



## RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### Testimony in Support of Bill 11-22: The Right to Nourish Act Submitted to the Montgomery County Council by The Montgomery County Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee July 12, 2022

Good afternoon Councilmembers. My name is Selena Mendy Singleton. I am a member of the Montgomery County Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee (Committee), and I am testifying on behalf of the Committee.

**The Montgomery County Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee strongly supports *The Right to Nourish Act* – an Act to include lactation rooms in County buildings for County employees or provide alternative accommodations.** Successful lactation is inextricably linked to the health and well-being of mothers and infants, and is a racial equity and social justice issue. *The Right to Nourish Act* is a critical investment in a determinant, breastfeeding, that improves maternal and infant health outcomes, generally, and specifically improves the outcomes and promotes the equity of women and infants of color.

Breastmilk represents our very first food – the initial infant nutrition that establishes the groundwork for our health trajectory. The benefits of breastfeeding provide for both the unique nutritional and health needs of infants, and as noted in the *Montgomery County, MD Improved Pregnancy Outcomes Program 2020 Annual Report*, is associated with numerous short- and long-term material health outcomes for the breastfeeding mother. For mothers, breastfeeding can provide long-term health benefits including the reduction in postpartum blood loss, Type 2 diabetes, and breast and ovarian cancer. Breastfed children have lower risks for morbidity and mortality from infectious diseases, and a reduced risk for both Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID). In addition, according to the CDC, breastfed infants have reduced risks of asthma, obesity, Type 1 diabetes, severe lower respiratory disease, and ear and gastrointestinal infections.

Working moms often discover that returning to work presents significant breastfeeding challenges. Women often face rigid work hours, limited lunch hours and breaks to express milk, inadequate spaces to pump breastfeeding milk, a lack of privacy for breastfeeding or expressing milk, and no place to store expressed breast milk. Evidence suggests that returning to work can also lead to stress and anxiety for new mothers. However, studies have demonstrated a positive and encouraging relationship between workplace lactation support and interventions and increased rates of both breastfeeding and the duration of breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding disparities and inequities have persisted in families of color. Systemic and structural obstacles, such as inequitable access to lactation resources and assistance are

persistent. According to the CDC, women and infants of color experience racism, and systemic and structural barriers during the perinatal period.

Increasing breastfeeding rates is a critical public health strategy to address maternal mortality and morbidity and infant mortality. Data suggest that community-based strategies, government plans, and maternity care policies and practices that encourage breastfeeding have been successful in enhancing breastfeeding rates. However, breastfeeding inequities and disparities in communities of color persist.

This legislation, by protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding, is one step toward a multifaceted public health strategy to address and reduce health disparities and inequities toward mothers and infants, especially mothers and infants of color.

For more information about the work of the Montgomery County Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee, please visit:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/boards/sites/RESJ/index.html>