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COUNTY COUNCIL OF TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND

Public Budget Hearing

May 5, 2026; 7:00 p.m.

Easton Elementary School, Easton, Maryland

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Pete Lesher

Keasha N. Haythe

Lynn L. Mielke

Dave Stepp

Reported by

Diane Houlihan

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<p>1 TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 MR. LESHER: Okay. Good evening and</p> <p>4 welcome.</p> <p>5 This is a continuation of this afternoon's</p> <p>6 hearing on the Talbot County budget for fiscal</p> <p>7 year 26. I will call this meeting to order.</p> <p>8 And we will begin with a little repeat</p> <p>9 from our 2 o'clock hearing by asking Mrs. Moran</p> <p>10 to please read the title of Bill 1625 into the</p> <p>11 record.</p> <p>12 SECRETARY: Bill Number 1625, an act to</p> <p>13 establish the 2026-2027 annual budget and</p> <p>14 appropriation ordinance.</p> <p>15 MR. LESHER: Thank you.</p> <p>16 And Mr. Stamp, I will turn it over -- I</p> <p>17 should say we have, we are expecting Ms. Haythe</p> <p>18 here. President Callahan is unable to join us</p> <p>19 this evening, which is why I'm sitting in the</p> <p>20 center seat for this evening.</p> <p>21 And Mr. Stamp, if you will take it from</p>	<p>1 (indiscernible).</p> <p>2 So if we can advance the slide.</p> <p>3 So this year as we built the budget, we</p> <p>4 tried to use our normal conservative approach</p> <p>5 and bring the budget in somewhere near level</p> <p>6 from last year. And again, we tried to strike</p> <p>7 a balance. Again, that balance was important</p> <p>8 for meeting needs and delaying the wants.</p> <p>9 In doing so, we took a look at the risks,</p> <p>10 and these aren't (indiscernible) for everybody</p> <p>11 who is sitting here. We understand what the</p> <p>12 risks are.</p> <p>13 We are seeing daily policy shifts in the</p> <p>14 federal government. Those have real life</p> <p>15 effects on local jurisdictions across the</p> <p>16 country, and we're not immune to that. So we</p> <p>17 have to be cognizant of that as we built the</p> <p>18 conservative budget, one.</p> <p>19 Two, the State has a looming budget</p> <p>20 deficit that many in the room are probably</p> <p>21 aware of. And when the State has a looming</p>
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<p>1 here.</p> <p>2 MR. STAMP: Good evening, Council Vice</p> <p>3 President Leshner and Members of Council.</p> <p>4 Greetings to everybody out in the</p> <p>5 audience.</p> <p>6 I just want to take a moment before I</p> <p>7 introduce our finance director, Martha Sparks,</p> <p>8 to say a couple of things about this year's</p> <p>9 budget.</p> <p>10 Moving into this year's budget, I'm happy</p> <p>11 to report that the FY26 budget is on target to</p> <p>12 finish as planned.</p> <p>13 And with this budget, we tried very hard</p> <p>14 to meet with all of our department heads, other</p> <p>15 agencies, and organizations to gain an</p> <p>16 understanding of what their needs are and</p> <p>17 trying to meet them where their needs are and</p> <p>18 identifying what their wants are, but</p> <p>19 understanding because of a number of reasons</p> <p>20 I'll go over in a few minutes, this year is not</p> <p>21 a good year for wants. We need</p>	<p>1 budget deficit, they normally pass as much as</p> <p>2 they can to local jurisdictions to pick up, you</p> <p>3 know, that for them. We've seen that.</p> <p>4 Director Sparks will go over some of that when</p> <p>5 she presents.</p> <p>6 Finally, economic pressures. We continue</p> <p>7 to see (indiscernible) prices and commodities,</p> <p>8 what have you, and then workforce challenges.</p> <p>9 And again, we are seeing a highly-competitive</p> <p>10 workforce, number one. And we have to be</p> <p>11 competitive to maintain our wonderful talent</p> <p>12 that we have now and then recruit others.</p> <p>13 So those are risks we had to consider.</p> <p>14 And our strategies were, again, to hold the</p> <p>15 line from FY26 to match it in the '27 budget.</p> <p>16 We wanted to limit new positions. We only</p> <p>17 were able to include several, but they had to</p> <p>18 have a funding mechanism with them.</p> <p>19 We wanted to focus on completing existing</p> <p>20 capital projects. Over the last several years,</p> <p>21 this Council has worked really hard to invest</p>

