OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

MEMORANDUM

August 12, 2021

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

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

Re: Supplemental Appropriation: Community Services Block Grant REIA #22-4

I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice finds that Special Appropriation #22-4 advances racial equity and social justice. Based on targeting criteria and information provided in the 2019–2022 Montgomery County, Maryland Community Needs Assessment, we believe that communities of color and low-income residents living in selected zip codes will likely gain increased access to resources necessary to fill gaps created by the economic impacts of Covid-19. Ensuring access to proposed programs will prevent existing gaps from widening during the pandemic recovery.

II. **BACKGROUND:** Special Appropriation #22-4 seeks to use Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding awarded to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to address the negative impacts of Covid-19 for households most affected by the dual economic and health crises the pandemic created. The strategies outlined in the Special Appropriation are based on a community needs assessment approved by the Community Action Board. The community needs assessment included identification of community needs and areas to be served, a review of reports from DHHS as well as community partners and a survey of Community Advocacy Institute participants. Findings from the community needs assessment encourage County stakeholders to address rising poverty and social and economic challenges experienced by people in areas most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is well documented that Covid-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color and low-income communities nationally[1] and in the County[2]. Existing racial inequities in employment, income, housing and healthcare put communities of color at greater risk of contracting, becoming severely ill and dying from Covid-19 and at the same time exaggerated the economic impacts of pandemic-related business closures and job losses. Communities of color in the County have lower median wages than white residents and are overrepresented in low-wage jobs with fewer benefits. These jobs were also in industries most affected by the pandemic, resulting in higher levels of unemployment and for workers who remained employed, higher levels of risk of exposure to Covid-19. Likely related to employment disparities, communities of color also have lower rates of health insurance in the County.

Many of the County's residents experiencing negative impacts of Covid-19 along with existing racial inequities live in East County, Long Branch, Gaithersburg, Germantown, and Wheaton. The geographic targeting involved with the proposed approach is similar to DHHS' Framework for Equitable Access to Covid-19 Vaccination[3] and the Covid-19 Preventing Homelessness Index[4] and aligns with practices adopted by other jurisdictions to support an equitable response and recovery from Covid-19. For example, the City of San Antonio's Covid-19 Equity Framework and Rapid Response Tool[5] emphasizes identifying communities who would benefit or be burdened by proposed decisions and taking into consideration which communities are already most burdened by racial inequities.

The Defining Areas of Need Appendix of the Community Needs Assessment uses data points from the following sources along with County-wide statistics to determine priority areas for resource allocation.

- CDC Social Vulnerability Index
- Distribution of SNAP and Free and Reduced Meals
- Public Health Services Zip Code Health Ranking Project

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[1] Amy Liu, Alan Berube, Joseph Parilla. Brookings. July 2020. Available at https://www.brookings.edu/research/rebuild-better-a-framework-to-support-an-equitable-recovery-from-covid-19/

[2] Maryland Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Covid-19 and Health Disparities in Maryland. February 2021. Available at https://www.usccr.gov/files/2021/04-20-MD-SAC-COVID-19-and-Health-Disparities-Advisory-Memo.pdf and Rebecca Tan. Washington Post. "A diverse suburb's biggest pandemic challenge: Distributing the vaccine equitably". January 2021. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/vaccine-equity-montgomery-maryland/2021/01/31/3a1f2fe0-617f-11eb-9061-07abcc1f9229_story.html

[3] Montgomery County, Maryland Community Action Agency, University of Washington, School of Social Work, and the Center for Women's Welfare. Self-Sufficiency Standard Montgomery County, Maryland. 2018. Available at https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/SSS%20Report%20for%20MC_2017_FINAL.pdf

[4] Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services. Homeless Prevention Index. Available at https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/mc.dhhs/viz/HomelessPreventionIndexBeta/OverviewIndicators

[5] City of San Antonio Office of Equity. Covid-19 Equity Framework and Rapid Response Tool. Available at https://www.sanantonio.gov/Portals/0/Files/Equity/COSACOVIDEquityRapidResponseToolandFramework.pdf?ver=2020-06-22-165856-570

- Behavioral Health and Crisis Services Maps
- Aging and Vulnerability Neighborhood Scores
- Accessibility — Job "Opportunity Score" from Redfin

While the Appendix doesn't make clear how insights from these sources are weighed or analyzed, it is clear that the Community Action Board and other users of this report do have access to critical disaggregated data related racial and other structural inequities that can be used to promote equitable resource allocation.

