



MONTGOMERY COUNTY
OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY
& SOCIAL JUSTICE

REIA #26-25

Community Connect Portal Continued Development

| Requesting Agency/Department(s) | Dollar Amount |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions | \$3,000,000 |
| Funding Source | |
| General Fund | |

Finding

The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #26-25 *Community Connect Portal Continued Development* has the potential to advance racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County, as the funds support the continued development of the Community Connect Portal¹—broadening resident access and streamlining services for those applying for County services. As a result of historical and systemic inequities, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are more likely to be living in poverty than their White counterparts. As a result, BIPOC individuals are more likely to apply for public assistance benefits, enabling them to meet their basic health, childcare, housing, and nutritional needs. Given that the Community Connect Portal streamlines application processes for these benefit programs, it is highly likely that BIPOC communities will greatly benefit from continued development of the Portal.

Background

Purpose

The purpose of SA #26-25 is to provide funding to support the expansion and enhancement of the Community Connect Program², improving efficiency, streamlining services, and broadening resident access to the services the Portal provides. Of this amount, \$2,200,000 will support the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS's) ongoing platform development, replacing

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paper-based processes with a secure digital system. The remaining \$800,000 will fund a six-month feasibility study led by the Department of Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions (TEBS) to evaluate the potential for countywide implementation of the platform, including assessments of infrastructure capacity, cybersecurity, system integration, cost-effectiveness, and return on investment.

Additional Background Information (Optional)

The two key initiatives funded by this supplemental request will specifically:

1. Enable DHHS to continue developing and deploying its customer-facing systems, allowing the department to incorporate more programs and manage a larger number of customer intakes and applications. This investment supports a system with extensive capabilities, enabling the platform to expand to include data from other County departments and resulting in a seamless experience for residents. As residents engage with multiple County agencies through the portal, the system promotes efficiency by sharing customer data from a single profile, making their interactions with the County government more seamless.
2. Provide resources to carry out a six-month Feasibility Study for Cross-Agency Scaling. The study aims to assess the potential to expand the Community Connect Portal to other County departments and establish a standardized digital entry point for residents. After the demonstration of DHHS' Community Connect Portal, TEBS recognized the potential for the platform to be scaled to other County agencies that currently run individual intake or service request systems. A centralized intake module could boost efficiency, enhance resident access to services, and lower overall technology maintenance costs by unifying similar functions.

Relevant REIAs and Other Assessments

ORESJ has conducted REIAs since 2021. The below REIA(s) are relevant to supplemental appropriation #26-25.

- REIA #22-66 Martha B. Gudelsky Child Care Center
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-66.pdf>
- REIA #23-16 Montgomery County Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Support Services (IECMHSS) Grant
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-16.pdf>
- REIA #23-80 Local Health Department Health Disparities Grant

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- <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-80.pdf>
REIA # 23-95 –Non-Departmental Accounts Working Families Income Supplement
- <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-95.pdf>
REIA #25-42 Services to End and Prevent Homelessness
- <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/25-42.pdf>
REIA #25-65 Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development
Emergency Rental Assistance Grant

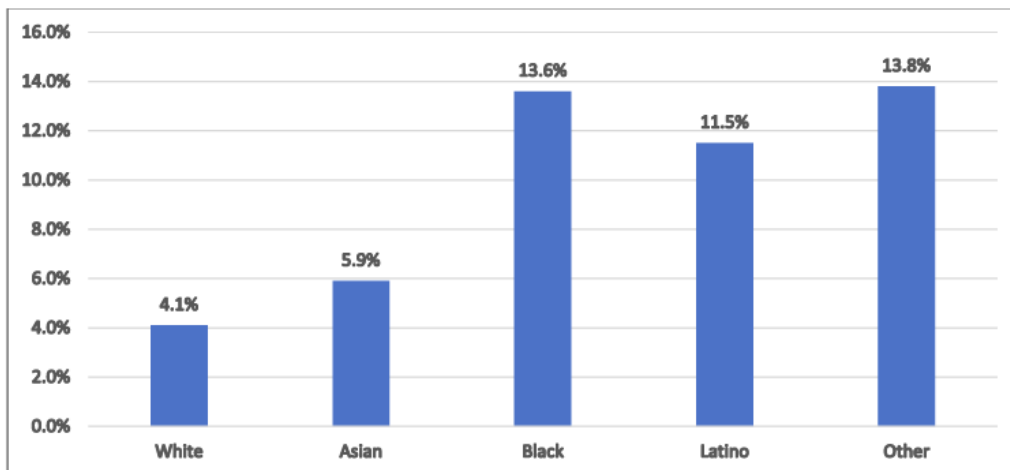
Analysis

Demographic Profile

As previously stated, those identifying as BIPOC are more likely to be low-income and/or living in poverty. This is particularly the case for BIPOC children and youth. The graphs below demonstrate these inequities in Montgomery County.

