



# BARRY GLASSMAN

HARFORD COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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## **Harford County Earns Two National Association of Counties Awards for Innovation**

**BEL AIR, Md.**, (June 17, 2020) - The National Association of Counties (NACo) has recognized Harford County in 2020 with two awards for innovative and effective county government programs. The county was honored with Achievement Awards for its Halloween costume workshop for children who use wheelchairs and the anti-drug Pledge Program for youth, presented in partnership with the Harford County Sheriff's Office.

The Glassman administration has earned a total of eleven NACo awards over the past five years.

"I would like to thank our community partners and sponsors, and our creative county employees, for these outstanding programs," County Executive Glassman said. "Together we were able to help children learn early on about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and give all kids a chance to share in the joys of childhood."

### **Halloween Costume Workshop**

For some children who use a wheelchair, dressing up in a costume and trick-or-treating in their neighborhood can be a challenge. Traditional Halloween costumes often don't fit and the physical inaccessibility of neighborhoods leaves many children with disabilities home on that magical night. Imagine a place where every child who uses a wheelchair can not only trick or treat with their siblings and peers, but be the star of the evening in a unique costume designed specifically for them. In most communities around the country, this does not exist. In Harford County, Maryland it does.

Rachel Harbin in the Harford County Department of Community Services developed the region's first Wheelchair Costume Workshop, held at Ripken Stadium in October 2019. Over two days, more than

100 community volunteers designed, built and painted completely original costumes that fit securely on 12 children's wheelchairs. Once the costumes were fitted, the children joined over 300 children of all abilities for inclusive trick-or-treating at the stadium, providing an important example to the community that ALL children should be able to have fun, play with their peers, and enjoy Halloween! The Wheelchair Costume Workshop is an outstanding example of a public-private partnership—with over 30 local businesses and community organizations coming together to provide volunteers, donate building materials, and sponsor trick or treat stations.

### **Pledge Program**

The Pledge Program was developed by Tara Lathrop in Harford County government's Office of Drug Control Policy and by the Harford County Sheriff's Office. The program for children ages 8 to 11 years old educates young people before they are exposed to substances and trains them to use refusal skills to resist drugs and alcohol. The interactive program incorporates guest speakers, including a doctor, an individual in recovery, and a parent who has lost a child to drug use. Children also have the opportunity to participate in role play scenarios with local high school theater students to experience mock-peer pressure and practice refusal skills. Another important component of the Pledge Program is the participation of parents and guardians. Parents and caregivers are provided topics to discuss with youth to continue the conversation at home and encourage discussion among family members. Since its inception in January 2019, the Pledge Program has partnered with five Harford County elementary schools with a total of 153 participants. Each participant received training and information that help expand their understanding of drugs and drug use in order to make positive and healthy choices in the future.

"Our community has been rocked by addiction and the overwhelming loss of life to opioid overdoses," Harford County Sheriff Jeffrey R. Gahler said. "It isn't enough to lock up dealers, we must find a way to prevent the overdoses from occurring. When Sgt. Aaron Penman approached me with the idea of the Pledge Program, it was an easy 'yes' from me. We know that early intervention is the key to preventing drug use and this program offers us one more tool to prevention and reaching our most vulnerable population, our children. I am exceedingly proud of this program, our partnerships to get this accomplished, and for the young people who are so willing to participate and learn."



*Participants in Harford County's Wheelchair Costume Workshop and inclusive trick-or-treating*

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