



## OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich  
County Executive

Tiffany Ward  
Director and Chief Equity Officer

### MEMORANDUM

November 28, 2022

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director  
Office of Management and Budget

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

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) for Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-22 Montgomery County Government Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Older Americans Act Title III Grant

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #23-22 *Montgomery County Government Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Older Americans Act Title III Grant*, aligns with the County's overall objective to reduce and eliminate racial disparities and inequities and could ultimately advance equitable outcomes for low-income aging residents of the County. Funds made available from the grant will primarily target programs serving low-income older adults (aged 60 and over<sup>1</sup>) in Montgomery County who, due to historical and systemic factors, are more likely to be Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Grant funds will also target older adults whose primary language is not English.

ORESJ's analysis is based on how services for older residents of Montgomery County will be distributed—using an approach that prioritizes responding to the needs of older adults and their caregivers who are experiencing the greatest barriers in accessing services that address social isolation, nutrition, health, and safety in the County. It is important to note that funding from this grant will not address underlying systemic factors impacting low-income BIPOC older residents of the County or those whose primary language is not English, however, it will provide resources to those who have been disproportionately

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<sup>1</sup> Congressional Research Service. *Older Americans Act: Overview and Funding*. 2022. Available at: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43414>

impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the hardships (both economic and social) it has caused.

II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #23-22 DHHS ARPA Older Americans Act Title III Grant is to provide a variety of supportive services to aging residents of Montgomery County. These services include:

- expanded access to transportation in an effort to re-engage aging County residents in community activities following the pandemic;
- programming to address depression in aging residents;
- arts programming for individuals living in long-term care settings;
- affordable and effective hearing assistance devices;
- nutrition, light chore, and dental services for aging residents;
- respite for family caregivers; and
- additional services with proven benefits to aging individuals.

Specifically, this one-time funding opportunity will allow DHHS' Area Agency on Aging and Disability Services to enhance current services to reach more people, develop innovative new services, and support community providers who serve older adults in the County.

DHHS states that their greatest challenge in serving aging County residents is that they can be hard to reach—with older adults intentionally avoiding interactions with providers for reasons such as denial, shame, language barriers, financial hardship, and trust. Designed with these barriers in mind, DHHS will provide most programs free of charge to reduce any financial burden in locations across the County that serve people where they are—in places such as senior and community centers and low-income senior housing. DHHS has selected specific locations, partners, and projects in these efforts as they believe they are more likely to reach their target populations. Specifically, DHHS intends to partner with community providers with strong connections to their older members and their caregivers to help establish trust and rapport amongst groups with historically low levels of trust in government.

III. **ANALYSIS:** Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, ORESJ has continued to document the disproportionate impact the pandemic's effects have had on low-income BIPOC communities through various [Racial Equity Impact Assessments \(REIAs\)](#). The research is clear, the burden of the pandemic has fallen largely on Black, Indigenous, and Latino communities with these groups experiencing the greatest racial disparities in health, income, housing, and various other measures of well-being, leaving them particularly

susceptible to the virus and its effects.<sup>2</sup> This is especially true for BIPOC older adults and their caregivers as the risk for serious illness and death related to COVID-19 increases with age.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the inability to visit with loved ones coupled with challenges related to securing basic household supplies, food, and health care has served to exacerbate feelings of social isolation and loneliness amongst older adults.<sup>4</sup>

While it is difficult to measure social isolation and loneliness, nationally, nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated,<sup>5</sup> putting them at greater risk (along with loneliness) for dementia and other serious medical conditions<sup>6</sup>. As DHHS has acknowledged, when serving older adults, one of the key challenges they face in serving this group is social isolation amongst aging residents, greatly affecting their ability to access services and resources. By connecting older adults to County programs, DHHS also intends to pair them with additional services that they may be eligible for, using a “no wrong door” approach to ensure that clients are aware of benefits and resources entitled to them.

While the funding put forth by this one-time grant enhancement has the ability to serve aging County residents in need of concrete and social support in a culturally responsive way, these funds will not address the underlying structures that create disparities in well-being outcomes amongst older BIPOC communities in the County. This would require the County to assess its systems and address the ways in which they exclude particular communities, pushing them further into isolation. As of 2021 (the most recent year for which data is available), approximately 17% of the County’s population was aged 65 or older with approximately 66% of these residents identifying as white<sup>7</sup>. Of this group of older adults, approximately 8% lived below the poverty line, with Black, Asian, and Latino older residents being more likely to experience poverty compared to their white counterparts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> V. Wilson. *Inequities exposed: How COVID-19 widened racial inequities in education, health, and the workforce: Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor*. 2020. Available at: <https://files.epi.org/pdf/203287.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> NORC at the University of Chicago. *Needs Assessment and Environmental Scan Report: Maintaining Physical and Mental Well-Being of Older Adults and Their Caregivers During Public Health Emergencies*. 2021. Available at: [www.norc.umd.edu/PDFs/Maintaining%20Physical%20and%20Mental%20Well%20Being/ESandNAREportNarrative.pdf](http://www.norc.umd.edu/PDFs/Maintaining%20Physical%20and%20Mental%20Well%20Being/ESandNAREportNarrative.pdf)