POVERTY - ALL RESIDENTS

| Year | Racial/Ethnic Group | Montgomery County | Maryland | United States |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------|---------------|
| 2019 | White | 4.1% | 6.4% | 10.3% |
| | Asian | 5.9% | 7.4% | 9.6% |
| | Black | 13.6% | 12.9% | 21.2% |
| | Latino | 11.5% | 11.7% | 17.2% |
| | Other | 13.8% | 14.0% | 18.0% |

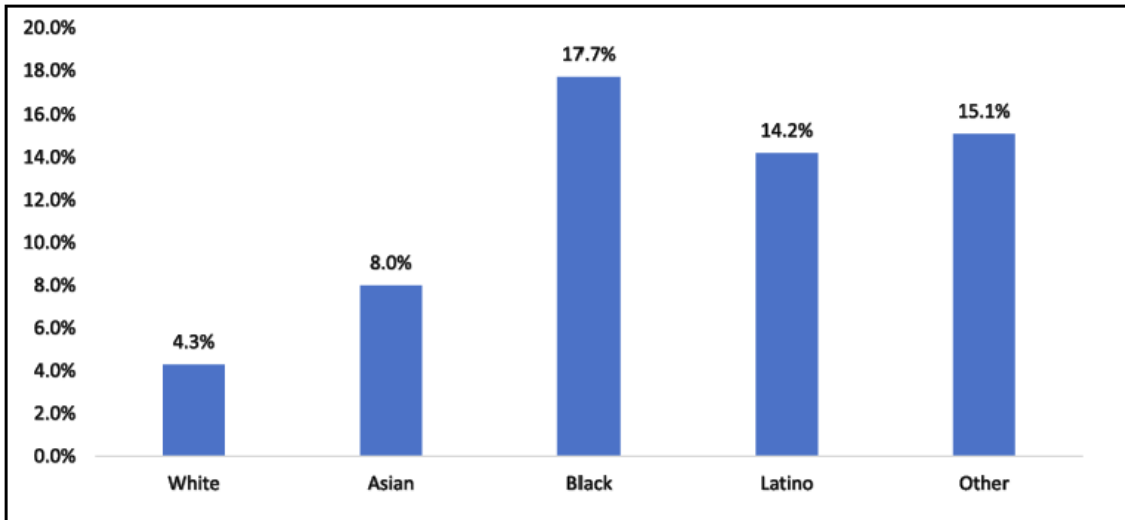


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Data Source: Jupiter Independent Research Group. *Racial Equity Profile Update: Montgomery County*. 2023. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ORE/Resources/Files/JUPITERRACIALEQUITYPROFILE.pdf>

CHILD POVERTY

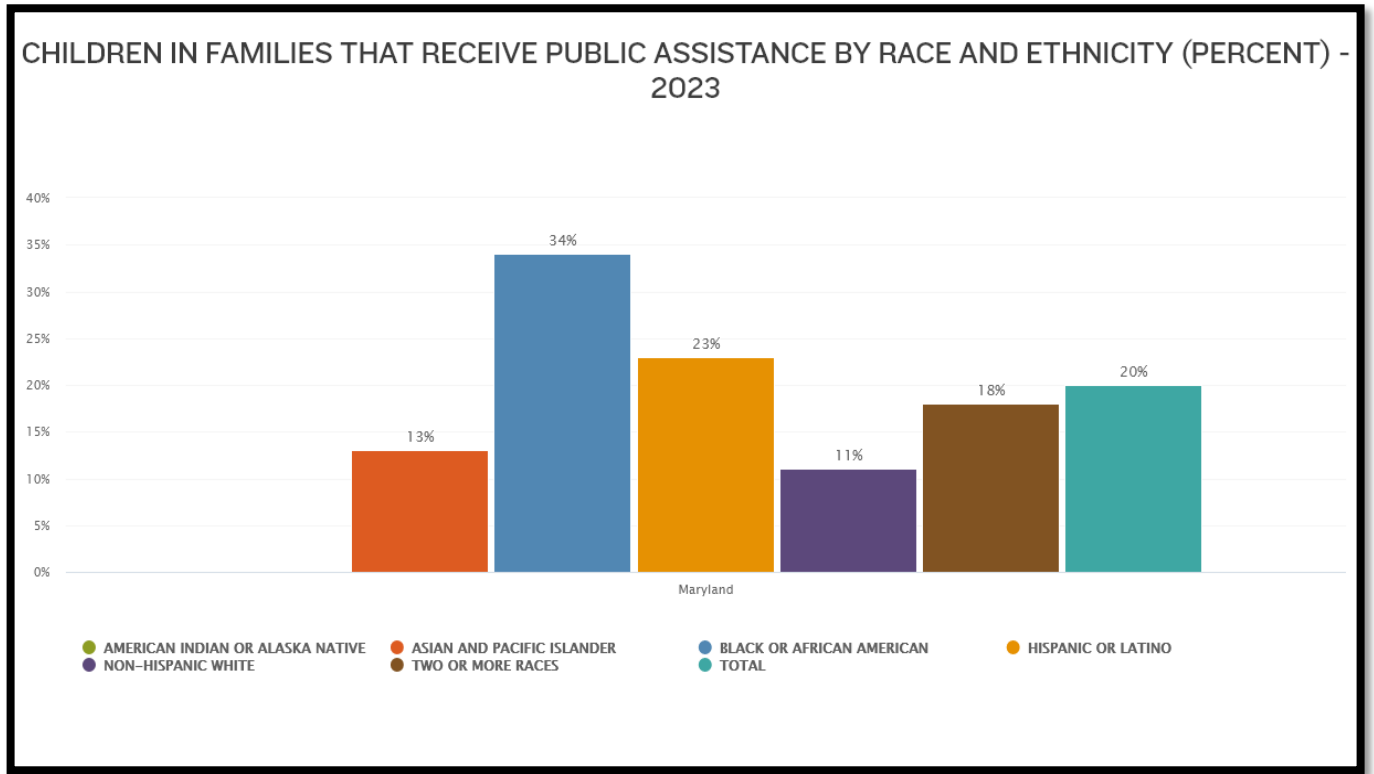
| Year | Racial/Ethnic Group | Montgomery County | Maryland | United States |
|------|---------------------|-------------------|----------|---------------|
| 2019 | White | 4.3% | 6.5% | 13.3% |
| | Asian | 8.0% | 9.5% | 9.2% |
| | Black | 17.7% | 18.7% | 30.6% |
| | Latino | 14.2% | 14.9% | 23.4% |
| | Other | 15.1% | 18.2% | 24.2% |



