



April 14, 2020

Dear Councilmember Jawando,

On behalf of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce and the thousands of employers and employees our organizations represent, we were deeply disappointed by the reckless statements you made on April 8 on *Rising on The Hill* YouTube Channel. During this interview, you claimed that landlords were instituting 20 - 40 percent rent increases during COVID-19.

The most offensive premise of the interview was the impression that rent gouging was a rampant and widespread issue. We were taken aback by these allegations and reached out to our landlord members to determine if any of them had implemented a rent increase of that magnitude. To the contrary, we learned that none of our members reported any rent increase, let alone a 20-40 percent increase. We found that not only are landlords across Montgomery County holding rents at current levels, but they are also going above and beyond to work with tenants who cannot make their rent. Further, these actions were initiated proactively and voluntarily well before your accusations were made last week. Some of the stories we heard include:

*“We are working with residents/tenants to provide them with resources to obtain assistance, setting up payment plans, waiving late fees, suspending transaction fees to pay online...”*

*“We have been working with tenants to defer rental payments, in whole or in part, for April and May, with repayment over the balance of the lease term.”*

*“We are making sure they have all of the information for aid from the various governmental agencies. We are also providing them with constant updates on the recommended strategies to protect them from this virus. We are doing this for all of our commercial and residential customers.”*

*“As for the commercial, we are doing workouts in many different manners...whether paying half rent for several months, no rent for two months for adding term...again for our commercial folks we are being as flexible as possible. We need our tenants and are trying to help in any manner possible.”*

As Chambers representing businesses across the county, we have dozens of landlords, large and small, as a part of our memberships. We would have welcomed the opportunity to sit down with you to work towards solutions that would not have unfairly painted the entire industry in such a negative light.

Perhaps you understand that property-owners are good community partners; however, your words and actions unjustly villainize individuals who are trying to help the community get through this unprecedented crisis. Moving forward, we look forward to more supportive dialogue and actions for those community members who are rising to help others during this global pandemic. Now is a time that we

must take care of one another and stand united as the community works together to manage a global pandemic.

Sincerely,

**Georgette “Gigi” Godwin**

President and CEO

Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce

**Ginanne Italiano**

President and CEO

The Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce

**Jane Redicker**

President and CEO

Greater Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce

Cc: Montgomery County Councilmembers