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<p>1 in capital programs, infrastructure. And we 2 began that several years ago. This is the year 3 it's about not funding more but finishing what 4 we started. And so this is about finishing 5 what we started. 6 I'm happy to say we're going to have a 7 ribbon cutting on a new EMS station on the 8 north end of the county. Chapel School is well 9 underway. I could go on and on, but it's 10 (indiscernible). 11 And then finally, again, we use the 12 umbrella with this Council overarching plan, 13 people, personnel, processes, and projects that 14 we've been busy doing that this budget supports 15 those as well. 16 Again, it's prioritizing public safety and 17 education. And again, we tried to strike a 18 balance. 19 Now, Martha Sparks will go into detail 20 with her presentation, but I would like to 21 thank her and Kaitlin Foster-Clark for her help</p>	<p>1 northern part of the county. 2 In addition, the county has entered into 3 an equipment purchase agreement for new heart 4 monitors, stair chairs, power stretchers for 5 all paramedic units, replacing aging equipment 6 and enhancing EMS capabilities. 7 Council has also increased support to our 8 volunteer fire departments. 9 Talbot County also continues to prioritize 10 the safety and maintenance of its 370 miles of 11 county roads. Routine maintenance and paving 12 occur annually, but the county also invests in 13 strategic roadway strengthening and widening 14 projects. 15 In November 2025, Talbot County, in 16 partnership with the Town of Easton and 17 Mid-Shore Regional Council, completed a 18 multi-phase project to widen and to strengthen 19 Goldsborough Neck Road. This enhances safety, 20 improves access, and supports future economic 21 growth associated with the Mistletoe Hall</p>
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<p>1 as well, as well as Jessica and County 2 Manager's Office and, of course, the Council 3 for your support. 4 With that, I'll turn it over to Martha. 5 Thank you. 6 MS. SPARKS: Good evening, Council, 7 Members of the Public. 8 The general fund budget for fiscal year 9 2026 is performing well. Revenues are 10 projected to come in slightly above estimates 11 and expenditures are on track to meet budgeted 12 levels. 13 The FY26 budget has supported and allowed 14 for meaningful improvements in government 15 services, community support, communication, and 16 overall government effectiveness. 17 Some FY26 accomplishments. Earlier this 18 fiscal year, Talbot County began construction 19 of a new north EMS station in Cordova. This 20 facility will improve emergency response times 21 and enhance public safety for residents in the</p>	<p>1 Commerce Business Park and the Talbot Commerce 2 Business Park. 3 More recently, construction began on the 4 Chapel Road culvert replacement, which is 5 necessary to maintain safe roadway conditions 6 and proper water flow to Wootenau Creek. 7 The St. Michaels Library reopened in 8 March 2026, showcasing new features designed to 9 better serve the needs of the community. 10 Improvements at county owned pools in 11 Easton and St. Michaels are ongoing, as the 12 county continues to invest in and maintain its 13 recreational facilities. 14 Most recently, the Council established the 15 Office of Community Partnerships to serve as a 16 coordinating office that strengthens 17 collaboration among agencies, nonprofit 18 partners, community stakeholders, and improves 19 access to resources. 20 The fiscal year 2027 general fund budget 21 of \$159.1 million was developed using the</p>

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<p>1 county's longstanding conservative budgeting 2 approach, which has consistently supported a 3 strong financial position.</p> <p>4 The budget reflects input gathered through 5 meetings with departments, outside agencies, 6 finance, the county manager, and work sessions 7 with Council. Each request was carefully 8 reviewed, and the budget before you represents 9 the priorities and decisions made during those 10 work sessions.</p> <p>11 Our budgeting methodology focuses on 12 modestly projecting revenues, evaluating the 13 need and impact of expenditures, using reserves 14 strategically. This disciplined practice 15 ensures that any new, ongoing expenses, such as 16 full-time positions, are added only when a 17 funding source is found and it is clearly 18 justified.</p> <p>19 As a result, Talbot County has been able 20 to maintain low property and income tax rates 21 and keep other fees down. This approach has</p>	<p>1 reserve, and 44.3 million in unassigned 2 reserve.</p> <p>3 These reserves are calculated according to 4 the reserve policy adopted by the Council in 5 February 2025 and provides 30 percent coverage 6 of general fund expenditures before other 7 financing costs.</p> <p>8 FY25 reserves also included 21.6 million 9 assigned to the FY26 budget and 2.7 million in 10 non-spendable reserves. Reserves should only 11 be used for non-recurring purchases, projects, 12 or payments, and not for ongoing expenses that 13 are difficult to reduce, such as personnel or 14 education funding.</p> <p>15 Talbot County's reserves provide several 16 benefits. They demonstrate strong financial 17 management to credit rating agencies, 18 supporting the county's ability to secure 19 favorable interest rates and reduce borrowing 20 costs, they provide the ability to fund small 21 capital projects and capital outlay without</p>
<p>Page 11</p> <p>1 also supported healthy reserve growth, 2 positioning the county to withstand fiscal 3 uncertainty at the State and federal levels.</p> <p>4 Council's reserve policies adopted last 5 year provide a clear guidance for funding 6 decisions and risk mitigation strategies that 7 help shape this budget.</p> <p>8 Talbot County property tax rates are 9 calculated in accordance with the Talbot County 10 Charter and the Maryland Education Article 11 Section 5-104.</p> <p>12 The property tax rate proposed is .8180 13 and includes as education supplement of .0147. 14 There is no change to the county's income tax 15 rate, and there are no changes to the county's 16 schedule of fees.</p> <p>17 Talbot County's reserves at the end of 18 FY25 totaled 106 million, which includes 19 24.9 million in the rainy day reserve, 20 7.5 million in the risk mitigation reserve, 21 4.8 million in the permanent public improvement</p>	<p>Page 13</p> <p>1 borrowing, and they serve as an essential tool 2 in the county's conservative budgeting 3 approach.</p> <p>4 The largest portion of Talbot County's 5 recurring operating expenditures supports 6 Talbot County Public Schools. For FY27, TCPS 7 funding and school-related debt accounted for 8 43 percent of the county's recurring operating 9 expenditures.</p> <p>10 FY27 funding attributable to the K through 11 12 education includes the required adjusted 12 local share of 57 million; capital projects 13 totaling 1.8 million for the Easton Middle 14 School roof and the Education Center exterior 15 repairs and painting; teachers' pensions at 16 619,000, which was a former State 17 responsibility that was shifted to the 18 counties; universal pre-k at 307,000, which is 19 also a State-mandated cost increase that's up 20 from \$29,000 last year. And this is not 21 eligible for inclusion in the education</p>

