

April 23, 2026

Lauren Cook

Visual Artist

Board Chair, Executive Committee

Prof. Cinder Cooper Barnes

Global Humanities Institute

Board Vice Chair, Advocacy Committee

Ryan Lorey

EDENS

Board Treasurer

Chair, Finance Committee,

Public Art Trust Steering Committee

John Murph

DC Bar

Board Secretary

Eleanor Park Choi

SmithGroup

Chair, Public Art Trust Steering Committee

Ruby Lopez Harper

CEO, CERF+

Chair, Audit Committee

Dr. Sharon Fechter

Emeritus, Montgomery College

Chair, Governance Committee

Norman Rogers

CEO, Kno

Advocacy Committee

Marquette Rogers

Library of Congress

Genna Styles-Lyas, Ed.D

Americans for the Arts

Kendra Hyson

SmithGroup

ex officio

Suzan E. Jenkins, MBA

Chief Executive Officer

Kenneth A. Lechter, Esq

Legal Counsel

The Honorable Natali Fani-González
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: Charting a Collaborative Course for the FY27 Budget and the Creative Economy

Dear Council President Fani-González,

On behalf of the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County (AHCMC), our Board of Directors, and the thousands of creative professionals we represent, I want to thank you for your bold leadership in your April 17th memo. We applaud your commitment to a progressive income tax structure and your focus on protecting the social safety net while providing much-needed relief to 96% of Montgomery County households.

As the County's contracted partner for the arts and humanities, we share your vision for a fiscally prudent budget that prioritizes vulnerable residents. However, we are deeply concerned that the current proposal to seek \$25 million in savings from the Non-Departmental Agency (NDA) sector creates a disproportionate burden on the very organizations that provide the "direct services" you seek to protect.

The Disproportionate Impact

While we support the spirit of "slowing the growth," the current proposal targets the \$88 million NDA pool for a reduction equivalent to 28.4% if applied proportionally. In contrast, the overall County budget growth is only being slowed from 5.7% to 3.3%. The Arts and Humanities Council represents approximately 0.1% of the total County budget, yet under this proposal, our sector is being asked to absorb a massive share of the "targeted savings."

A cut of this magnitude is not a marginal adjustment, it is a liquidation of the cultural infrastructure that drives our local economy.

The Efficiency of the Arts and Humanities Council

As you chair the Economic Development Committee, you know that AHCMC is one of the County's most efficient investments. We operate with a lean, "net-zero liability" model:

- **Zero Legacy Costs:** Unlike County departments, AHCMC carries no pension or OPEB liabilities for the County.

- **Self-Funded Benefits:** We pay 100% of our staff's healthcare costs from our allocation, simply utilizing the County's purchasing power to maintain efficiency.
- **Economic ROI:** As detailed in our 2026 *Strength of the Creative Economy* report, our \$7.2 million allocation helps fuel a \$251 million creative economy that supports small businesses and vibrant downtowns.

The Human Cost to the "Safety Net"

Cutting our funding directly undermines the "social safety net" the Council seeks to preserve. Our grantees are the front-line providers for at-risk youth programs, therapeutic arts for seniors with dementia, and English-literacy programs for immigrant communities. Furthermore, because we fund 100% of our own benefits, any large cut in support forces a "Sophie's Choice" between maintaining these vital community programs and providing healthcare for our dedicated workers.

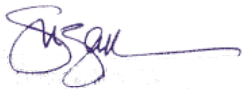
A Path Forward Together

We believe there is a way to achieve your progressive goals without dismantling the arts and other NDAs. We suggest considering the following:

1. A **"Shoulder" Adjustment:** Our preliminary analysis suggests that by adjusting the income tax rate by a mere 0.15% for the \$150,000–\$300,000 bracket, the Council could generate the revenue needed to fully restore these vital programs. Under this model, middle-income households would still receive substantial tax relief (varied, but roughly \$450) comparable to the approximately \$750 in annual savings cited for median-income families, preserving the "96% tax break" **and** saving the County's nonprofit partners and cultural community.
2. **Utilization of Priority Capacity:** We request that a portion of the \$10 million in capacity identified for Council priorities be used to stabilize the "Table of 12" NDAs, ensuring that the organizations doing the County's work without County-subsidized benefits are not left behind.

We are available to work with you and the ECON Committee to ensure this budget is one "our residents can be proud of." We can have a progressive tax structure and a thriving cultural sector; they are not mutually exclusive, but rather two halves of a healthy, vibrant Montgomery County. Thank you for your thoughtful leadership and community-centered vision.

Sincerely,



Suzan E. Jenkins, MBA
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Montgomery County Councilmembers