

## **REMARKS**

**Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Reconciliation and Adoption**

**The Honorable Todd M. Turner**

**Chair, Prince George's County Council**

**Friday, May 29, 2020 11:00 A.M. (as prepared for delivery)**

This is an extraordinary moment for our County, our nation and our world. The COVID-19 global pandemic has thrust us all into uncertain times and unknown territory, and as the substantial impacts of this crisis continue to reach into our communities, Prince George's County faces health, safety and economic challenges of historic proportion. This deadly virus is testing us at every level, and it is heartbreaking to experience its devastating impact on our residents and communities, small businesses, nonprofits and faith communities, and our finances.

COVID-19 has changed life as we know it, and at least for now, it has also changed the way this County Council and our County Government operates.

Let me begin by thanking my colleagues on this Council and our Legislative Branch staff. A pandemic like this hasn't happened in 100 years or more, and it's new for all of us. My Council colleagues have been inspiring, hard-working teammates and passionate advocates for the residents we represent. In addition, they have been directly in the community, in response to this crisis – providing meals, supporting workers, hosting virtual town halls, leading regional groups and getting the message out on services and assistance – they have risen to this historic challenge and excelled as leaders and colleagues.

I am humbled to chair this august body, and I ask everyone to join me in thanking Council Vice-Chair and Council Member At-Large Calvin S. Hawkins, II; At-Large Council Member Mel Franklin; District 1 Council Member Tom Dernoga; District 2 Council Member Deni Taveras; District 3 Council Member Dannielle Glaros; District 5 Council Member Jolene Ivey; District 6 Council Member Derrick Leon Davis; District 7 Council Member Rodney Streeter; District 8 Council Member Monique Anderson-Walker; and District 9 Council Member Sydney Harrison.

Together, we have spent long hours reviewing documents in our virtual binders, listening to testimony during virtual meetings and public hearings, and balancing the many needs and concerns in the midst of this unprecedented crisis.

The Council, after receiving the Proposed FY 2021 Budget from County Executive Angela Alsobrooks and her team on March 11<sup>th</sup>, began its budget review process. We fully expected to ultimately adopt a spending plan that offered a strong statement of our County's economic growth, and our community priorities for Education, Public Safety, Healthcare, Quality of Life, Economic and Transit-Oriented Development, Infrastructure and Environment, and other critical initiatives for progress.

Less than a week later, with the arrival of COVID-19 and the County State of Emergency, Prince George's County was hard hit, and life as we know it, drastically changed.

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Tragically, our family members, loved ones and friends, neighbors and co-workers have become positive cases, hospitalizations and fatalities in this crisis, represented by inconceivable numbers that are really hard to hear.

We take this moment to remember those we have lost to this pandemic, extend our heartfelt condolences to their families and loved ones, and offer our prayers to all others directly impacted, including members of this Council, the Legislative Branch and County Government.

By April, everything came to a halt; schools and businesses closed; students were distance learning and picking up grab and go meals; face coverings and social distancing were required; jobless claims hit historic levels and job gains were erased; Council meetings became virtual and we established an eComment Portal for remote public participation in our budget and legislative processes; and our health care system was fighting to stay ahead of the coronavirus pandemic and health disparities.

County Executive Alsobrooks submitted an amended FY 2021 budget proposal to the Council for consideration on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. It included an estimated \$134 million reduction in revenue and proposals for compensation changes and delays in capital projects to meet our fiscal responsibility.

Today, after two months of virtual Committee of the Whole budget sessions and staff reviews, and as our County now cautiously prepares for a modified phase one, "incremental" reopening this Monday, June first, the Council is focusing forward with the unanimous adoption of a new and balanced **\$3.7 billion** County General Fund Budget for Fiscal Year 2021. The total County budget for all funds **just under \$4.5 billion**.

Our County's newly-adopted FY 21 spending plan applies the responsible use of County reserve funds to fill revenue gaps this year and in the new fiscal year; offsets severe revenue erosion; addresses the immediate COVID-related needs of residents, providing critical relief to businesses and workers utilizing federal, state, local, non-profit and private resources; maintains core government services; manages the impacts of the pandemic; fosters recovery; implements significant spending controls; and retains our County workforce, as we worked with our unions and staff to avoid layoffs by implementing hiring and salary freezes.

The coronavirus pandemic has shifted the needs of communities across the County in a very short period of time. Rather than growth strategies, we are focusing on retaining public service levels. With an even greater impact on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable Prince Georgians, this crisis has also shifted the focus of our fiscal policy to investment in the basic needs of our residents – food, shelter, health care, livelihood. In this pandemic, every stroke of the budget pen directly affects the lives and quality of life

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Education, with nearly 66-percent of all General Fund monies, still remains our priority, and continues to receive the lion's share of County revenues to support the Board of Education, Prince George's Community College and our library system. We look forward to our continued work with Dr. Monica Goldson, CEO, Dr. Alvin Thornton, Board of Education Chair, Board of Education members, and Prince George's County Public Schools staff, as they venture into the new future, and hopefully opening later this year, as well as the new, incoming Prince George's Community College president.

We again want to thank outgoing Community College president Dr. Charlene Dukes for her steadfast leadership and commitment to the County and her institution, even as she continues her service as Co-Chair of the County's Recovery Task Force.

The County will use the Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to support the growing concerns around food insecurities, business and employment support, rental and mortgage housing assistance, and COVID-related health services. We also wish to thank our Federal Delegation – U.S. Senator Ben Cardin, U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Congressman Anthony Brown and their staffs – for their unending leadership, partnership and support for Prince George's County.

The Council has reaffirmed its commitment to the Prince George's County immigrant community with additional funding for the Immigrant Services and Language Access (ISLA) initiative, which it started in FY 2018 to provide free legal services to eligible County residents who have been detained and are facing deportation and setting some funding to start services for those re-entering our communities.

While we cannot foresee the timing and circumstance of the eventual pandemic recovery, it is clear that Prince George's County will grapple with the fiscal impact for years to come. The FY 2021 Budget adopted today, and effective with the new Fiscal Year on July 1, will change, and there is still much work to do.

The recommendations included in the approved budget document take serious steps to address what we know will be a substantially weaker economic environment for the foreseeable future, while still mindful that much of the long-term impact from the pandemic is uncertain.

The Council will continue its work with the County Executive and her budget team, our residents and all stakeholders, to closely monitor our revenue collections and overall economic trends for further threats to the County's fiscal health, and address fluctuations as they come.

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As this pandemic continues its significant impact on Prince George's County, now more than ever, it is critically important that we come together as a community to ensure our County's fiscal priorities are met; address the growing need for critical services and resources; and secure an even brighter future for Prince George's County.

This Council remains committed to working collaboratively to recover from this crisis and achieve a sustainable financial future for our County. We are continuing to invest in Prince Georgians, and we thank every partner for their leadership and committed service to our residents, and their partnership with us.

We are deeply grateful for the steadfast leadership of County Executive Angela Alsobrooks and her budget team, led by Chief Administrative Officer Major Riddick, and Budget Director Stanley Earley. We must also recognize Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Health, Human Services and Education, Dr. George Askew, Health Officer Dr. Ernest Carter and Director of the Office of Emergency Management Ronnie Gill, for their leadership and guidance through this public health emergency. Also thank you to Planning Board Chair Elizabeth Hewlett and her team.

We are truly proud of our County workers, our first responders and essential workers who continue to provide important services and assistance to our residents – we are Prince George's Proud of you and thank you for your understanding and support.

Also, while the coronavirus ended the Maryland General Assembly early, we appreciate the strong support of state lawmakers this year, particularly with the issues around education funding and look forward to their leadership to ensure appropriate State resources as we begin the County's recovery.

Moving through this emergency and seeing ourselves differently on the other side of this crisis will be yet another challenge that Prince Georgians will rise to meet together.

As a Council, we are struck by the enduring spirit of Prince Georgians. You have tuned into our online meetings; and you signed up to speak virtually and participate in the budget and legislative processes. We listened to everyone who addressed us about needs and priorities and worked hard to provide limited resources where you told us they are most needed.

Additionally, our residents are staying informed; following the guidelines for hygiene, face coverings and physical distancing, accessing healthcare and community resources; and finding creative ways to honor one another safely with things like drive-by birthday and graduation celebrations, and virtual family gatherings.

Motivated by the continued strength, determination and resiliency of our residents and communities, we will do it. We will get through this together. Thank you. Be safe. Be well.

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