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<p>1 supplement.</p> <p>2 In FY2025, out of 24 school districts in</p> <p>3 the State of Maryland, Talbot County was 12th</p> <p>4 highest in total per pupil funding and fourth</p> <p>5 highest in local per pupil funding.</p> <p>6 The FY27 budget includes a three percent</p> <p>7 cost of living adjustment and one</p> <p>8 performance-based step for county employees, no</p> <p>9 new general government positions without an</p> <p>10 identified funding source, and the use of fund</p> <p>11 balance reserves that will be invested in</p> <p>12 5.5 million for capital outlay purchases,</p> <p>13 4.6 million for capital projects, and</p> <p>14 2.2 million for the recreation fund.</p> <p>15 Total revenues for FY27 are projected at</p> <p>16 159.1 million. Revenue estimates have been</p> <p>17 increased based on historical trends. This</p> <p>18 approach slightly adjusts the county's</p> <p>19 traditionally conservative budgeting method,</p> <p>20 while relying on reserve policies to help</p> <p>21 protect against uncertainties, such as federal</p>	<p>1 Recordation and transfer taxes can be</p> <p>2 volatile and are strongly tied to the</p> <p>3 performance of the real estate market in Talbot</p> <p>4 County.</p> <p>5 The net increase in education funding to</p> <p>6 Talbot County Schools, teachers' pensions, and</p> <p>7 universal pre-k is 1.8 million.</p> <p>8 Operating costs for the county have</p> <p>9 increased five percent annually as a result of</p> <p>10 the fixed costs related to our workforce.</p> <p>11 Capital outlay has an increase of</p> <p>12 2.4 million. Capital outlay includes the</p> <p>13 one-time or non-recurring costs for vehicles,</p> <p>14 equipment, and small improvements. Included in</p> <p>15 the 5.5 million in capital outlay is Talbot</p> <p>16 County's contribution of 2.3 million to the</p> <p>17 construction of the Queen Anne's Technical</p> <p>18 Center at Chesapeake College, which will</p> <p>19 support adult learners, career changers,</p> <p>20 incumbent workers, and expand learning in the</p> <p>21 construction trades.</p>
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<p>1 policy changes, the State's budget deficit, and</p> <p>2 broader economic pressures.</p> <p>3 Property taxes remain the county's largest</p> <p>4 revenue source, and the education supplement is</p> <p>5 a component. Each year, the education</p> <p>6 supplement resets to zero. Revenues received</p> <p>7 from each year's education supplement are</p> <p>8 folded into total property tax revenues and</p> <p>9 become part of the county's cumulative property</p> <p>10 tax rate going forward.</p> <p>11 Education supplement revenues are</p> <p>12 dedicated exclusively to education funding.</p> <p>13 They are used to pay for a level of funding</p> <p>14 that does not decrease.</p> <p>15 The county has two primary sources of</p> <p>16 revenues. Those are property taxes, which</p> <p>17 comprise 46.5 percent of general fund revenues,</p> <p>18 and income tax revenues at 25.1 percent of</p> <p>19 general fund revenues. Recordation, transfer,</p> <p>20 and other local taxes account for 9.4 percent</p> <p>21 of the general fund revenues.</p>	<p>1 There are also one-time increases of</p> <p>2 2.3 million in transfers to the recreation fund</p> <p>3 of capital outlay and CIP projects and to</p> <p>4 support the recreation programs that run</p> <p>5 through the Community Center.</p> <p>6 These general fund expenditure categories</p> <p>7 that you see on this chart are consistent</p> <p>8 between our budget ordinance and our annual</p> <p>9 comprehensive financial statement. And those</p> <p>10 financial documents education expenditures</p> <p>11 include Talbot County Public Schools, Talbot</p> <p>12 County Free Library, and Chesapeake College,</p> <p>13 which comprise 43.7 of all general fund</p> <p>14 expenditures.</p> <p>15 Public safety accounts for 26.9 percent of</p> <p>16 general fund expenditures and illustrates this</p> <p>17 Council's strong support for our public safety,</p> <p>18 which includes strong support of our local</p> <p>19 volunteer fire departments.</p> <p>20 General government expenditures comprise</p> <p>21 11.7 percent, and Public Works is at</p>

