



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

MEMORANDUM

November 30, 2021

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: REIA for Supplemental Appropriation for #22-19 Epidemiology and
Laboratory Capacity Enhancing Detection (ELCED) Expansion Grant

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #22-19 Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Enhancing Detection (ELCED) Expansion Grant is likely to advance racial equity and social justice in the County as it will support the county in monitoring and addressing the ever-changing COVID-19 landscape. While collecting data and providing educational outreach—like that described in this supplemental appropriation—will benefit all residents, centering communities of color and those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 will enable the County to identify and disparities as they emerge and reemerge throughout the pandemic recovery.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #22-19 is to use grant funds provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention via the Maryland Department of Health to enhance the capacity of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to detect, respond, prevent and control known emerging or re-emerging infectious diseases. The funds will also be used to collect data through contact tracers and support outreach and educational projects focused on reaching underserved communities.

At the time of this analysis, a new strain of COVID-19 is garnering global attention¹, and concerns about preventing, detecting, and vaccinating against COVID-19 persist as the 7-day average of new cases and hospitalizations is on the rise² across the DC, MD, and Virginia (DMV) region. While Montgomery County continues to have the highest percentage of the 12+ population who are fully vaccinated among all US counties with >300k residents, there are gaps in case rates, vaccination rates, and (for many weeks prior to this point) hospitalization rates by race and ethnicity. These data track with trends across the country, where structural inequities in housing, healthcare, and employment have had an outsized impact on the health and economic well-being of communities of color during the pandemic.

Black residents make up 18.68% of the County's total population but represent 21.4% of total Covid-19 cases, 18.2% of total COVID-19 deaths, and a hospitalization rate of 6.1 down from 7.1 (on 11/14/21) when it was the highest of any race or ethnic group³. As of November 21, 2021, gaps in hospitalization rates between Black, Hispanic, and White residents closed, after 16 consecutive weeks of Black residents having the highest hospitalization rate per 100k. At times, the gap was as large as 13.9 percentage points between Black residents (24.4) and White residents (10.5). While the closure of the hospitalization gap represents a milestone in the pandemic recovery, the trends leading to this point offer a warning sign for continued vigilance, particularly as the vaccination gap persists. Black residents represent 15.4% of the County population who has received a vaccine, disproportionately fewer residents than the Black population overall.

Similar to Black residents in the County, Latino residents have also been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19. Latino residents make up 20.05% of the County's total population but represent 31.4% of total COVID-19 cases in the County—the largest percentage of cases for any racial group—and 20.6% of total COVID-19 deaths in the County. At the same time, Latino residents represent 19.54% of the County population who has received a vaccine, disproportionately fewer residents than the Latino population overall.

¹ Perry Stein, William Booth, and Frances Stead Sellers. The Washington Post. "Announcement of new virus variant alarms world, as stocks crash and flights are banned". November 26, 2021. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/europe-south-africa-variant-coronavirus/2021/11/26/0f7f5a78-4e99-11ec-a7b8-9ed28bf23929_story.html.

² Alejandro Alvarez and Jack Moore. WTOP News. "https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/europe-south-africa-variant-coronavirus/2021/11/26/0f7f5a78-4e99-11ec-a7b8-9ed28bf23929_story.html". November 29, 2021. Available at: <https://wtop.com/coronavirus/2021/11/coronavirus-test-results-in-dc-maryland-and-virginia/>

³ Case and death data by race from 11/26/21 (<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/data/case-counts.html#deaths-demographics>). Hospitalization rates used DHHS Pulse Reports from August 9, 2021 to November 24, 2021. Available at: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/news/pulse-reports.html>.

These disparities follow similar patterns in the US, where non-white racial groups are less likely to have access to testing, more likely to be infected, more likely to be hospitalized, and more likely to have an adverse clinical outcome such as death⁴. There is also growing concern among practitioners that impacts of long-haul COVID-19⁵ may follow similar patterns of disproportionality⁶. Further, while early in the roll out of pediatric vaccination, gaps⁷ already exist by race and ethnicity between the percentage of children who are eligible and the percentage who have received their first vaccine dose.

It's important to note that disparities evident in the County data do not factor in age, which is likely to increase the gaps between the Covid-19 death rates of Black, Hispanic, and White residents. The Brookings Institute explained in a June 2020 article that the gap between the death rates between Black, Hispanic, and White people are larger when accounting for differences in age because older people are more likely to die from COVID-19 and White people are more likely to be in the oldest age cohorts. As of June 6, 2020, the age-adjusted COVID-19 death rate for Black people in the US was 3.6 times that of White people, while for Hispanic people was 2.5 times that of White people⁸. Given that the median age of Black and Latino residents in the County is younger than that of White residents (by 9 years and 13.5 years, respectively), it is likely that even as Covid-related gaps shrink and disappear, unless age-adjusted metrics are calculated it will be difficult to determine whether all gaps have truly closed.

- III. **DATA ANALYSIS:** ORESJ conducted Racial Equity Impact Assessments (REIAs) of supplemental appropriations related to Proyecto Salud y Bienestar and the African American Health Program, which describe the racial and ethnic disparities underlying and exacerbated by the pandemic's disproportionate effect on communities of color. Below is a snapshot of relevant metrics and data demonstrating the scale of barriers impacting communities of color throughout and beyond the pandemic. We recommend referring to the above referenced REIAs for deeper analysis and discussion of inequities.

Related to employment, the chart below shows that in 2019 in Montgomery County, Latino and Black workers compared to White workers made up larger shares of the

⁴ Zachary Berger, Vivian Altiery De Jesus, Sabrina A. Assoumo, and Trisha Greenhalgh. "Long COVID and Health Inequities: The Role of Primary Care". The Milbank Quarterly. June 2021; 99 (2): 519-541. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8241274/>

⁵ Long-haul Covid-19 refers to the long-term effects of Covid-19. For more information, see "Post-COVID Conditions". The Center for Disease Control and Prevention. September 16, 2021. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/long-term-effects/index.html>

⁶ Zachary Berger, et al. June 2021.

