



## ROBERT G. CASSILLY

Harford County Executive

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April 14, 2025

When I came into office two years ago, my administration was among the first statewide to recognize the serious financial challenges facing Maryland and its counties. We understood the folly of increasing government spending faster than the growth in revenue paid by our taxpayers.

Instead of raising taxes, we took the tough but prudent step of dialing back government spending across the board. Doing so brought harsh criticism from those who would have us dole out taxpayer dollars regardless of the consequences. Despite the pushback, we held firmly to our principles of responsible fiscal management.

Two years later the state is in a fiscal crisis and raising your taxes because the governor and a majority of legislators have refused to rein in spending. The state has also shifted some of its costs to the counties and is pretending that is a spending reduction. For Harford, this means that we have to fund an additional \$6.2M next year for other costs that have historically been state responsibilities. Despite these challenges we have been able to achieve a balanced budget without raising taxes, while increasing funding for essential services like public safety and education.

Public safety remains my top priority. For the third year in a row my budget provides for increased pay for sheriff's deputies in line with the sheriff's salary study. We are also supporting deputies with first-rate equipment including new cars and encrypted radios. Our new county ambulance service now operates 17 units deployed countywide; response times are reduced, and we are saving lives every day.

Educating our children and our future workforce remains a priority and continues to receive the largest portion, by far, of the county's general revenue. By working closely with the board of education and school superintendent, we are able to fully fund the school board's operating budget request for next year. We are also funding a combined new elementary school and a new Harford Academy for students with disabilities, major repairs to existing schools, and a larger share of teachers' pensions that the state imposed on the county. We are also continuing our collaborations with HCPS to identify opportunities for cost sharing and cost savings.

Other priorities in my recommended FY 2026 budget include funding for important safety improvements for our court system, a new firehouse in Whiteford, improvements to our parks and recreation facilities, and expanding agricultural preservation and open spaces.

Moving forward, my administration has assembled an expert team in economic development focused on attracting high-tech manufacturing and other businesses to expand our revenue base and bring well-paying jobs for our homegrown talent. We are also working closely with our

largest employer, Aberdeen Proving Ground, and with federal authorities on public and private sector opportunities to maintain and grow APG's mission and workforce.

I would like to thank my budget team and all county employees for their good stewardship of taxpayer dollars. Harford County is a special place. With strong fiscal management and with everyone's help, I know we can keep it that way.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Cassilly', with a stylized, cursive script.

Robert G. Cassilly

Budget highlights are listed below:

- Total operating budget (all funds) of \$1,039,641,000; Total capital budget of \$260,987,729
- Total general fund operating budget of \$817,605,000, an increase of \$37.5 million (4.8%)
- No increases in tax rates
- Highest funding in county history for HCPS, Sheriff's Office, State's Attorney
- Largest funding increases by department/agency:
  - o Harford County Public Schools (\$29.7 million)
  - o Sheriff's Office (\$7.0 million)
  - o Emergency Services (\$3.8 million)
  - o State's Attorney (\$1.1 million)
  - o Information & Communications Technology (\$951,000)
  - o County Council (\$836,000)
  - o Public Libraries (\$627,000)
- COLA of 3% plus a merit increase of \$1,000 for employees of County Government, as well as civilian employees of the Sheriff's Office, Circuit Court, and State's Attorney's Office.
- Appropriated fund balance decreases from \$58.5 million to \$51.6 million, demonstrating the steady reduction in our structural deficit.
- The state of Maryland has burdened county taxpayers with \$6.2 million in new costs
- AAA Bond Rating retained, lowering our cost of borrowing for capital projects

#### Harford County Public Schools

- Full funding of the Board of Education's operating budget request of \$347,602,277 (\$26.2 million increase over the current year)
- Additional funds of \$3.4 million for the state-mandated shift of teacher pensions to county government, for an overall funding increase of \$29.7 million (9% increase over the current year)
- Capital project funding of \$87.3 million, including \$26 million for the Harford Academy and new elementary school project; \$16 million for the renovation of Harford Technical HS

#### Sheriff's Office

- Overall operating budget of \$133.5 million, an increase of \$7.0 million (6%)
- Full funding of the sheriff's non-personnel operating budget request
- Wage increases of 6% for eligible law enforcement deputies and corrections officers, including one merit step plus a 3% COLA, in keeping with the recommendations of the Sheriff's Office pay study
- Average salary is now \$106,000 for a law enforcement deputy and \$82,000 for a corrections officer (not including overtime)
- Continued funding for three (3) school resource officers previously assigned to Aberdeen schools, to allow for increased coverage of elementary schools.  
(Aberdeen Police are resuming responsibility for SROs in city schools)
- Over \$10 million in capital funding, including funds to upgrade the radio system

#### State's Attorney's Office

- Overall operating increase of \$1.1 million (11%)
- Includes \$525,000 in additional personnel funding (in addition to the wage package)
- This is sufficient funding to provide \$10,000 salary increases for all 30 prosecutors to keep salaries competitive, and to also hire two (2) new body worn camera technicians.
- Dispersal of these funds is at the discretion of the state's attorney to allow for flexibility in managing the agency.

Harford County Public Library: Funding increase of \$627,000 (3%) to allow for a 3% COLA for library system employees, as well as for corresponding benefit rate increases.

#### Harford Community College

- County capital funding of \$8 million for a regional workforce training center
- \$300,000 in new funding for state-mandated shift of employee pensions to county

Humane Society: \$1.3 million funding contribution (13% increase)

Health Department: Full funding of the \$5.2 million requested (3% increase)

#### Volunteer Fire Companies

- Full funding of the Volunteer Fire Association's annual allotment request of \$7.8 million (\$224,000 increase)
- Additional increases totaling \$500,000 for other operating expenses such as workers' compensation insurance and a staffing incentive program
- \$7 million in capital funding for a new Whiteford Volunteer firehouse
- \$500,000 in capital funding for volunteer fire company facility repairs

Parks & Recreation: \$13.8 million in capital projects, including \$4.5 million for the Joppatowne Community Center

Ag Preservation: \$12.3 million for the permanent preservation of additional farmland and forests