

**Montgomery County Council Public Hearing - FY21 Operating Budget  
April 16, 2020**

My name is Bruce Turnbull and this testimony is presented on behalf of both myself, as a resident of Montgomery County for more than 40 years, and Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ represents over 2,000 Jews and allies from across Montgomery County, who act on our shared Jewish values by pursuing social and economic justice and racial equity in our local communities.

On the day of the budget hearings, we are observing the final holy day of Passover, a holiday where we tell the story of liberation from bondage. We are called to action — we invite all who are hungry to come and eat and we recommit to working to ensure freedom for all people. Amidst the COVID-19 crisis, our collective call to action is to ensure everyone in our County has their essential needs met.

JUFJ appreciates the actions of both the County Council and the County Executive thus far throughout the crisis. Every budget is necessarily a moral document, with funding choices reflecting values that go with the money. This year, there is no doubt that there will be significant pain and hardship for many, many Montgomery County residents and small businesses. The County budget must reflect the morality of addressing that pain and hardship. We must fund the basic necessities of life — food, housing, healthcare, and education. These are in peril for too many of our County residents, and the County must act to address the needs of so many.

The most severe effects of the ongoing pandemic are being felt in communities of color, especially among African Americans and Latinx people who have been disproportionately hard hit with the virus and its life threatening effects. This heightens the need to ensure adequate funding of programs that serve those communities and underscores the importance of fully funding the new Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice. That office's work is critical to making sure that the effects on communities of color of the pandemic and the associated economic downturn are always priorities as the crisis and its aftermath unfold.

The County must facilitate maximum access to the resources provided by all levels of government for our residents. Many non-profit organizations are critical mechanisms for distributing assistance to hard-hit County residents, and they need adequate funding. Where the state and federal governments may not be doing enough for Montgomery County, the Council and Executive must step up to advocate with our representatives to those levels of government, working collaboratively to achieve the best result for our County.

In addition to funding essential non-profits and the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice, we join our partners in calling for the following:

- **Direct Support to County Residents:** We appreciate the County's leadership in allocating \$5 million for direct financial assistance to County residents. Due to the prolonged and

unprecedented nature of this emergency, we urge the Council to consider that \$5 million a down payment. Just as the Council is planning to add an additional \$5 million to support local restaurants and retail shops, we urge the Council to make additional funds available for the most vulnerable members of our community to assist with health, housing, and other essential costs.

- **COVID-19 Testing & Treatment:** Both testing and treatment must be accessible to everyone in Montgomery County. Maryland has taken an important first step by ensuring testing is covered for uninsured people. Now the County must work to ensure everyone, including uninsured and undocumented people, can receive treatment for COVID-19 with no out of pocket expenses.
- **Protection for Renters:** We support Bill 18-20, sponsored by Councilmember Jawando, to prohibit the increase of residential rents during and after the present state of emergency. We urge the Council to take further action to prevent evictions, such as providing direct rental assistance and incentivizing landlords to keep tenants in their homes.
- **Caring for Frontline Workers:** The County should continue to work to ensure all frontline workers have personal protective equipment, including sanitation workers, grocery stores workers, contract workers, and all who perform essential functions. In addition, the County should create an emergency childcare fund to supplement state funds for the care of children of doctors, nurses, and other health care workers.
- **Universal Representation:** We urge the Council to remove restrictions from the \$545,000 allocated for legal representation so all people facing deportation have access to a lawyer, including the most vulnerable immigrants in our County — those who are currently detained.
- **Support for Those Released from Incarceration:** We support reducing the number of people who are incarcerated to help keep people safe from COVID-19. We urge the Council to ensure that when people are released from incarceration they can take care of themselves, specifically that fees for monitoring or other conditions of release should be waived; that restrictions on public housing (or housing subsidies) should be waived at least for the duration of the crisis; that funding for housing should be provided on a high priority basis (whether through temporary rental assistance, use of vacant motels or hotels, or other mechanisms); and that funds should be provided for local re-entry service providers who provide mental health, substance use disorder, food security, and housing services so that they can safely remain open in order to provide these essential services.

JUFJ thanks the Council for this opportunity to submit our views on the County's Fiscal Year 2021 operating budget and stands ready to assist in addressing these and other issues facing our County and, indeed, our state and nation.