Data Source: Jupiter Independent Research Group. *Racial Equity Profile Update: Montgomery County*. 2023. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ORE/Resources/Files/JUPITERRACIALEQUITYPROFILE.pdf>

Given that BIPOC children and individuals are more likely to be living in poverty, it is no surprise that they are also most likely to utilize public assistance benefits. The graph below highlights public assistance receipt for children in Maryland by race and ethnicity in 2023.

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Data Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. *Children in Families that Receive Public Assistance by Race and Ethnicity (Percent) - 2023*. 2025. Available at: <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/bar/9789-children-in-families-that-receive-public-assistance-by-race-and-ethnicity?loc=1&loct=2#2/22/false/2545/8223,4040,4039,2638,2597,4758,1353/19063>

ORESJ Research & Analysis

Supplemental information accompanying this funding request acknowledges that the existing paper-based application process enabling Montgomery County residents to apply for some public assistance benefits is inefficient for both applications and staff. Residents are often burdened by a complex, time-consuming process that requires staff to spend valuable time on manual data entry and follow-up. An updated Community Connect Platform will streamline the application and approval process by providing a secure, user-friendly digital solution that automates eligibility checks, document transfers, and communication points, significantly reducing the time and effort for those involved. Front-loading these services empowers residents to begin the application process at their convenience while also providing DHHS staff with tools to work more efficiently. This approach not only saves employees time, allowing them to focus on complex cases and direct support, but also makes services more accessible to the public.

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Efforts such as this have been piloted for some time now, with the Urban Institute and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) having previously worked with six states through the Work Support Strategies (WSS) initiative³ to align programs and streamline processes to ensure that low-income working families could access and keep benefits for as long as they are eligible through a system that allowed families to apply for multiple benefits such as Medicaid and SNAP simultaneously. While this effort and that of the Community Connect Portal surely serve to benefit BIPOC children and families, especially, it is important to note that careful attention must be paid to the implementation of this system to minimize disruptions to service delivery.

Transitioning from a paper process to a can disrupt both applicants and DHHS staff, potentially leading some people to slip through the cracks. As DHHS and TEBS begin rolling out the updated system, it will be important to develop a concrete strategy to minimize the impact on service delivery and potential churn as data is entered into the new system. Additionally, great consideration must be given to applicants with limited English proficiency, limited digital skills, and limited access to the internet or virtual devices. While information accompanying this supplemental request stated that the County provides self-service computer labs for customers without digital tools, along with in-person and multilingual support to ensure equitable access, it will be important to ensure that those in need of these resources are connected to them.

Caveats

This REIA has been conducted with the best available information at the time of writing, including department responses to the Racial Equity and Social Justice template and research conducted by ORESJ Policy Team Analysts. While the assessment examines the specific racial equity and social justice impacts of the funding request, it cannot fully address all systemic inequities affecting the communities in question, nor do we seek to examine impacts outside the scope of the funding request. We recommend using this assessment as a starting point for discussions about the program's impact on advancing racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County.

References

¹ Montgomery County Maryland Department of Health and Human Services. *Community Connect*. Available at: <https://communityconnect.montgomerycountymd.gov/>

² Montgomery County Maryland Department of Health and Human Services. *Community Connect*. Available at: <https://communityconnect.montgomerycountymd.gov/faq-page-home>

³ Cemeré James. CLASP. *Work Support Strategies Initiative 12 Lessons on Program Integration and Innovation*. 2016. Available at: https://www.clasp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/WSS_Lessons_4.1.16-.pdf