

Testimony in Support of Bill 42-21
Submitted by: Annice Cody, President, Holy Cross Health Network

I am writing to express my strong support for Bill 42-21 to establish an Early Care and Education Coordinating Entity. I greatly appreciate the attention County Executive Elrich and all of the County Councilmembers have brought to improving early care and education. I am particularly grateful to Council Vice-President Alborno and Councilmembers Navarro and Rice for developing the proposed legislation, and to Council President Hucker and Councilmembers Friedson, Glass, Jawando, Katz and Riemer in supporting it.

At Holy Cross Health, I focus on improving health and well-being to enable all people in our community to thrive. As a member of the Montgomery Moving Forward leadership group, I have been working over the past five years to understand early care and education in our community, identify best practices, and help develop recommendations that would coordinate resources more effectively. I believe an independent, public-private coordinating entity is key to achieving the goal of improving quality, accessibility and affordability for all families.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted both the importance and the fragility of our community's early care and education system. A coordinating entity can examine the early care and education eco-system holistically, not just from the perspective of single component. The proposed legislation ensures that the entity will have broad cross-sector participation to shape a stronger, more equitable and more coordinated early care and education system.

This work is important to Holy Cross Health as a health care provider and as the employer of approximately 4,000 people, many of whom rely on an effective childcare system in order to work. In fact, childcare is the most frequent reason our colleagues reach out to our Employee Assistance Program, and for too many, it is the reason they leave the workforce.

As the board chair of Nexus Montgomery Regional Partnership (NMRP), a collaboration of Montgomery County's health systems working with community partners, I have a clear view of the value a coordinating entity can bring. NMRP does not replace the independent governance, management, budgeting, or strategies of our participating organizations. Rather, it creates a forum for identifying and prioritizing shared challenges and opportunities and collectively determining the best ways to respond. Our work focuses on initiatives in which we can be more efficient or effective together. For example, we have provided start-up funds to increase behavioral health capacity, streamlined communication among hospitals and skilled nursing facilities, supported process improvement efforts that were shared as best practices, and better coordinated care for patients treated across multiple hospitals, all in ways we could not have done individually. A coordinating entity will provide similar benefits to the early care and education system in our community.

Thank you for your support of bill 42-21.