⁷ See data analysis section.

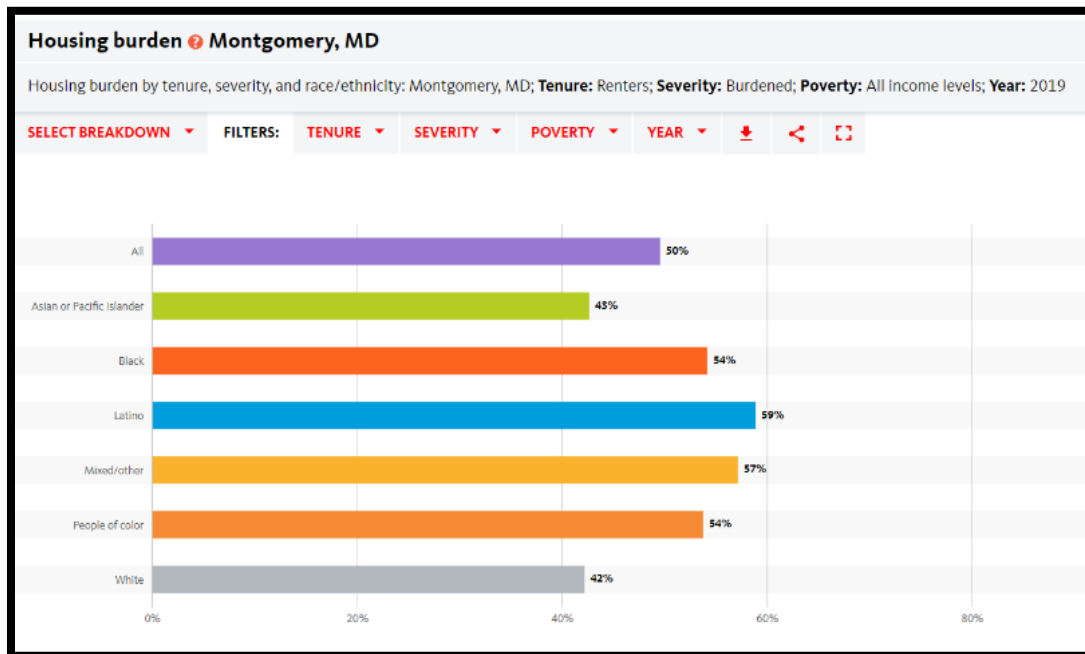
⁸ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/06/16/race-gaps-in-covid-19-deaths-are-even-bigger-than-they-appear/>

occupations that were most negatively affected by the pandemic. The highlighted rows are the occupations that based on Economic Policy Institute's (EPI) analysis experienced the greatest reduction in employment nationally—EPI's calculated reduction in employment is italicized.

Occupation distribution by Race and Ethnicity in Montgomery County, MD, 2019

Occupation category	% Black workers in...	% Hispanic or Latino workers in...	% White (alone) workers in...
Service (-27.2% <i>nationally</i>)	22%	31%	8%
Sales and office occupations (-17.5% <i>nationally</i>)	17%	15%	14%
Production, transportation, and material moving (-17.9% <i>nationally</i>)	11%	8%	3%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance (-15.7% <i>nationally</i>)	3%	21%	3%
Management, business, science, and arts (-4.6% <i>nationally</i>)	48%	25%	72%

Source: Author's calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (using table B24010B, B24010H, and B24010I) and analysis from Figure F: *Latinx workers—particularly women—face devastating job losses in the COVID-19 recession* by Elise Gould, Daniel Perez, and Valerie Wilson, Economic Policy Institute, August 20, 2020.
<https://www.immigrationresearch.org/system/files/Latinx%20workers.pdf>



The graph above from the National Equity Atlas illustrates housing-cost burden levels in 2019 for renters in Montgomery County. Overall, 50% of renters at all income-levels are housing-cost burdened, while 54% of renters who are Black and 59% of renters who are Latino (at all income levels) are housing cost-burdened.

Source: Housing burden. Montgomery County, MD. 2019. National Equity Atlas. Available at: https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Housing_burden#/?geo=04000000000024031

In addition to housing cost burden, disparities in insurance coverage are also relevant to Covid-19 impacts, particularly in vaccination distribution, as cost may be a factor residents are concerned about, if they believe there will be a cost associated with receiving the vaccine. In 2017, Black residents in Montgomery County were nearly twice as likely as white residents to not have health insurance. Latino residents were more than five times more likely than white residents to not have health insurance.

Insurance Coverage in Montgomery County, MD, 2017.

Racial/ethnic group	% who are uninsured
White	3.8%
Asian	5.8%
Black	7.3 %
Latino	19.4%
Other	26.6%

Source: Jupiter Independent Research Group. Racial Equity Profile Montgomery County. Report Number 2019-7. Office of Legislative Oversight. Published June 20, 2019. Accessed: [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/OLO2019-7-6 20 19.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/OLO2019-7-6%2019.pdf)

For additional data points related to employment, income, housing, and transportation disparities see Racial Equity Profile Montgomery County. Report Number 2019-7. Office of Legislative Oversight. Published June 20, 2019. Accessed: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/OLO2019-7-6 20 19.pdf>

Again, we recommend referring to REIAs conducted for Proyecto Salud y Bienestar and the African American Health Program for deeper analysis and discussion on the intersection of the disparities identified above and their effect on communities of color during the pandemic.

cc: Raymond L. Crowel, Psy.D., Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive