

**REMARKS (as prepared)**

The Honorable Thomas E. Dernoga  
Prince George's County Council Chair  
FY '24 Budget Adoption 5-25-2025

Good morning. On behalf of my Council colleagues, thank you for joining us today for the adoption of a new \$4.5 Billion-Dollar County Budget for Fiscal Year 2024.

As Council Chairman, I am honored to again lead this body through our budget process, the first for this 11-member Council, and I want to thank my colleagues along the dais – My leadership partner, Vice Chair Wala Blegay; Council Members Mel Franklin, Calvin Hawkins, Wanika Fisher, Eric Olson, Ingrid Watson, Jolene Ivey, Krystal Oriadha, Ed Burroughs, and Sydney Harrison, and, for their hard work, diligence and determination. My colleagues engaged in detailed oversight, asking numerous probing questions of agency officials seeking to ascertain where we could improve or better focus services for County residents.

As I have remarked previously, this Council has been “moving forward in bold new directions,” and our People’s Agenda has been working hard to achieve that, passing legislation that addresses our priorities for transparency in our government; increased services for residents; preserving green space, protecting our environment and planning for climate change; supporting smart and quality development; increasing opportunities for local, minority-owned businesses and nonprofits; and bringing quality healthcare to the community.

We thank our residents for participating in our budget process and I want you to know that we listened as you consistently shared the issues and concerns you believe should be the focus of our County’s tax dollars. To move forward and fully initiate the

changes our residents need, this Council's legislative initiatives addressing those issues must be funded.

My colleague, Council Member Oriadha, has often said, "If you want to know what is important to your elected leaders, look at the budget."

When the Council received the County Executive's Proposed Budget in March, we were pleased with the focus on investing in education and public safety, and to see strong investments made in the Department of Permitting, Inspections and Enforcement and in storm water management.

Over the last few months, guided by the core tenets of the People's Agenda, Council Members, as a body and in our respective districts, have been digging in to ensure that Council priorities – your priorities – were reflected in the final spending plan.

Earlier this month the Council received word that the income tax revenue for Fiscal Year 24 would be \$60 million dollars lower than initially projected – disappointing news for everyone.

With disappointment, and despite our best efforts, today we are approving a County Budget with serious concern that so many of these priorities are not addressed. In particular, we are disappointed that the Administration is not yet prepared to support directly a Guaranteed Basic Income pilot program advocated by Council Member Oriadha, or Vice Chair Blegay's Healthy Restaurant program that would highlight small businesses striving to address health disparities in our County. Also of concern is the failure to fund various public programs aimed at reducing violence in our County.

Of course, we have to acknowledge the current fiscal climate, but at the same time, it is important to recognize over the 5 years that I have been here, our reserves have

grown by about \$125 million, to almost \$600 million. Sometimes, it is better to appreciate expenditures as being investments that will pay future dividends.

Given the economic climate that communities across our nation, including Prince George's County, are grappling with, very tough decisions had to be made. Despite an inability to fund parts of People's Agenda legislation, I want our residents to know that we have delivered as much as we could under the circumstances.

Among some of the Council initiated budget enhancements:

**Libraries** are an essential component of our comprehensive education, and we are very pleased that we could augment expanded hours and the **Books from Birth**, a program to get books into the homes and hands of every young child in the County.

It is appropriate that the County's second-largest revenue commitment targets public safety improvements. Recognizing the critical role of our **fire department**, over one million and three-hundred-thousand dollars have been allocated for additional firefighter positions.

The Commission for Individuals with Disabilities has also expressed the need to increase awareness and provide learning resources for law enforcement concerning intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities. As a result, **the Council has set aside funding for disability training for public safety officials**.

And in support of our County's young people and public safety, funding has been made available to support **Police Explorers**, designed to introduce young adults to a career in law enforcement. The **Office of the Sheriff** will also receive a two hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar investment for recruitment and replacement of weapons.

Council Member Oriadha has secured two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to support the **Camera Incentive Program, also known as the Jayz Agnew Law**, named in honor of 13-year-old Jayz Agnew, who was fatally shot in front of his home while raking leaves. This program allows businesses and homeowners to purchase and install cameras to support law enforcement in their efforts to address and solve crime in our communities.

Understanding the need to support our most vulnerable populations, Council Members saw the need to support the Shepard's Cove Emergency Shelter. We have added two hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars to the budget to increase the capabilities of United Communities Against Poverty to continue their support of women and children.

ISLA, the Immigration Services and Language Access Initiative will also see a \$125 thousand-dollar increase.

We are also responding to residents, who for years have advocated for safer streets, accessible pathways, and road improvements. The Council has allocated \$2.1 million dollars for additional streetlights and traffic signals, along with \$4.5 million for curb and road rehabilitation.

Other areas that received Council attention in the final spending plan include funding for noise enforcement and the Prince George's Arts and Humanities Council. An additional \$3 million dollars will be provided for grants to support various community organizations.

In closing, I want to again offer my personal and grateful acknowledgment to the members of this body for their spirited energy during this first budget season of the term. I also want to thank the tremendous work of the Legislative Branch staff, led

by Council Administrator Jennifer Jenkins, and including Josh Hamlin leading the Budget and Policy Analysis team and Turkeesa Green of Audits and Investigation, for their tireless work to guide us through this budget process.

This budget year has been challenging, but we are already working to ensure that next year will more fully meet the needs of Prince Georgians. This Council is committed to the collaborative work we are accomplishing on behalf of the “people” of Prince George’s County.

We sincerely thank every partner for their leadership and committed service to our residents.

***\*Note: Council Members will meet with media immediately following budget adoption***