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Testimony of George L. Leventhal, Ph.D. (George.L.Leventhal@kp.org)

Director, Community Health, Kaiser Permanente

Before the Montgomery County Council

July 28, 2020

Mr. President and members of the council:

My name is George Leventhal and I am community health director for Kaiser Permanente of the mid-Atlantic states. Kaiser Permanente is a health care organization that serves nearly 800,000 members in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. Beyond providing excellent care to our members, we are deeply committed to improving the health of the communities that we serve. We understand the importance of addressing the social determinants of health, and one of these is stable housing.

In my previous job as a member of this body, I made the reduction of homelessness one of my primary policy priorities. Currently, representing Kaiser Permanente, I serve as co-chair of the Partnerships and Funding Committee of Montgomery County's Interagency Commission on Homelessness, and also on the Leadership Council of the Partnership to End Homelessness of the Greater Washington Community Foundation.

That's why I'm testifying today in support of the \$355,000 special appropriation for Permanent Supportive Housing for Veterans and Unsheltered Adults, of which \$236,665 is to come from the county's General Fund, and \$118,335 is a federal grant. While it was good to see the increase in federal Emergency Solutions Grants that Congress approved earlier this year, state and local governments, as well as private philanthropy must all play a role in housing homeless residents.

I have often said that a patient cannot be expected to be medically compliant if he or she doesn't even have a medicine cabinet in which to keep his or her medications. Homelessness is estimated to reduce life expectancy by as much as 27.3 years as compared to life expectancy for the average housed person¹. Permanent supportive housing is the answer to long-term sustainability of housing placements. This special appropriation will be spent on a best-practice partnership with Bethesda Cares, which will maintain a master lease to provide apartments for 14 people who formerly were unsheltered. Finding housing for those living outdoors has always been urgent, but it is even more important today, during a pandemic, when the health of unsheltered persons is at risk, and they pose a potential threat of spreading infection to the general public.

Kaiser Permanente is doing our part to address our region's homelessness catastrophe as well. In the coming weeks, we will be announcing several donations and grants to local governments and homeless service providers in our region, including in Montgomery County.

Thank you for your leadership, and for allowing me to deliver this testimony today.

¹ Choucair, B. and Watts, B. Rx For Health: A Place To Call Home, Health Affairs Blog, August 27, 2018.