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<p>1 5.6 percent.</p> <p>2 The proposed property tax rate has been</p> <p>3 calculated at .8180, which includes an</p> <p>4 education supplement of .0147.</p> <p>5 Talbot County's property tax rates are</p> <p>6 calculated in accordance with the Talbot County</p> <p>7 Charter and with Maryland State Education law.</p> <p>8 As mentioned previously, the education</p> <p>9 supplement is not cumulative. The rate resets</p> <p>10 each year. Only increases in education funding</p> <p>11 and teachers' pensions can be included in the</p> <p>12 education supplement.</p> <p>13 For a home assessed at \$300,000, the</p> <p>14 year-over-year property tax increase is 44.40</p> <p>15 cents, with 44.10 cents of that amount directly</p> <p>16 funding increases for Talbot County Public</p> <p>17 Schools and teacher pensions.</p> <p>18 Since 2019, the property tax on \$300,000</p> <p>19 home has increased by \$635. 480 of that</p> <p>20 increase has been attributable to the education</p> <p>21 supplement, while \$155 has supported county</p>	<p>1 Talbot County does offer property owners</p> <p>2 located within a municipal boundary a tax</p> <p>3 differential based parallel services offered by</p> <p>4 both the county and the town. In fiscal year</p> <p>5 2025, the total benefit to these property</p> <p>6 owners was calculated at \$4.1 million by the</p> <p>7 Department of Legislative Services.</p> <p>8 And on the next slide you'll see a sample</p> <p>9 tax bill illustrating the county property tax</p> <p>10 rate and the education supplement based upon a</p> <p>11 home assessed at \$300,000.</p> <p>12 Talbot County has remained the lowest</p> <p>13 property tax rate in Maryland for many years.</p> <p>14 However, this is changing due to the increased</p> <p>15 educational costs mandated by the State of</p> <p>16 Maryland through the Blueprint for Education.</p> <p>17 Talbot County is structurally different because</p> <p>18 its Charter-mandated revenue cap limits</p> <p>19 flexibility in a way most Maryland Counties do</p> <p>20 not face.</p> <p>21 Some counties are proposing to lower</p>
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<p>1 services, facilities, and programs.</p> <p>2 Counties in Maryland have very limited</p> <p>3 tools for generating revenue, and property tax</p> <p>4 is the most predictable and stable revenue</p> <p>5 source available.</p> <p>6 Education funding is a large recurring</p> <p>7 expense that grows every year. The county</p> <p>8 cannot reduce education spending in response to</p> <p>9 economic shifts. For this reason, Talbot</p> <p>10 County intentionally places increases in</p> <p>11 education funding into the education</p> <p>12 supplement. It ensures a reliable, predictable</p> <p>13 revenue stream for an expenditure the county is</p> <p>14 legally obligated and unable to reduce. It</p> <p>15 keeps education-related increases separate and</p> <p>16 transparent.</p> <p>17 Income tax revenue, by contrast, is highly</p> <p>18 volatile. While the county does not earmark</p> <p>19 it, it does rely on the flexibility within</p> <p>20 county operations to cut or reduce spending if</p> <p>21 income tax revenues decline.</p>	<p>1 property tax rates in FY27, which happens to be</p> <p>2 an election year. These counties have more</p> <p>3 flexibility because they are not bound by the</p> <p>4 same charter restrictions as Talbot County.</p> <p>5 Talbot County's Charter revenue cap allows</p> <p>6 no more than a two percent increase in property</p> <p>7 tax revenues or one additional penny on the tax</p> <p>8 rate each year for public safety. The county</p> <p>9 cannot exceed these limits under any</p> <p>10 circumstances.</p> <p>11 If Talbot County chose to not take the</p> <p>12 two percent increase or the additional penny in</p> <p>13 one year, the county cannot make up that lost</p> <p>14 revenue in future years, even if education or</p> <p>15 other mandated cost rise sharply.</p> <p>16 This structural limitation prevents large</p> <p>17 year-to-year swings in tax bills and enforces</p> <p>18 strong fiscal discipline on the Council, the</p> <p>19 county manager, and county departments.</p> <p>20 However, it also reduces the county's</p> <p>21 flexibility compared to other Maryland</p>

