

**League of Women Voters of Montgomery County Additional Testimony to the
Montgomery County Council**

Re: Proposed FY 23 Operating Budget

April 18, 2022

In addition to our prior letter of testimony dated April 15, the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC) would like to highlight various proposed expenditures for mental health needs and their implications for racial equity and social justice in the county.

1. The LWVMC supports funding of fully staffed High School Wellness Centers at ALL 31 county high schools. We believe Montgomery County should ensure that adequate mental health services are available and accessible to children in all parts of the county, and we support maintaining a safety net for underserved children and those with the most complex problems.
2. The LWVMC supports increased funding to expand Mobile Crisis Teams to provide 24/7 assistance for handling mental health and substance use crises instead of relying on police. Evidence supports our position that a combination of culturally sensitive and bi-lingual providers and a comprehensive range of services will better serve the community and get vulnerable residents on the path to recovery and safety faster. This funding will make mobile crisis teams timelier and more reliable and will better ensure coordination among county health, housing and correctional agencies for more effective care.
3. For these reasons, the LWVMC also supports the budget's proposal to expand a Restoration Center to increase the number of residential beds for people in mental health or substance use crises. We affirm that a safety net of public mental health services that includes a range of housing for the mentally ill and homeless is a vital and responsible use of public resources as it supports our most vulnerable and unprotected community members.

Together these proposals reinforce Montgomery County's stated commitments to promote and further racial equity and social justice. If the county hopes to achieve these goals, it must adequately maintain a comprehensive, responsible, multi-faceted and culturally competent ecosystem of mental health services to support residents who need it most, regardless of their background or situation in life. Mental health care is a spectrum and a continuum – no one can do it alone.

It is the League's conviction that mental health assistance should be rooted in compassion and administered by trained professionals. This assistance should not be an auxiliary responsibility of law enforcement, whose primary concern is the de-escalation of violent situations.

Additional Testimony Re: the proposed FY 23 operating budget (cont.)

Understandably, police are neither expected nor trained to follow up with recipients of mental health or crisis services as they progress through county assistance programs. This facet of care is critical for long-term success, and it is better suited to dedicated agencies. Those agencies can only do this work if they have adequate resources.

The League is committed to holding government accountable for providing necessary services that promote the health and wellbeing of residents. As such, racial equity, social justice and mental health must be part of programming, policy and legislation now and beyond.

Nancy Bliss & Vicky Strella, co-presidents