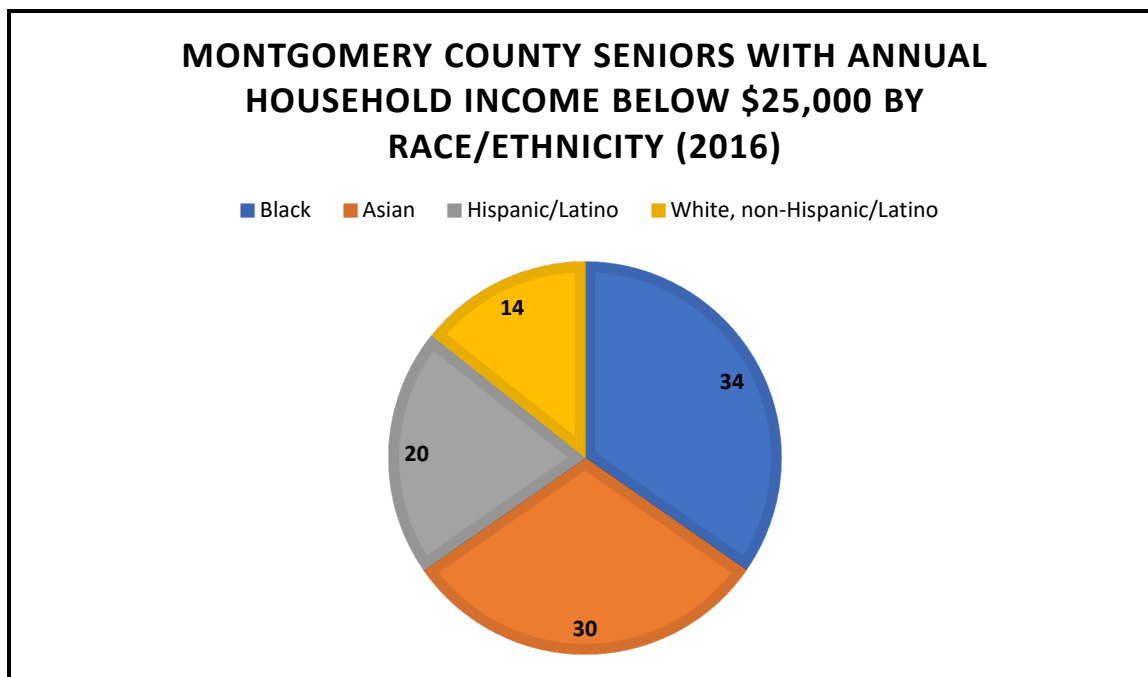
<sup>4</sup> CDC Foundation. *New Report Shows Impact of COVID-19 on Older Adults and Their Caregivers*. 2021. Available at: <https://www.cdcfoundation.org/blog/new-report-shows-impact-covid-19-older-adults-and-their-caregivers>

<sup>5</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System*. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25663external>

<sup>6</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention. *Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions*. 2021. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>

<sup>7</sup> League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, MD, Inc. *A Study of Aging in Montgomery County*. 2022. Available at: [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/lwvmc/pages/42/attachments/original/1650814657/FS\\_2022-05\\_A\\_Study\\_of\\_Aging\\_in\\_MC\\_-\\_League\\_of\\_Women\\_Voters\\_of\\_Montgomery\\_County.pdf?1650814657](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/lwvmc/pages/42/attachments/original/1650814657/FS_2022-05_A_Study_of_Aging_in_MC_-_League_of_Women_Voters_of_Montgomery_County.pdf?1650814657)

<sup>8</sup> League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, MD, Inc. *A Study of Aging in Montgomery County*. 2022. Available at: [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/lwvmc/pages/42/attachments/original/1650814657/FS\\_2022-05\\_A\\_Study\\_of\\_Aging\\_in\\_MC\\_-\\_League\\_of\\_Women\\_Voters\\_of\\_Montgomery\\_County.pdf?1650814657](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/lwvmc/pages/42/attachments/original/1650814657/FS_2022-05_A_Study_of_Aging_in_MC_-_League_of_Women_Voters_of_Montgomery_County.pdf?1650814657)



*A Study of Montgomery County\**

On trend with national projections, older adults are set to outnumber the child population by 2034.<sup>9</sup> As older generations begin to exit the workforce and live longer than those before them, it is imperative that services and support be provided as they are particularly vulnerable to a number of risk factors due to their dependency on more fixed incomes. This is especially true for aging BIPOC communities which are more reliant on government-provided sources of income as opposed to pensions and savings. As such, ORESJ recommends that careful attention be paid when prioritizing organizations to partner with in efforts to reach and serve low-income BIPOC aging County residents. Transparency should be provided regarding which organizations have been chosen along with outlining the criteria for the selection process. Where possible, priority should be given to culturally responsive organizations and programs with a demonstrated ability to advance equitable outcomes for BIPOC communities in the County. Additionally, while Equity Emphasis/Focus Areas serve as a starting point for identifying areas in the County with the greatest need, ORESJ recommends DHHS utilize additional data sets that offer more granularity to help determine priority areas.

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

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<sup>9</sup> J. Vespa. The U.S. Joins Other Countries With Large Aging Populations. 2018. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/03/graying-america.html>