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<p>1 counties.</p> <p>2 I'd also like to point out that the Talbot</p> <p>3 County, that Talbot County provides homeowner</p> <p>4 protections through the homestead tax credit.</p> <p>5 Talbot County has a zero percent homestead</p> <p>6 credit cap, which is one of the strongest in</p> <p>7 Maryland. This prevents the taxable assessment</p> <p>8 of owner-occupied primary residence from</p> <p>9 increasing for the year, even if the property's</p> <p>10 market value rises significantly.</p> <p>11 This means the property tax bill for an</p> <p>12 owner-occupied residence will increase as a</p> <p>13 result of the tax rate increase and it's not a</p> <p>14 result of changes in the assessment.</p> <p>15 Talbot County has the second lowest income</p> <p>16 tax rate in Maryland at 2.4 percent. A</p> <p>17 significant share of Talbot County's income tax</p> <p>18 revenue comes from a small number of</p> <p>19 high-income taxpayers, which makes this revenue</p> <p>20 source highly volatile.</p> <p>21 Income tax revenues have become even more</p>	<p>1 budgetary flexibility and Fitch's expectation</p> <p>2 that the county will sustain reserves at or</p> <p>3 above 7.5 percent of expenditures. They said</p> <p>4 the long-term liability profile assessed as</p> <p>5 strongest. But, however, our revenue</p> <p>6 volatility was assessed as weak due to the</p> <p>7 significant proportion of revenue derived from</p> <p>8 local income tax.</p> <p>9 Moody's Investor Service affirmed the</p> <p>10 county's credit rating at AA1, noting the</p> <p>11 following credit strengths: Strong management</p> <p>12 team, maintains formal policies, conservative</p> <p>13 budgeting, and long-term financial and debt</p> <p>14 plans. We have a robust per capita property</p> <p>15 (indiscernible) and manageable leveraged and</p> <p>16 fixed costs.</p> <p>17 There will be final budget deliberations</p> <p>18 by Council on Tuesday, May 12th. And budget</p> <p>19 adoption is scheduled for Tuesday, May 26th.</p> <p>20 The public is invited to submit written</p> <p>21 public comments by Thursday, May 8th.</p>
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<p>1 unpredictable as a result of the State of</p> <p>2 Maryland's increased tax rates on high income</p> <p>3 earners in 2025. The last time the State</p> <p>4 enacted a similar tax increase, Talbot County's</p> <p>5 income tax revenue dropped by 40 percent the</p> <p>6 following year due to outward migration. And</p> <p>7 it took ten years for the revenues to recover.</p> <p>8 Maintaining a low local income tax rate</p> <p>9 helps reduce the risk of out migration and</p> <p>10 protects this sensitive revenue stream. The</p> <p>11 county last changed the income tax rate in</p> <p>12 2013.</p> <p>13 In May of 2025, the county went out to</p> <p>14 bond. And as a part of that process, we are</p> <p>15 rated by two bond rating agencies, Fitch and</p> <p>16 Moody's.</p> <p>17 And Fitch Ratings affirmed the county's</p> <p>18 credit rating at AAA. And they noted that the</p> <p>19 AAA IDR and GO rating, general obligation</p> <p>20 rating, affirmation reflects Talbot's AAA</p> <p>21 financial resilience unpinned by ample</p>	<p>1 MS. MORRIS: Friday, May 8th.</p> <p>2 MS. SPARKS: Friday, May 8th. Okay. I</p> <p>3 didn't think that that was right. Friday,</p> <p>4 May 8th to publiccomment@talbotcountymd.gov.</p> <p>5 And for more information on the FY27</p> <p>6 proposed budget, you can visit our website at</p> <p>7 www.talbotcountymd.gov.</p> <p>8 MR. LESHHER: Thank you, Ms. Sparks.</p> <p>9 We are here to listen to you tonight. And</p> <p>10 as Ms. Sparks said, what we hear tonight we'll</p> <p>11 be deliberating on next Tuesday afternoon.</p> <p>12 That budget workshop is open to the public at</p> <p>13 2 p.m. And forward those recommendations for</p> <p>14 final preparation of the budget then.</p> <p>15 So at this time, I will open the public</p> <p>16 hearing on Bill Number 1625, an act to</p> <p>17 establish the 26-27 annual budget and</p> <p>18 appropriation ordinance.</p> <p>19 As you come to the podium, I will ask you</p> <p>20 to please state your name and address for the</p> <p>21 record. You will be given three minutes to</p>

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<p>1 speak if you are representing yourself or five 2 minutes to speak if speaking on behalf of a 3 group or association. 4 And Dr. Pepukayi, would you like to have 5 the first opportunity? 6 DR. PEPUKAYI: Sure. Good evening 7 President Callahan is not here, Members of the 8 Council, Mr. Leshner, Mr. Stamp, and staff. 9 I'm here this evening representing Talbot 10 County Education Center, 12 Magnolia Street. 11 First and foremost, thank you for your 12 continued collaboration and your demonstrated 13 support of Talbot County Public Schools. 14 As my fourth year serving as the proud 15 superintendent of schools comes to an end, I'm 16 grateful for the strong relationship that has 17 been forged between the Board of Education and 18 the Talbot County Council and for what we 19 accomplished together on behalf of our 20 students. We truly have a partnership, and I 21 look forward to serving this community over the</p>	<p>1 Our ask has two components. Specifically 2 we are seeking staffing to support student 3 mental health and academic success, as well as 4 an additional investment in student and staff 5 safety. 6 First, we are requesting 500,000 to 7 increase staffing in our alternative learning 8 environments, including four certified teachers 9 and one licensed social worker, who would 10 provide behavioral support. 11 This directly aligns with priority three, 12 strategy number one in our line by 2029 plan, 13 which is to increase the number of full-time 14 staff who support students' mental health. 15 These professionals would help ensure that 16 some of our most vulnerable students continue 17 to make academic progress while receiving the 18 social and emotional support necessary for 19 long-term success. 20 Second, we are requesting 800,000 to 21 implement a weapons detection system at our</p>
<p>1 next four years as I embark on my second term. 2 I appreciate the fact that the budgeting 3 process has been thoughtful, deliberate, and 4 conservative. But as a superintendent, I would 5 be remiss if I did not advocate for your 6 consideration of some additional support we 7 believe is critical to ensuring that all TCPS 8 students have access -- 9 SPEAKER: Recording in progress. 10 DR. PEPUKAYI: -- they need to compete. 11 With this in mind, I am hoping you will 12 consider an additional \$1.3 million above the 13 original proposed allocation for Talbot County 14 Public Schools. This request is directly 15 aligned with our Strategic Plan priority number 16 three, which focuses on students, families, and 17 community engagement by strengthening student 18 support services and enhancing school safety. 19 We believe this is essential to fulfilling our 20 mission, that all of our students graduate 21 prepared for college, career, and life.</p>	<p>1 high schools. This investment represents a 2 proactive step in maintaining safe school 3 environments and providing peace of mind to 4 students, families, and staff. 5 We just learned this afternoon that this 6 has been approved by the State Department of 7 Education as a non-recurring cost exclusion. 8 Our appeal tonight is driven by our shared 9 commitment and our strategic plan objectives, 10 ensuring that every TCPS student feels valued, 11 celebrated, and empowered to achieve their 12 potential. Every student deserves the 13 opportunity to a learning environment that 14 supports their success. And every educator, 15 and by the way, it is Teacher Appreciation 16 Week, deserves the resources necessary to meet 17 those needs effectively. 18 Thank you for your ongoing dedication to 19 the students and families of Talbot County. 20 MR. LESHNER: Thank you very much. 21 Do we have a sign-in sheet? Okay.</p>

