



## ROBERT G. CASSILLY

Harford County Executive

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### **Harford Executive Cassilly Recommends Flat FY 25 Budget: No Tax Increases; Major Investments in Public Safety, Education**

**BEL AIR, Md.**, (April 15, 2024) – Harford County Executive Bob Cassilly today released his recommended fiscal year 2025 budget with no overall increase in government spending and no increase in tax rates. Major investments in public safety and education are paid for through efficiency and the prudent use of accumulated savings, also known as fund balance.

The video and text of the county executive's budget message, followed by budget highlights, appear below.



# HARFORD COUNTY FISCAL YEAR 2025 PROPOSED BUDGET

ROBERT G. CASSILLY, COUNTY EXECUTIVE

“Coming into office last year, we faced a very troubling financial picture. Excessive spending by the prior administration had been financed with \$90M from our savings. We responded with a fiscally responsible budget that met intense opposition from those determined to continue irresponsible and unsustainable spending above levels recommended by the Harford County Spending Affordability Committee and other independent financial advisors. Time has proven our critics very wrong. Our prudent fiscal policies have been vindicated and the continuation of those policies is essential to our county’s long-term success.

A year later, we are once again undertaking the difficult yet necessary task of creating a county budget. We now face a new and unanticipated fiscal challenge. While last year our focus was on reducing excessive spending, this year our new challenge is a substantial reduction in tax revenue available to operate the state and county governments. The reasons for our state’s current predicament are open to debate but the fact of the reduction in revenue is not.

At the state level, we must reconsider policies that have raised Maryland’s minimum wage to the highest in the nation and placed us among the top five worst tax states in the nation. Such policies are a serious drag on our economy. At the same time, unrealistic state spending mandates for the Blueprint education plan are straining local budgets statewide and should be paused and revisited.

At the county level, our choices in responding to these challenges are clear. We can hold the line on spending and increase government efficiencies, or we can raise taxes. I do not support a tax increase. Our county's long-term fiscal success depends on retaining and attracting good businesses and taxpayers. Burdensome tax increases would do neither. They would produce only short-term revenue gains, but at the expense of long-term fiscal strength.

Just as you all do, the government must live within its means and my recommended budget for fiscal year 2025 continues on the path of fiscal responsibility and long-term financial health.

Overall, the proposed \$773,608,000 general fund operating budget is flat, with an increase of 0.67%, and no change in tax rates.

Areas where the budget is increased are offset by reductions and efficiencies elsewhere, including line-item cuts within county departments, leaving some open positions unfilled, and eliminating positions through a retirement incentive. A salary increase comprised of a 1% COLA and \$1,000 for county employees is funded through such measures.

We are still using our savings to supplement ongoing operations, but we are using less of it each year. The \$60 million structural deficit my administration faced coming into office is cut nearly in half in FY25. Our unassigned fund balance is proposed to be down to \$2.7M as of June 30, 2025.

Operating budget increases are mainly for public safety as we continue strengthening our emergency medical services, funding competitive salaries for law enforcement, and providing vital resources for the health department. The budget for information and communication technology increases due to the rising cost of software, which is necessary to improve overall operational efficiency.

Other notable changes in county departments reflect internal reorganizations that have a nominal or net-zero effect.

Major agencies that we help to fund - the public schools, libraries, and community college – have each accumulated reserves from prior years of taxpayer funding. They can use these funds and find efficiencies to pay for spending they believe is necessary above the amounts provided by this budget and by the state. County operating funding for these agencies is flat in FY25.

At \$314,852,402, funding for Harford County Public Schools is by far the largest component of the county budget and exceeds the maintenance of effort amount required by the state under the Blueprint. As we have been doing all year, we will continue working with the school system on ways to share and/or reduce costs so that savings can be directed to the classroom.

Major capital projects for schools include continued funding for the new Homestead Wakefield Elementary School; planning for a new combination elementary school/Harford Academy, which serves children with severe disabilities, and significant upgrades to C. Milton Wright and Harford Technical high schools.

Our other major capital projects include planning funds for a Joppatowne activity center and planning for a 1,200+ acre regional park on the Oakington Peninsula between Aberdeen and Havre de Grace.

In closing, I would like to thank my budget team and all county employees for helping to create a responsible spending plan for next year that meets our needs and does not demand more from Harford County taxpayers.

For complete details on my proposed budget, please visit the county website, [www.harfordcountymd.gov](http://www.harfordcountymd.gov). Thank you.”

## **BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS**

No increase in taxes

Triple AAA bond rating retained

Record level funding for public safety

1% COLA and step increase for law enforcement and corrections deputies

1% COLA and \$1,000 merit increase for eligible county government employees;

equivalent increases for State's Attorney and Circuit Court employees

Funding for 4 SRO's added to Sheriff's Office budget during FY 24 urgently needed for schools in Aberdeen

Funding for 8 positions added to Department of Emergency Services during FY 24 for an additional ambulance crew

Eliminated 11 positions in county departments through a retirement incentive

24 vacancies frozen for last quarter of FY 24 and only partial- or half-year funding for FY 25

Aside from public safety agencies, most departments held flat or funding was reduced for FY 25

Investments in Information and Communications Technology for software programs to support efficiency in government agencies

Board of Education, Libraries and Harford Community College funding held flat for FY 25

Health Department funding increased by 5%, offset by increased fee revenue

**Capital Projects:**

Detention Center Facility Repairs/Upgrades	\$3,000,000
Sheriff's Office Body Worn Camera's, In-Car Cameras, and Mobile Data Terminal Replacement	\$1,554,000
Sheriffs Fleet Replacement	\$1,530,000

Riverside Fire & EMS Station - to complete construction	\$4,000,000
Whiteford VFC New Station - design funds	\$1,000,000
Mobile/Portable Radio System Upgrade	\$5,000,000
Homestead Wakefield ES Major Project	\$23,125,000
Harford Tech HS Limited Renovation Project	\$17,812,000
Aberdeen MS HVAC Systemic Renovation	\$17,087,475
CMW High School Limited Renovations	\$7,000,000
Blueprint Facility Program	\$1,000,000
Athletic Fields	\$2,500,000
Regional Parks	\$2,000,000
Multipurpose Recreational Facilities	\$1,150,000
Joppatowne Community Center	\$1,000,000
Trails and Linear Parks	\$750,000
Equestrian Center Improvements	\$500,000
Watershed Management, nine various capital projects	\$12,200,000
<b>Highways:</b>	
Abingdon Road Bridge over CSX	\$11,300,000
Resurfacing	\$9,525,000
Woodley Road Extension to MD 715	\$4,000,000
Bridge & Culvert Rehabilitation	\$1,750,000

Aldino Stepney/Gilbert Tar & Chip to Asphalt	\$1,310,000
Boggs Road Bridge	\$1,300,000
Stepney Road at Rt 7 Intersection Improvements	\$300,000
Bel Air S. Parkway at Blue Spruce Road Improvements	\$300,000
Grafton Shop at Rt 23 Intersection Improvements	\$150,000

**Water & Sewer:**

Bush Creek Pumping Station	\$11,000,000
Sod Run Facility Improvements	\$1,400,000

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