

Testimony Regarding the FY24 Operating Budget

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A friend has had traumatic experience since migrating in the USA illegally in July 2019.

He had escaped from the war-torn Anglophone region in Cameroon and had embarked on the risky and dangerous journey to enter the USA. He spent about three months travelling by road, crossing deserts, high seas, forests, fast moving rivers before he arrived the Mexican border where he was kept in detention for about six months and luckily granted Asylum into the USA.

Recalling his ordeal, he said there were days he did not shower, slept well nor ate good food. He had poor physical and mental health. He experienced difficulties adapting into the “American way of life” and constantly lived in anxiety and fear for his life and that of family back home.

This is just one of the cases of **IMMIGRATION TRAUMA** experienced by thousands of people who migrate into the USA.

I would be grateful if more funding is provided to supporting Agencies, Coalitions and Non-Governmental Organizations taking care of Immigrants and Refugees especially on the issue of their mental health and general wellbeing.

Recent research from the **American Psychiatric Association** reported that the USA had about **Eleven Million Undocumented immigrants in 2021**.

According to a report from **the Migration Policy Institute**, **Montgomery County** had about **Seventy-Five Thousand** unauthorized immigrants in 2019.

A majority of Immigrants, whether legal or not, are faced with a lot of challenges before, during and after migration into the USA.

These challenges include:

Higher risk of mental health issues and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Fear, Anxiety, Depression, Threats, Stress adjusting into the new environment, financial issues, communication issues, limited access to resources, social isolation, stigmatization, racial profiling, various forms of discrimination, etc.

Research also showed that most Immigrant Children faced changes in behavior, were stressed, depressed, and performed poorly in school.

Recommendation:

Agencies working with Immigrants should be able to provide more resources, sensitization, follow up, to make sure immigrants have access to the resources provided.

Agencies should also ensure increased communication, openness, and trust with Immigrants so they can report their mental health and other issues for solutions to be sought.

Agencies should have staff that understand the language, cultural or religious affiliations of Immigrants.

Immigrants should be encouraged to not only get training on Community policies but also get involved in community activities.

Note should also be taken of the fact that Immigrants are not only “consumers”, but they also help build the economy, **646 170 Immigrant workers** comprised **20%** of the Labor force in **2018**. (Source: **American Immigration Council**).

Though Montgomery County is already doing a lot by providing resources to Immigrants through its Agencies like Montgomery County Office of Human Rights, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Catholic Charities, AYUDA, CAIR Coalition, Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center, just to name a few; the County could still face additional challenges in the future if the issue of Immigration Trauma is not properly addressed as we might continue to experience an increase in substance abuse, suicide, violence and crime rates.

Thank you.