<p style="text-align: right;">Page 30</p> <p>1 DR. PEPUKAYI: Oh, and President Jackson. 2 MR. LESHER: Please. 3 MS. JACKSON: I missed the sign-in sheet. 4 I'm sorry. 5 Good evening, Vice President Leshner and 6 Council Members. I'm Emily Jackson, the 7 president of the Talbot County Board of 8 Education. I'm speaking on behalf of the Board 9 of Ed at 12 Magnolia Street, and I appreciate 10 the opportunity to speak to you tonight. 11 I want to begin by acknowledging the care 12 and discipline with which you, Mrs. Sparks, and 13 Mr. Stamp approach the county budget. 14 We understand the responsibility that you 15 carry in balancing competing priorities, and we 16 respect the thoughtful, conservative approach 17 you take in stewarding the public funds and my 18 own tax dollars. Thank you very much. 19 At the same time I want to be very clear 20 about the position we find ourselves in. 21 Funding the school system at the minimum</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 32</p> <p>1 narrow difference. 2 We are asking you to consider two targeted 3 increases, one of \$500,000 to the operating 4 budget and one of \$800,000 to the non-recurring 5 costs above the current proposed funding level. 6 Over the past several years, I believe 7 that we have built something important 8 together. Through joint conversations, public 9 meetings, and community engagement, we together 10 have heard directly from our residents, 11 including our TCPS staff and students. And 12 their voices have been especially impactful. 13 A consistent theme has emerged. We've 14 even heard it from you. Around discipline, 15 student support, and the need for stronger, 16 more responsive systems. 17 The additional 500,000 that we are 18 requesting is directly tied to those 19 conversations. It is a targeted investment to 20 address clearly-identified needs. 21 Specifically, it would allow us to place</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Page 31</p> <p>1 required level due to State mandates and fixed 2 costs increases outside of our control does not 3 maintain our current level of service. In real 4 terms, it results in more than a 1.5 million 5 reduction. 6 That's not a projection or a preference. 7 It's a structural reality of this funding model 8 we are all operating within. 9 I also want to recognize the extraordinary 10 work of our financial team led by Sarah Jones. 11 The Board initially put forward a budget 12 that reflected the full scope of our needs. 13 Since that time, we have worked to close the 14 gap between that request and the funding level 15 currently under consideration by approximately 16 nine and a half million dollars. 17 That gap has been closed through seven and 18 a half million in cuts and deficiencies, along 19 with \$2 million in our fund balance that we are 20 committing to this year's budget. 21 After all of that, what remains is a very</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 33</p> <p>1 certified teachers in our Checkmate Program, 2 add a dedicated social worker to support 3 student mental health in those settings, and 4 expand tutoring to provide more individualized 5 academic support. 6 This is not about expansion for the sake 7 of growth. It is about responding to what our 8 community has asked of us in a way that is 9 thoughtful, measured, and accountable. 10 One of the greatest strengths of a 11 community like ours is our ability to work 12 together and respond in real time. We are small 13 enough to listen, to adapt, and to act. 14 Moments like this are an opportunity to 15 demonstrate that strength and show that when 16 our community raises its concerns, we hear them 17 and we respond together. 18 We value the partnership we have with you, 19 and we are committed to continuing that 20 collaboration. 21 We respectfully ask for your support of</p>

