

Thank you for that warm introduction from the First Lady—MY First Lady, Shani Ball.

Family, friends, neighbors and all who care about the future of our County, our State, our nation, and our world.

We come together tonight during a serious moment in our history, a pivotal moment of new beginnings. Tonight, is not about a victory of a person or a Party. Rather tonight, is ceremony. It is a celebration of opportunity.

Congratulations to my councilmembers and colleagues, and to all of our elected officials, including our Central Committee, on your elections and I look forward to our continued collaboration and progress. Please give them all a round of applause.

We, **united**, can embrace the opportunity to boldly face the challenges of today and transform the world of tomorrow into the best embodiment of who we are, who we want to be, and who we can be.

After enduring the shared difficulties of fear, anxiety, discomfort and loss, which culminated in a passionate campaign season, many of us face fatigue. We are fatigued with division and negativity, fatigued with trying and not achieving, fatigued with fear.

Tonight, I'd like to remind you that it's ok to feel fear, it's ok to feel anxious, it's ok to be tired.

As your County Executive, I too know that weight of those common difficulties. In recent years, facing those difficulties, together, we:

1. Invested more in our students and educators, because we understand the opportunity of education.
2. Prioritized our first responders, because we understand the opportunity of being safe and feeling safe.
3. Preserved greenspace and farms and became national environmental leaders because we understand the opportunity of saving our planet for current and future generations.
4. Broke down barriers in business, entrepreneurship, and homeownership, because we understand the opportunity of an economy where building generational wealth can positively impact the trajectory of a family, neighborhood, our future.

5. And we were able to responsibly address budgetary deficits and begin to make progress to improve our infrastructure.

We are all blessed to see today. We were not and will not be defined by our fear. Rather, we choose to be defined by our works.

Fear divides.

We have, and we can unite around creating the very best place to live, work, play, grow, and grow older for all by:

1. Innovating in the areas of physical and mental health and wellness, so that we can all live longer, healthier, happier and more active lives;
2. Expanding apprenticeships, career opportunities, and elevating the entrepreneurs of tomorrow;
3. Increasing parks, playgrounds, and places where we can connect, laugh, and create;
4. Becoming more energy independent and making more progress on becoming a national model for flood mitigation and resilience;
5. Opening more schools and providing the best teaching and learning environment so that our children of all ages and abilities can grow and thrive as adults;
6. AND creating a community where as we age, we have accessible outdoor spaces and buildings and more efficient transportation options.

The pandemic and the related challenges and common difficulties, in many respects made many of us feel more isolated and alone. However, through technology, we learned we can stay connected; we can carry on business and even make strides in economic development; we can, and we will, make progress.

We will further embrace technology to service our external and our internal customers, ensuring that we do stay connected and that we further erode barriers of time and distance. Allow me to publicly and personally thank everyone who works for Howard County Government, because you all make it, so we all look good.

We will go boldly into an innovative era of technology that will help those who work for your government be more supported, more responsive, and become even more data-informed and people driven.

We will efficiently, effectively, and respectfully serve our residents, businesses, and visitors of Howard County.

We are here tonight in the midst of the holiday season—a time of forgiveness, good will, and hope. This is a time for us to reconnect with loved ones, and ourselves.

During this time many of us enjoy or know someone who is enjoying having some turkey. As a boy my father, who was a great cook, taught me about the wishbone in a turkey—a singular bone inside the turkey that two people pull apart, while making a wish. The one with the bigger piece gets their wish. My father and I would pull it apart every time we had a turkey. Over the years sometimes I got the bigger piece and sometimes he did. My wishes would range from great wealth to bigger muscles to height, and I'd like to think maybe even world peace every once in a while.

After many years, I asked my dad what he wished for. He responded that every time we pulled the wishbone apart, he made the same wish, year after year. Curious, I asked him what it was. His reply to me was that I would get my wish. I think that's a shared wish for all of us parents these days.

My father and my mother taught me many things – my sister and I. The deepest and most enduring are the power of compassion, service, and love...always love.

Let us together embrace, activate, and expand the opportunity in this serious moment in our history.

Let us together, in spite of our fear, be bold and be brave.

I implore you to make the world a better place in the simplest way you can...by following your passion and living your purpose. Finish that degree you were afraid of or too busy to complete. Start that business you know that you can run better than anyone else. And always, share your love with one another.

Let us be more compassionate, more empathetic. Let us be examples of caring that help reignite the flames of hope and healing.

My mom, my beloved mom, who is watching us at home, my dad, and all of our ancestors who are watching us in heaven, my beloved little, big sister

Karen, my A-team of the amazing Alexis and Alyssa, and my “day one ride or die” Shani, I want to thank you all for being there always and for so many years and seeing so much potential when the stoop was real, real low.

I pray that as my father, and all of our beloved ancestors upon whose shoulders we stand, continue to wish for us to get our wishes. We united as a community wish and manifest the very best future beyond even what we can imagine for Howard County, our state, our nation, and our world.

God bless Howard County, God bless America, and God bless each and every one of you.

Thank you.