

Testimony of
Dr. Sheryl Brissett Chapman
Montgomery County Council
Hearing on Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget
Council President: Evan Glass

Montgomery County Council President Glass, and all Council Members present, thank you for your time and attention today. My name is Dr. Sheryl Brissett Chapman, I am a resident of Downtown Silver Spring, and have lived and worked as county resident for over 35 years. I have served this region in many capacities including as a Founding Board member of Silver Spring Town Center, Inc.; a member of the African American Advisory Group for both Ike Leggett and our current County Executive; member of the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth and the Interagency Commission on Homelessness; a member of the Montgomery County Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.; currently, a Governor's Appointee on the Procurement Improvement Council; I have served as faculty at the GW Medical School and for over 30 years at Howard University in the School of Social Work; and was recently appointed to the Board of Trustees for Montgomery College. I say all this to give you an understanding of my expansive perspective on this county. I've been around. I've raised 5 children here, three of whom were relative children with disabilities, who attended MCPS and MC. I am a Black woman, a Black mother and grandmother, I am a participating member of this community. I have seen it all. What I have never seen in this county is adequate support for Black families and children to ensure equitable access to health care and mental health supports.

You are aware, I am sure, of the statistics about Blacks in this county. They are more likely to be low income, more likely to struggle with basic needs, and more likely to die from preventable disease. But one thing that they are not is unemployed or uninsurable. They are not eligible for the clinics this County operates. To me this explains the health disparity quite clearly. Add to all this the implicit bias deeply rooted in the American health care system and a post-pandemic mental health crisis, and we have quite a problem that cannot be minimized. We see the ramifications daily in the news.

Equity is not standardization. We need something different. The Black Physicians and Health Care Network (BPHN) is something different, it is new and innovative, it is a key piece to solving the problem of Black health care access. Alternative models do not perform well for working poor black people. The BPHN is a response that is respectful and attentive to the needs of this specific community. It is perfectly tailored to provide for the privacy and individual empowerment of Black people who have suffered the generational trauma of racism. Black BPHN providers are the trusted professionals so desperately needed by this community. They reflect the 5% of the total health clinicians, nationally. In just a short time they have saved the lives of children and adults who went undiagnosed and untreated. To the Black and African Diaspora members of this community the BPHN means that they do not have to choose between basic needs and a visit to the doctor, dentist, or therapist.

Maybe the previous Council's creation of the BPHN was inadvertent – there were extra Federal dollars and during the pandemic we all learned to be radical and get outside of our comfort

zones. But even if it was not intended, it was powerful. Montgomery County changed Black health care access for the better. It changed lives. It gave people the opportunity to take better care of themselves and their families. I urgently ask that you find the additional money (\$1M) to fund this program fully.