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<p>1 this targeted investment so that we can 2 continue to meet the needs of our students and 3 our community. 4 Thank you for your time, your partnership, 5 and your consideration. 6 MR. LESHER: Thank you, Ms. Jackson. 7 I do, in fact, have a sign-up sheet. And 8 so we will start at the top of that sign-in 9 sheet with Charlie Yonkers. 10 And queued up right behind him then will 11 be Robert Forloney. 12 MR. YONKERS: Just a word of appreciation. 13 Charlie Yonkers. 14 I live at 700 Port Street now at 15 Londonderry. And I am a happy taxpayer for 35 16 years down at (indiscernible) Farm in Wittman. 17 And we are now newly resident at Londonderry. 18 I'm speaking on behalf of the Board of the 19 Talbot County Free Library, which I've been a 20 Board member since 2019. And I'm currently on 21 the executive committee as secretary.</p>	<p>1 County, and thank you for the opportunity to 2 serve on the library, as an engine of community 3 in a way in which is new. And what you all 4 have done with respect to the library in my 5 personal experience is beyond words 6 appreciated. 7 And thank you. That's it. 8 MR. LESHER: Thank you, Mr. Yonkers. 9 Mr. Forloney. 10 MR. FORLONEY: Thank you, Council. I am 11 Robert Forloney, 101 West Marengo 12 Street in St. Michaels. I'm representing the 13 Talbot County Free Library Board. I am the 14 Vice President of the organization. And also 15 representing myself as a parent. 16 We would like to thank you greatly for 17 your acceptance of our proposal for our capital 18 outlay as well as our operating budget. And to 19 see the culmination of many years of work with 20 cooperation in partnership for the expansion of 21 the St. Michaels Library. I know a number of</p>
<p>1 It's been a deep, deep honor to me 2 personally and great satisfaction to have 3 participated on the Board of the library. I've 4 come to respect the library used as a citizen 5 of Bay Hundred and St. Michaels and who have 6 witnessed what we've seen in the last two 7 years. 8 The fulfillment is moving as a citizen and 9 as a participant of this community. And my 10 intensity, we have been a full-time resident 11 since 2016 of Easton and of Talbot County now. 12 And we totally love our new association 13 with Easton. 14 But the library has become a central part 15 of my personal life, and I've come to respect 16 it for what I now appreciate is an engine of 17 community development in a way in which as a 18 younger person I never appreciated. 19 As a student and teacher at Georgetown and 20 so forth, I appreciated libraries for their 21 academics. But now I see them at Talbot</p>	<p>1 people in the audience were there, and it was 2 just tremendous to see after all this hard work 3 the actual opening of the building itself and 4 the number of students and children who were 5 there with their families. 6 I didn't realize there were that many in 7 the Bay Hundred area. It seemed like each and 8 every of one had come out for that particular 9 event. 10 In addition, I have teens. And this is 11 something that I think is greatly overlooked 12 often by the organizations. There's things for 13 young children, there's things for adults, but 14 teens tend to get left out. So the new library 15 is a wonderful space with regard to the maker 16 space, different types of programming. 17 And I know our capital outlay is also 18 specifically looking at refurbishing the teen 19 section at the Easton Library. 20 So as a parent who had brought these 21 children there as a small child, bringing them</p>

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<p>1 in after the farmer's market and spending a 2 tremendous amount of time together at the 3 library, it's wonderful to see them come back 4 now as volunteers.</p> <p>5 Last Thursday, they were there in the new 6 space with over I think close to 18 to 20 other 7 teens teaching Dungeons & Dragons. So we had 8 been using the temporary space in St. Michaels 9 and then the YMCA for a little bit. And it was 10 just nice to be able to be back in that space 11 (indiscernible) together.</p> <p>12 So again, we're just greatly appreciative 13 of the partnership and the collaboration that 14 we have with the Council, and the work that 15 you've done has been tremendous with regards to 16 the impact its had on families throughout the 17 county itself. Thank you.</p> <p>18 MR. LESHER: Thank you, Mr. Forloney.</p> <p>19 I want to now open it up to any member of 20 the public who wishes to come forward. We have 21 two podiums. So we can queue up one person</p>	<p>1 like you saw hey, we're getting left behind 2 because we don't have rural Internet. You guys 3 made investment and you found grants and you 4 found ways to get high-speed Internet to all 5 the -- to many of the residents within the 6 county. And that helped the county.</p> <p>7 I would also say right now what's 8 happening with the schools, and I work in the 9 schools, right, after a long time in the 10 business world. And I've got to tell you these 11 are the hardest working people I've ever seen 12 in my entire 40-year working career. Right?</p> <p>13 If I ever went back in the private 14 industry, the first people I'd hire are 15 teachers. They're smart, they're dedicated, 16 they show up every day to deal with all kinds 17 of obstacles. And we need to do more to help 18 them. Right?</p> <p>19 And I'm going to challenge you from the 20 standpoint of our property values have done 21 really well. But if my property values could</p>
<p>Page 39</p> <p>1 while the other person is speaking.</p> <p>2 If you would like to come up to the 3 podium, anybody is welcome to speak at this 4 time. Just please come forward.</p> <p>5 MR. JURRIUS: Yeah.</p> <p>6 MR. LESHER: And if somebody wants to line 7 up at the other podium, that's fine, too.</p> <p>8 MR. JURRIUS: Doug Jurrius. Been here in 9 the county for almost three years now. Most of 10 that time was spent in the business world. I 11 (indiscernible). I was here on the weekends. 12 I live at 6864 Travelers Rest Circle.</p> <p>13 And I guess the thing -- I've seen some of 14 you at the school on a regular basis. And that 15 I appreciate. I guess the thing I'd like to 16 bring up is times are changing. Right? You 17 guys were very quick to -- you know, we have 18 done a really job on keeping costs down, 19 keeping our tax rate low. And that served us 20 well as a county.</p> <p>21 But one of the things that changes, just</p>	<p>Page 41</p> <p>1 have gone up ten percent more but they didn't 2 because the schools rankings are so low, have 3 they really served the interests of the 4 property owners of Talbot County? Right. The 5 number one, number one driver on property 6 values is the quality of the schools. Right.</p> <p>7 We now spend way less per student than 8 anybody else. Yay. Right? But we're getting 9 results that are maybe -- I think we're doing 10 better than we should be given the funding, but 11 at some point you need to change programs. We 12 need to rethink how do I best serve the 13 residents.</p> <p>14 Anybody try to get a colonoscopy recently? 15 There are no -- they're not taking any new 16 patients here in town. You have to go across 17 the bridge.</p> <p>18 You're about to open a giant new hospital. 19 How are you planning to staff it? Young 20 doctors and nurses and medical professionals, 21 they're going to come to the area? Right.</p>

