

# The Black Ministers' Conference of Montgomery County FY22 Budget Testimony

April 8, 2021

## Political Affairs Committee

Laurie-Anne Sayles, Chair

Rev. Kenneth Nelson, Co-Chair

Good evening Council President Hucker, Vice President Albornoz, and Councilmembers. My name is Laurie-Anne Sayles, and I am the Chair of the Black Ministers Conference of Montgomery County's Political Affairs Committee.



<https://www.bmcmc.org/>

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The Black Ministers' Conference of Montgomery County, Maryland, is an alliance of predominantly Black Churches in Montgomery County, Maryland that have joined together to promote the causes of the Black Community and to enrich the religious life of the Black Community.

We appreciate this opportunity to address our organization's budget priorities, which can promote, support, and advance the interests and upward mobility of the Black community in Montgomery County.

The Black Ministers Conference urges the Council to support funding in economic prosperity, affordable housing, quality health care, a safe community, and a skilled workforce.

### Support Economic Prosperity, Transportation, Affordable Housing, and Responsive Public Utilities to:

- Stabilize families during a crisis, such as the Rental Assistance Program.
- Develop job creation goals and measure the effectiveness of the Montgomery Works One-Stop career system to address unemployment.
- Encourage lending to Black residents to start and grow their businesses.
- Promote homeownership so entrepreneurs can live where they work and employ residents
- Preserve and expand economic empowerment through research, partnerships with public and private entities
- Increase the supply of affordable housing with a focus on Homeless Prevention and Emergency & Transitional Housing
- Increased affordable housing units to meet the needs of low-income residents struggling to get by in our County and foster local economic growth.
- Ensure reliable and affordable transportation options to overcome barriers to economic prosperity for too many residents of color. We appreciate the Council maintaining free Ride On fares through the end of June, but with \$3.5 billion allocated for transportation projects, and we hope there is a priority to continue this practice throughout the pandemic, saving riders who have an annual household income under \$30,000, an estimated \$90 per month, to buy groceries, pay rent, etc.,
- Support \$2.9 billion for Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission projects. We support funding to address our workforce needs and the reconstruction and rehabilitation of WSSC Water's critical infrastructure repairs associated with our aging water and sewer system.

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### Support Access to Quality Health Care for Those with The Highest Risk Factors as follows:

- Support African American Health Program (AAHP). Restore \$93,000 to AAHP FY21-FY22 budget for data analysis. Realign 1.6 million to support moving AAHP COVID Testing and Vaccine support, administered by AAHP Department of Health and Human Service. Enhance \$300,000 for Black Physician Network Model and Set up infrastructure for health disparities evidence-based models. Support Annual Community Health Day
- Support Caring Matters, Inc. Support community grants to Caring Matters, Inc. for patient companionship, grief support, and community education efforts. We believe this program will help many residents in dealing with pandemic effects and life adjustment.
- Support Asian, Pacific, and Asian Indians. We stand in solidarity to encourage community well-being. Accordingly, we support community grants for Asian, Pacific, Asian Indian agencies such as Chinese Culture and Community Service Center, Inc., to ensure that all community members receive building capacity to facilitate community development.
- Support Climate Action Plan. We appreciate the County's ambitious goal of zero carbon emissions by 2035 while striving to incorporate racial equity in the County's Climate Action Resilience Plan.
- We value efforts to provide resources to low-income households to replace appliances with more energy-efficient options and ensure that any awareness campaigns are culturally competent and developed in multiple languages.

### Support Cultivating a Safe and Just Community

- We appreciate the County Executive's attention to reorganize the County's police department budget, including the reallocation funding for the primarily vacant police officer positions that will be reassigned within the department. Even with some positions being cut, the police department's budget is proposed to increase by \$1.6 million, about 0.6% from the FY21 budget.
- We support the "Restoration Center," aka the Criminal Justice Complex. Mental health screenings and assessments, treatment and short-term stabilization, and evaluation beds are critically needed. Traditional CPU activities for arrestees admitted and processed into the detention facility should be enhanced.
- Establish a committee or task force to weigh how the programs will contribute to upward mobility and holistic rehabilitation.

### Ensuring an Equitably Educated Workforce

- We applaud the County Executive's recommended budget to fully fund budget requests from MCPS and Montgomery College without raising taxes to increase opportunities to ensure college/career readiness and address the ever-present opportunity gap impacting students of color and economically disadvantaged students and diversify our workforce.

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- Moreover, the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) data analysis of the achievement gap could be helpful in devising and implementing a strategic plan to address the issues and barriers outlined in the OLO reports and utilize the OLO as an evaluation arm to assess whether or not the recommended strategies are working throughout the implementation period.
- In closing, we thank you for this opportunity to share our budget recommendations and priorities and look forward to continuing to work together to develop policies and programs that meet the immediate and long-term needs of the County's Black residents and those who are economically disadvantaged.