



March 11, 2021

HB 935

Emergency Community Services Fund

Appropriations Committee

Position: Favorable

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 640, **legislation that would support the State's ability to quickly provide crucial community services to Marylanders during a state of emergency or periods of increased unemployment.** Arundel Community Development Services, Inc., (ACDS) serves as Anne Arundel County's nonprofit housing and community development agency, helping Anne Arundel County residents and communities thrive through the provision of safe and affordable housing opportunities, programs to prevent and end homelessness, and community development initiatives. In fulfilling this role, ACDS administers grants to nonprofit partners, directly develops and implements programming, and advises the County on housing and community development policy initiatives.

As the COVID-19 crisis forced the closing of businesses, many households saw a huge drop in incomes due to the loss of jobs and childcare and other factors. ACDS stood up the State's first Eviction Prevention Program (EPP) specifically in response to COVID-19, getting payments to landlords as quickly as possible and keeping low-income families affected by the COVID-19 crisis in their homes, utilizing a combination of federal and local funding. The ACDS EPP Program and similar programs set up all over the State in response to the COVID-19 crisis have provided crucial financial assistance to renters, keeping rooves over the heads of thousands of Marylanders who, without that assistance, would have been evicted from their homes in the middle of a pandemic. Fortunately, Anne Arundel County was able to re-program some local funding to meet the emergent needs of vulnerable County renters until federal funds were disbursed, but that may not always be the case in a State of Emergency.

In addition, ACDS, on behalf of the County has worked to establish and sustain a network consisting of over a dozen community based food providers, the Anne Arundel County Food Bank and Feed Anne Arundel in response to the added food insecurity experienced by households in Anne Arundel County as result of COVID-19. Through this partnership, we have ensured food was distributed to a network of over 90 food pantries and weekly distribution sites, provided emergency food box deliveries to homebound residents, and increased the capacity of our community partners to respond to the emergency. Utilizing a combination flexible federal and County funds, ACDS and our partners have responded to a 400 percent increase in demand for food assistance over the last year. However, the majority of currently

allocated federal funds have been expended for emergency food assistance and more resources are needed as the demand for food assistance continues.

While the COVID-19 crisis will not last forever and additional funds from the federal level – at least for rental assistances are in the pipeline - this bill would provide flexible funding to continue these efforts and address future States of Emergency, ensuring State funding for crucial resources – rent, utilities and food- is available right out of the gate. Meanwhile, the comprehensive infrastructure local governments and nonprofit organizations like ours have already set up for eviction prevention, food assistance, and energy assistance programs can be implemented during future emergencies, as well.

For the reasons noted above, we urge a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 935.