

# Montgomery County Council Hearing Testimony

## BPHN- Black Physicians & Healthcare Network

May 2023

Dear Montgomery County Council,

My name is Barhynn Johnson and I am writing this testimonial in support of both increased and continued funding for the Black Physicians and Healthcare Network, without limitations or amendments to direct service. I support the Black Physicians and Health Care Network (BPHN) and their efforts to ensure that Montgomery County's Black residents are connected with culturally specific physical and mental health providers. I ask you to keep your promise to fund the BPHN. The lack of sufficient funding is negatively affecting thousands of Black residents and their access to lifesaving and life-changing care. I believe that Black health is important and valuable to this rich and diverse community.

During the height of the covid-19 pandemic, I was laid off from my job and would subsequently lose my health insurance three months later. During that time, my therapist informed me of BPHN and encouraged me to speak to the organization to help me continue therapy. At the time, I was in therapy learning to cope with persistent suicidal ideation, severe depression and anxiety. Because of BPHN, not only was I able to continue going to therapy (*sometimes twice weekly*), but I was also able to see a dentist, and a doctor specializing in weight loss. The ability to continue my care with the help of BPHN helped transform my life in ways that I might not have otherwise experienced without it.

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the disparities in healthcare coverage and treatment for Black Americans in comparison to their non-Black counterparts.<sup>1</sup> There is a great deal of mistrust throughout the Black community for medical professionals due to a history of both implicit bias and systemic racism acting as the foundation for the aforementioned disparities.<sup>2</sup> Despite Montgomery County's sufficient distribution and access to testing, vaccination, and data via the Covid-19 dashboard, Black Montgomery County residents disproportionately represented the county's most severe covid cases, hospitalizations and deaths.<sup>3</sup> Although these numbers were often attributed to "pre-existing conditions", said conditions can also be attributed to medical racism. A recent study concluded that Black representation in the primary care physician workforce was a catalyst for lower mortality rates from all causes.<sup>4</sup> Black Montgomery County residents belonging to a lower economic status are also disproportionately uninsured or underinsured. Organizations like BPHN help to bridge the gap between the Black community and adequate, compassionate healthcare.

I personally have referred a number of people to BPHN, many of whom were able to receive healthcare and/or mental health services for the first time since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is my opinion that until there are systems in place to address and mitigate medical racism, there will be a necessity for organizations like BPHN. I also believe that making changes to BPHN will only deepen the mistrust that Black Montgomery County residents hold toward the medical community and the government that informs its decision-making. I ask that you consider and implement a resolution that allows BPHN to remain in place as is, with increased funding.

Thank you,  
Barhynn Johnson

**Sources:**

1. Covid-19 Data Tracker by race in Mid-Atlantic Region:

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#demographicsovertime>

2. Americas Legacy of Medical Racism:

<https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/health-equity/how-legacy-medical-racism-shapes-us-health-care-today>

3. Montgomery County Covid-19 Demographic Data:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/data/case-counts.html#cases-ethnicity>

4. Black Representation in Healthcare Link to Black Longevity:

[https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2803898?utm\\_source=For The Media&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_campaign=ftm\\_links&utm\\_term=041423](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2803898?utm_source=For%20The%20Media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_term=041423)