

**My name is Crystal Townsend, and I represent the Healthcare Initiative Foundation. I am writing to testify in support of Bill 42-21 on the Early Care and Education (ECE) Coordinating Entity**

Thank you, Council Vice President Albornoz, and Councilmembers Navarro and Rice for taking the lead on this groundbreaking legislation, and thanks to Council President Hucker, and Councilmembers Friedson, Glass, Jawando, Katz and Riemer for their enthusiastic support. This is an important step towards ensuring that all children in Montgomery County have access to high quality early care, giving them a solid foundation for academic and economic success later in life.

Montgomery County needs a plan to build back the ECE sector and improve access for ALL children. The independent public-private coordinating entity proposed in this legislation will help build a system of early care and education that will foster coordination, collaboration, and cooperation across sectors. The new entity will help facilitate a sustainable economic recovery and future growth by helping to identify needs and coordinate resources across the entire public/private ECE system. The framework for this entity is based on extensive research, best practices, and knowledge of other models around the country.

The Healthcare Initiative Foundation (HIF) is a private foundation that invests only in Montgomery County supporting innovative solutions for health and wellness. To this end, we invest in access to health and wellness services; initiatives that impact the social determinants of health (race, equity and inclusion, education, employment, housing, food security, etc.), systems building (i.e., Food Council, Nonprofit Montgomery- Montgomery Moving Forward, Thriving Germantown, Vaccine Providers Network, etc.) and the healthcare workforce.

HIF support the creation of an independent public-private coordinating entity that will build a high quality and affordable early childcare and education because it is an essential to the well-being and future of the children and families of Montgomery County. It is also critical to employers, who rely on their employees having reliable childcare so they can come to work every day and know that their children are in safe and nurturing environments. We know that education and employment greatly impact the life expectancy and wellness of our community's residents and ensuring that we as a community have the vital infrastructure in place for high quality, affordable, and safe ECE options for ALL is paramount for a healthy and thriving community.

Further, HIF prioritizes investments that center race, equity, and inclusion. This new public private entity will develop clear, realistic, actionable, and measurable inclusion and racial equity goals that align with the County's racial equity and social justice strategic plan. Parents/caregivers and providers will have an authentic voice and authority on the governing board. The Entity will also implement effective community engagement strategies to ensure community priorities are reflected in a common agenda that all those engaged in ECE in Montgomery County will subscribe to.

This collaborative work also builds upon lessons that we have learned repeatedly throughout the pandemic -no one can do it alone and the impact is far greater through cross sector representation, investment, and decision-making. The newly proposed entity will have a public-private board whose members span the system including employers, philanthropy, government, providers, and parents. As noted in the legislation, the Entity will have three Co-Chairs: a parent, a private sector representative, and a public sector representative.

The pandemic exposed ongoing gaps in the ECE system and exacerbated existing inequities with wide disparities in the availability and quality of care available to families depending on where they live in the county, their race and cultural/national background, and their income level. Also, providers, many of whom are women of color, struggled with the additional burdens imposed by the pandemic and were forced to close and remain closed.

This is a moment to pursue bold solutions to transform ECE in Montgomery County that will lay the foundation for better educational, health, and economic outcomes for All of community's children. High quality and affordable early childcare and education (ECE) is an essential service for the well-being and future of the children and families of Montgomery County.

I ask that you vote in support of Bill 42-21 and support a bright future for Montgomery County's children! Thank you for this opportunity to testify.