



April 1, 2024

Dear Council President Friedson and Councilmembers,

I am writing on behalf of the Montgomery County Black Collective and the small and minority businesses that we serve through our AMBER program and other technical assistance programs.

Four years ago, we opened conversations with the County Council on the dearth of resources for small, minority, and particularly Black businesses. We shared data on both for-profit and nonprofit organizations, who suffer from consistently less investment and access to resources. We reported then that less than a third of Black organizations receive funding or contracts from the local government. For nonprofit organizations, even when the mission is the same as white counterpart organizations, funding awarded is less. Collaborating with our partners and the entire Council, our goal was to develop an actionable and measurable plan to transform the economic, health and educational conditions of the Black community in Montgomery County. In partnership with the County, we are well on our way to achieving that goal for Black and other underserved businesses.

Four years later, we read daily about the state and local programs benefiting underrepresented groups that are prime targets for legal challenges. We have watched as programs that benefit women, minorities and other underrepresented groups undergo re-examination and get re-defined as unconstitutional. Legislatures across the country are struggling to overcome disparity in underserved communities while avoiding challenges that can eliminate programs meant to give power to those that would benefit most.

The JOBS Initiative is addressing three key areas of support for economic empowerment and mobility; direct support for business owners, focus on underserved geographic areas of the county that will benefit from the initiative, and job creation. Most importantly, the Initiative is designed to provide specific support for a variety of companies, small and large.

- The Job Creation Fund will help the company, the person filling the job, lower income census tract areas and the industry.
- The Innovation Fund will invest to level the playing field for companies with a proven concept but lack of access to capital.

- The Equity Fund will provide for small and underserved companies, many of which we work with, grant investment to expand. Many have graduated from a program like ours or the Maryland Women's Business Center, or received extensive technical assistance from MCEDC, SCORE or the County Business Center.

Thank you for listening to the needs of businesses at every level. Your creativity and collaboration will continue to build the capability and capacity of dozens of businesses in the county. This Initiative speaks loudly to the business community that Montgomery County is business friendly and interested in supporting economic development in a tangible way. The resources for critical jobs, innovation, and equitable funding will ensure a positive impact on economic mobility and therefore an impact on local economic growth.

We look forward to educating businesses about this new cog in the wheel of the economic ecosystem. It will inspire them to ensure they are sustainable and continue to work toward taking advantage of the extensive technical assistance services that are available to help the company grow.

We stand ready to help disseminate this information when it is ready for applicants and to continue the discussion about the ongoing needs of businesses that we all serve. Thank you for your partnership and leadership.



Kim Jones
Executive Director