

Re: Testimony for FY24 Operating Budget

April 17, 2023

To: County Council President Evan Glass and Montgomery County Councilmembers

Montgomery County has the beauty of providing residence for over 1 million people providing diversity and a magnitude of talents to our area. There are innumerable benefits to residents of Montgomery County accessing appropriate care. The Black Physicians Healthcare Network is an immeasurable resource for many Black minoritized individuals residing in our county. I have witnessed these benefits as I currently serve as a BPHN mental wellness provider. I have a BPHN client who experiences suicidal ideation and I extend services, which I cannot and do not bill the grant for, in order to provide ethical and efficacious care when the suicidality becomes prominent and diminishes daily functioning. There are many who we serve enduring grave psychological pain that with the grant funding is providing a continuity of care and reducing harm that can come from not self-selecting a provider to experience a good fit, build a therapeutic alliance, and collaborate with to gain healthy coping skills, apply interventions, and be guided toward wellness.

The unstable challenging economy has delivered unemployment and unstable healthcare to the recipients of the BPHN funding who are Black professionals I serve. This grant has allowed many to move toward wellness while unemployed and build skills and actively seek employment. This funding has contributed to Black professionals experiencing a continuum of care during unemployment as well as employment without healthcare. I have witnessed Black professionals work through a magnitude of challenges and distress from these unfortunate downturns and gain employment in their respective field with improved wellness outcomes. The funding provided has helped to decrease hospitalization for some as outpatient care continued, this is a saving for county resources. There are recipients who are benefiting from the supports continued therapeutic services offer to move toward wellness and become a contributing member of society.

There are systemic issues the current stipulations of the new proposal for FY24 funding perpetuate. Not allowing BPHN to fund direct services limits as well as blocks access to quality mental healthcare and services. It sends a negative message that Black residents without healthcare and underemployed are not valued by the county and face additional barriers to care in an existing inequitable society.

I write this testimony to implore the County Council to reconsider new mandates disallowing the BPHN fund to reimburse providers providing care. The purpose of the grant fund is to build access to healthcare to for Black residents of Montgomery County since the disparities in healthcare are widely known and negatively affect quality of life. It would be reasonable and promote equity for the County Council to rule that the FY24 funding for BPHN including allowing funds to reimburse professional healthcare providers for services to Black residents of Montgomery County.

Sincerely,

Roni K. White, NCC, LCPC