

Testimony Regarding Montgomery County's FY26 Operating Budget

To the Montgomery County Council from the Steering Committees of the African American Health Program and the Asian American and Latino Health Initiatives.

April 7, 2025

I am Jacquelyn Williams, the Co-Chair of the **African American Health Program Executive Committee**. The African American Health Program join with the Asian American Health Initiative and the Latino Health Initiative to present a clear and urgent request—to preserve the essential safety net for our vulnerable residents (including displaced Federal workers) by fully funding (with no cuts to the budget) the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). This includes level funding for the African American Health Program.

The past several years has demonstrated the critical role the three minority groups (MHIPs) play, in partnership with DHHS, in safeguarding public health and positioning community members for positive life outcomes. AAHP, together with AAHI and LHI, did a phenomenal job during COVID-19 in saving lives. AAHP is also proud of our Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) certified by CDC at their highest rating (full plus for the last two years); and our signature SMILE Program, a home visitation program for Black infants and Black pregnant women implemented by AAHP's Registered Nurse Case Managers. Further our prevention programs ranging from a variety of curated healthy nutrition options, exercise choices, weight management, walking club, aging summits, AAHP's mindfulness program, and a variety of other culturally competent classes are all lifestyle strategies for living a healthy, long life for our Black residents. These efforts were possible because of the County's investment in AAHP and we thank you.

When there is an investment in equity, specifically health, our entire community benefits. Now, as we navigate new challenges at the federal level such as poverty, disease prevention, maternal and child health, education, and management of health crises, we must not retreat from the progress we have made which AAHP, AAHI, and LHI feel will help Montgomery County emerge from this crisis stronger than before.

Fully funding DHHS ensures that minority communities, which together make up the majority of Montgomery County, continue to have access to life-saving services, culturally responsive outreach, and trusted messengers who bridge longstanding gaps in care. It means reinforcing the very infrastructure that allowed us to respond swiftly and effectively when crisis struck. Cutting funding now would not only jeopardize these gains but also deepen risks that we have worked so hard to address.

We urge you to reaffirm your commitment to health and community well-being for all by fully funding DHHS in this year's budget. The investments you make today will determine the resilience and strength of our County for years to come.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your dedication to a positive future for all residents of Montgomery County.