



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

COUNCILMEMBER LAURIE-ANNE SAYLES

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, CHAIR

AT LARGE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

February 20, 2026

SUBJECT: FAVORABLE TESTIMONY ON HB809 WALTER SONDHEIM JR. PUBLIC SERVICE INTERNSHIP SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM - FUNDING

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and Honorable Members of the House Appropriations Committee, I write in strong support and enthusiastic support of HB0809, legislation to expand and strengthen the *Walter Sondheim Jr. Public Service Internship Scholarship Program*. This program is one of Maryland's most powerful pipelines for cultivating the next generation of public service leaders.

As a proud former Sondheim Scholar, I can speak firsthand to the life-changing impact of this investment. The internship did more than provide practical experience. The cohort experience challenged my peers and me to think boldly about how we could address real issues in our communities. Together, we launched our own nonprofit initiative, an experience that sharpened my leadership skills, strengthened my belief in collaborative problem-solving, and showed me the power of young people working collectively to drive change.

That foundation directly influenced my creation of the nationally recognized SMART Youth Advisory Council Program, the first Youth Advisory Council of the County Council, which I launched after my second historic election victory in 2022. Through the SMART YAC, students in grades 7 to 12 work together to identify local challenges and pitch innovative solutions directly to community leaders and decision-makers. I have witnessed how public-private partnerships create meaningful opportunities by bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world impact.

Now, as the Chair of the Council's Health and Human Services Committee and a member of the Economic Development Committee, I see clearly how critical it is to build strong pathways into public service careers. Our communities face complex public health, economic, and social challenges. We need talented, mission-driven young people prepared to lead, equipped with the necessary skills and compassion. Programs like Sondheim ensure students gain hands-on experience in government agencies,

nonprofit organizations, or public service law, while earning financial support that makes these opportunities accessible.

HB809 ensures sustained and increased funding so internships and fellowships like the Governor's Summer Internship Program, the Sondheim Maryland Nonprofit Leadership Internship Program, and the Sondheim Public Service Law Fellows Program continue to grow and thrive. Predictable funding sends a clear message that Maryland values public service and that those who choose this career path are worth the investment, regardless of your zip code, ethnicity, or who you or your parents may know.

Investing in this program goes beyond just securing internships. It is about leveling the playing field, honoring the legacy of its namesake, Walter Sondheim Jr., who was renowned for his financial expertise, integrity, and bipartisan leadership. One of his most admirable qualities was his commitment to nurturing the next generation of public servants, believing that a quality education is the key to endless opportunities.

For these reasons and so many more, I urge you to issue a favorable recommendation on HB809 and continue investing in young leaders who are trained in Maryland and ready to serve.

Respectfully,



Laurie-Anne Sayles

Montgomery County Councilmember At-Large