

## **Testimony in Support of the Prevention of Blindness Society and BPHN Partnership**

Good morning,

My name is Jon Lombardi, and I am honored to speak on behalf of the Prevention of Blindness Society and our invaluable partnership with BPHN. Our programming goal is to be in communities that are less likely to get eye exams due to numerous factors: access, work schedules, transportation, and affordability. Additionally, most FQHCs in Montgomery County do not have eyecare services, and the one that does is limited to part-time hours. For such a robust county, this is one area that is slipping through the cracks.

At the same time we want to serve communities who are at higher risk factors for chronic eye diseases, such as glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy. These weekend community health clinics are not just a service—they are a lifeline for individuals at high risk of vision loss. Through exams, prescription glasses, and critical follow-up care, we are preserving sight, livelihoods, and public safety.

We serve a population that is disproportionately affected by vision-threatening conditions such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and uncorrected refractive errors. Our data shows that 15-25% of individuals who visit our clinics require immediate follow-up care—care that, without these community-based services, many would not receive until it is too late. The early detection and treatment we provide helps prevent irreversible blindness, allowing individuals to continue working, caring for their families, and contributing to their communities. When vision loss occurs, it affects the whole family, which makes prevention critical.

In addition to being windows to the souls, eyes also provide a key window into identifying whole-body health concerns such as diabetes and hypertension. With BPHN, we not only screen for eye disease but also help individuals enroll in healthcare programs, ensuring they receive comprehensive care. This holistic approach strengthens our healthcare system by addressing chronic conditions early, reducing emergency room visits, and improving overall public health. BPHN is a critical partner in all of this, having established pathways for full health care for our vulnerable neighbors.

Beyond statistics, we see the real impact of our work in the lives of those we serve. In one instance, we provided glasses to Jasper\* who had never owned a pair and whose vision was near legal blindness. With his new glasses, he could finally see clearly, improving his quality of life and opportunities for employment. We also recently met Sarah\* who had not renewed her glaucoma medications in over a year, putting her vision at severe risk. We helped her schedule an appointment to renew her prescriptions and preserve her sight. Once glaucoma affects sight, there's no going back; that sight is lost.

Our success in reaching and serving these neighbors is in large part due to our partnership with BPHN, an organization deeply rooted in Montgomery County. Their established trust and connections within these communities help us build relationships, ensure people feel safe seeking care, and find the right partners to maximize our impact. Without BPHN, our ability to reach those most in need would be significantly diminished. Our organization is focused on our local communities in the DMV. We wish more of these communities were fortunate to have BPHN; they are efficient and caring stewards of both their community members and their funds.

**By preventing blindness, you and the key funding from Montgomery Count are keeping people employed, keeping families stable, reducing accidents, and improving public health. This is not just an investment in vision; it is an investment in the well-being and economic stability of our neighbors and our community.**

Thank you for your time and support.

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