

Class members of the County Council, my name is Assaati Ahmad, you have my written testimony and I'd like to bring the most important points to your attention. As a resident of Montgomery County, a 3rd term AmeriCorps member who served with my local County Government, in my most important role as a mother, I am deeply concerned about the state of our collective wellbeing, especially our children. What I'm asking the County to do, is prioritize establishing programs such as Haven & Health, a comprehensive wellness and integrative lifestyle education program I started in 2016, that offers alternative modes of healing to help our most vulnerable members of the community.

Our children in Montgomery County are struggling to recover from traumas magnified by the pandemic such as food insecurity, homelessness, racial disparities in educational services, and in most severe cases domestic violence. While things like temporary housing or protective orders may alleviate some traumas for only a year, whether physical or psychological in nature, trauma does not go away in a year and without intervention can take a lifetime to recover from. My son is an Honors student at Magruder High School in the Aviation Aerospace program, and with the recent school shooting we've all experienced feelings of unsafety as a subsidiary ripple effect of trauma.

There is a dire need for healing practices and therapy in our County right now. As a Certified Yoga Instructor and Wellness Consultant, I know first-hand that the heavy stigma surrounding mental health therapy poses a tremendous barrier for people to seek help, and the high cost of qualified therapists makes it inaccessible to families that are economically disadvantaged. Alternative modes of healing with music training, travel, animal assisted therapy, and emotional support animals in combination with movement have scientifically proven benefits to relieve and heal trauma in youth and adults. I implore the County Council to create a comprehensive approach to making these alternative therapy programs immediately available to the most vulnerable members of our community.

I am available to discuss this further with you if you would like to know more. Thank you for your consideration.

Assaati Ahmad