Using findings from the community needs assessment to inform its approach, DHHS' proposed uses of CSBG CARES funding address the economic impacts of Covid-19 on communities who before the pandemic were already dealing with higher rates of poverty and associated inequities in housing, food access, healthcare and educational opportunity. Specific proposed program elements[6] include:

- rental assistance to households who meet CSBG income eligibility but do not qualify for other rental assistance programs
- five multi-lingual and/or minority navigators who assist people by providing interpretation, translation and education about systems; helping residents access basic and emergency needs; and initiate access to nonprofit resources or enrollment of public benefits
- one-year opportunity coach and mental health counselor working with families in the Long Branch and served by the Takoma East Silver Spring Community Action Center (TESS).

These elements are intended to strengthen the whole-family approach[7] and reach families who do not meet federal eligibility criteria but who live below the County's self-sufficiency standard[8]. Together, the coordinated approach will assist residents in navigating a complex set of County services, including the County's rental assistance programs and programs with varying eligibility criteria. These actions increase access by meeting communities

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[6] The proposed elements listed below are quoted from a July 15th memo from County Executive Marc Elrich to County Council President Tom Hucker.

[7] Montgomery County, Maryland Community Action Agency, University of Washington, School of Social Work, and the Center for Women's Welfare. Self-Sufficiency Standard Montgomery County, Maryland. 2018. Available at https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/SSS%20Report%20for%20MC_2017_FINAL.pdf pg. 48.

[8] The Montgomery County self-sufficiency standard in 2016 for two adults, one preschooler and one school age child was $91,252. Montgomery County, Maryland Community Action Agency, University of Washington, School of Social Work, and the Center for Women's Welfare. Self-Sufficiency Standard Montgomery County, Maryland. 2018. Available at https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/SSS%20Report%20for%20MC_2017_FINAL.pdf pg. 22

where they are—recognizing how mistrust of government and healthcare systems[9] and the pandemic's impact on mental health[10] is shaping individual choices—and removing barriers like transportation, low rates of health insurance coverage, limited time, diminished trust and lack of translation services that disproportionately impact communities of color.

As the Community Needs Assessment demonstrates, both quantitative and qualitative data play an important role in articulating community needs and measuring progress towards goals. It is therefore a strength of this proposed approach that there will be data tracked about program participants. Additional information about the kinds of data collected and how the data will be used would allow this analysis to more completely assess the extent to which that data collection effort advances racial equity.

III. **DATA ANALYSIS:** Using Montgomery Covid-19 surveillance data (as of August 9th, 2021) the zip codes in which special appropriation funding will be directed are among the most Covid-19 impacted zip codes in the County.

	Wheaton: 20902	Gaithersburg: 20877	Germantown: 20876
Cumulative cases per 100k residents	9.3k	10.4k	6.2k
Ranking among zip codes in terms of cumulative cases per 100k residents (greatest to least, where ranking #1 is the most cases per 100k residents and #37 is the fewest number of cases per 100k residents)	5	1	19
Cumulative cases	5,028	4,050	1,950
Number of deaths	106	78	20
Population (zip code)	52,908	38,423	30,778
Case per capita (cumulative cases/population)	10%	11%	6%
Deaths per case (deaths/cases)	2%	2%	1%
% total population Black and Latinx	68%	77%	73%

[9] Kweli Rashied-Henry. International City/County Management Association. "COVID-19 Vaccine and Mistrust in Communities of Color". February 2021. Available at https://icma.org/blog-posts/covid-19-vaccine-and-mistrust-communities-color

[10] Office of Legislative Oversight. Covid-19 and Mental Health. July 2020. Available at https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2020%20Reports/OLOSpotlight-COVID-19MentalHealth.pdf

Source: Montgomery County Covid-19 Surveillance Data accessed on August 9, 2021. https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/data/case-counts.html#cases-zip

The Montgomery County Self-sufficiency Standard Report published in 2018 provides data from 2016 on the amount of income necessary to meet the basic needs of families, differentiated by family type and geographic location. Economic disruption caused by the pandemic have particularly impacted families living below the self-sufficiency standard. Available data shows stark differences between the self-sufficiency standard, median household income and the minimum wage at the time:

Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard Report **January 2018**

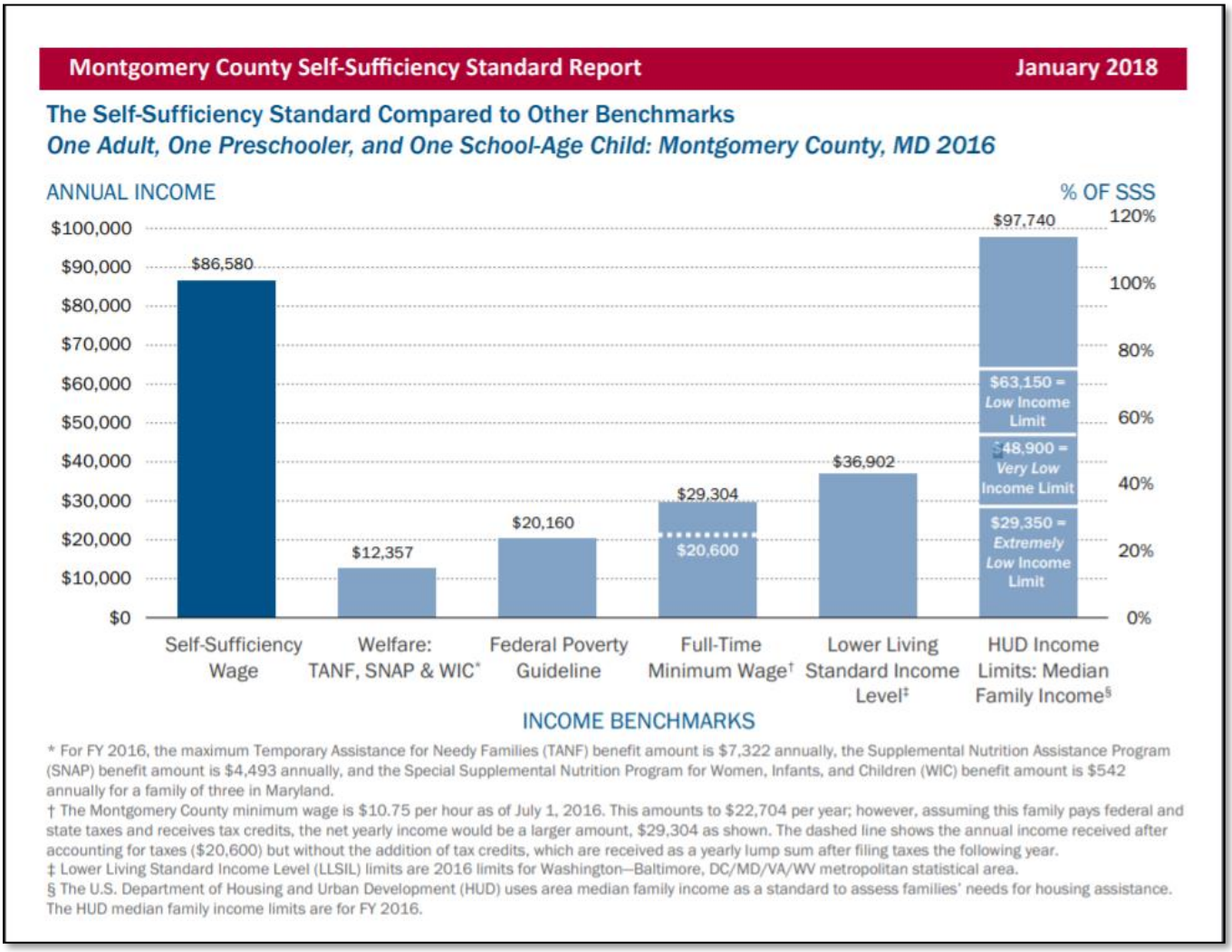
The Self-Sufficiency Standard as a Percentage of Other Benchmarks of Income, 2016
Two Family Types, Montgomery County, MD

	Self-Sufficiency Standard for One Adult + One Preschooler + One School-age				Self-Sufficiency Standard for Two Adults + One Preschooler + One School-age			
	Annual Self-Sufficiency Standard	As Percentage of:			Annual Self-Sufficiency Standard	As Percentage of:		
		Federal Poverty Guidelines	Minimum Wage	Median Family Income		Federal Poverty Guidelines	Minimum Wage	Median Family Income
COUNTY								
Montgomery County	$86,580	429%	381%	89%	$91,252	376%	201%	84%

Definitions: The federal poverty guidelines for family of three = $20,160 and for a family of four = $24,300. Annual minimum wage is the gross amount of full-time, year-round work at an hourly wage of $10.75 per hour (assumes both adults work). Area median family income varies by county and is calculated based on HUD's FY2016 Low Income Limit (50% of median family income).

Source: Montgomery County, Maryland Community Action Agency, University of Washington, School of Social Work, and the Center for Women's Welfare. Self-Sufficiency Standard Montgomery County, Maryland. 2018. Available at https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/SSS%20Report%20for%20MC_2017_FINAL.pdf pg. 22

In addition, data shows a gap between the self-sufficiency standard and eligibility for some income-eligibility based programs. This means for example that a family making $64,000 per year will exceed, the upper threshold of the HUD designated low-income limit, but will still only make 73% of the self-sufficiency standard. The chart below shows how other benchmarks compare to the self-sufficiency standard for one adult, one preschooler, and one school age child.



Source: Montgomery County, Maryland Community Action Agency, University of Washington, School of Social Work, and the Center for Women's Welfare. Self-Sufficiency Standard Montgomery County, Maryland. 2018. Available at https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/SSS%20Report%20for%20MC_2017_FINAL.pdf pg. 21.

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