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<p>1 They're going to look at the beauty, but then 2 they also need to say how are my kids going to 3 be served. 4 The question you have to ask yourself is 5 have we done our best. Right. We cannot 6 always continually save (indiscernible). So I 7 would ask you to think about that. 8 Many of you are real estate professionals. 9 Take a look and say what would it be like if 10 Talbot County were ranked one, two, or three in 11 the State of Maryland. Right. 12 And I don't think you can just hold 13 Dr. Pepukayi and the staff saying oh, you need 14 to do more with what little we give you. 15 Right. 16 At some point you look at the fact that we 17 have social media. That is monetizing our 18 kids's brains. Right? We -- none of us made 19 that happen, but we have to deal with that when 20 they come into the school. Right? 21 None of us (indiscernible) were there</p>	<p>1 So think strategically, but think to a new 2 area. Saving is not going to make 3 (indiscernible). Thank you. 4 MR. LESHHER: Thank you, Mr. Jurrius. 5 Please feel free to come forward. You 6 don't need to be shy. Anyone else wish to 7 speak this evening? This is your opportunity. 8 All right. Well, we don't need to just 9 have spoken comment. Written comments will be 10 accepted by the County Council until Friday, 11 May 8th, at noon. Email comments can be sent 12 to publiccomment@talbotcountymaryland.gov. 13 One last chance. 14 I will now close the public hearing. 15 And Bill 16 -- we will be deliberating 16 again next Tuesday, May 12th, at 2 o'clock in 17 the afternoon. That's in the Bradley Meeting 18 Room over at the courthouse, our usual meeting 19 place. 20 And Bill 1625 is eligible for a vote on 21 Tuesday, May 26th.</p>
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<p>1 promoting the opioid addiction. Right? You 2 know, we have children of those people now. 3 Right? And we're dealing with that. They come 4 to our school. We have to take them how they 5 come to us. Right? And we need the resources 6 to (indiscernible) with your kids. 7 And the quality of life in Talbot County 8 relies on a really strong school system. 9 So I would say start to think 10 strategically about how you can make better 11 investments in the school. I'm not saying 12 (indiscernible) budget, but I am saying use the 13 financial wherewithal that you have to help 14 better all the people in Talbot County so when 15 they wake up in the morning, there's a doctor 16 available. Right? When they wake up in the 17 morning, there's a trained mechanic. Right? 18 All those services we need to be able to 19 provide coming from our school system. And 20 right now, I feel it how stretched everybody is 21 and they're working countless hours.</p>	<p>1 Thank you, all. 2 And do we need a motion to adjourn? 3 MS. MIELKE: Motion to adjourn. 4 MS. HAYTHE: Second. 5 MR. LESHHER: We have a motion and second. 6 Ms. Moran, would you call the roll. 7 SECRETARY: Mr. Leshher. 8 MR. LESHHER: Aye. 9 SECRETARY: Mr. Stepp. 10 MR. STEPP: Aye. 11 SECRETARY: Ms. Mielke. 12 MS. MIELKE: Aye. 13 SECRETARY: Ms. Haythe. 14 MS. HAYTHE: Aye. 15 MR. LESHHER: Thank you all very much. 16 We are adjourned. 17 (Meeting concluded at: 7:45 p.m.) 18 19 20 21</p>

1 STATE OF MARYLAND
2 I, Diane Houlihan, a Notary Public in and
for the State of Maryland, County of Talbot, do
3 hereby certify that the within named, Talbot County
Council Audio, personally appeared before me at the
4 time and place herein set according to law, was
interrogated by counsel.

5
6 I further certify that the examination was
recorded stenographically by me and then transcribed
7 from my stenographic notes to the within printed
matter by means of computer-assisted transcription
in a true and accurate manner.

8
9 I further certify that the stipulations
contained herein were entered into by counsel in my
presence.

10
11 I further certify that I am not of counsel
to any of the parties, not an employee of counsel,
nor related to any of the parties, nor in any way
12 interested in the outcome of this action.

13 AS WITNESS my hand Notorial Seal this 13th
day of May, 2026, at Easton, MD.

14
15 

16 _____
Diane Houlihan
Notary Public

17
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19 My commission expires September 16, 2029

20
21

[& - accomplished]

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