank you and may God continue to bless each of us and Prince George’s County. Please continue to be safe and well in the upcoming holiday season.

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