



Mona-Mae Juwillie, Chair
Keyna Anyiam, Vice Chair
Montgomery County Office of
Community Partnerships

Dear Montgomery County Councilmembers,

The African Affairs Advisory Group was founded 15 years ago and housed under the Office of Community Partnerships to advocate for the needs of the African community and connect our community with many resources the County has to offer. The African community is part of the one-third of Montgomery County residents that are foreign-born, the second fastest-growing immigrant community. In 2010, we made up about 14% of the foreign-born population but we are confident that number has grown¹. The data is outdated, and we are requesting disaggregated data of the diaspora to inform current and future budget requests. Our community is not a monolith, and we ask that you join us in the collection of information that highlights our uniqueness and celebrates our collective contributions to the county.

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The African Affairs Advisory Group sends this letter to ensure requests made in the FY25 budget remain intact because of how they can positively affect the African community, by way of continued funding of the Newcomers' Program, funding and education for the procurement of community grants, and the expansion of resources to include additional languages.

First, we ask that you support the allocation of additional federal reimbursement for COVID Costs, under HHS, towards supporting the Newcomer Program. Throughout this past year, refugees from Mauritania, The Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea, have found themselves in Montgomery County. Some of them completed the treacherous trek through South America and were a part of convoys bussed up from Texas. County residents and partners representing those countries, such as Fuwana and the Senegalese Task Force, quickly mobilized to house, feed, and support over 300 newcomers from the aforementioned countries. The expansion of the Bienvenidos Program to the Newcomers Initiative is critical for inclusivity because immigration as we have all witnessed is not just impacting the Latino community. Your support of the Newcomers Program will ensure that people seeking asylum, especially those fleeing persecution in their countries, are able to acquire the important necessities they deserve, like language training to make their assimilation and future contribution to our county easier.

Second, your continued support of community grants is critical to organizations serving the African community, from youth to senior citizens. The quarterly community grant application has been pivotal for many African nonprofits and community groups looking to receive funding; however, some do not get approved and to ensure equity there needs to be timely application feedback in order to improve their chances for the future. We are also proud of organizations like Immigrant Community Services (ICS), which received an award to launch an app dedicated to

¹https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/partnerships/resources/files/Montgomery_County_Foreign_Born_Data.pdf

connecting newcomers with resources and events across Montgomery County, and The Ethiopian Community Center which has used their grants to service the large Ethiopian community based in Montgomery County. We hope to see more grants and the development of a contract education program to allow more organizations from the African community to acquire grants that will in turn help the many in addition to the aforementioned organizations.

Finally, we request funding for the expansion of resources to include additional languages. The mission of the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice is to reduce and eliminate racial disparities and inequities in Montgomery County. We see efforts by the county to achieve that, however there is room for improvement. We are grateful that the County Executive agreed to host a budget forum in Amharic last year, providing more opportunities for residents to be civically engaged in the budgeting process. The county must continue to provide resources in different languages, so residents have the same opportunities to receive county resources and information as others. The second largest language group of the African diaspora is French. With limited County resources that provide French services, we would appreciate a budget that supported opportunities for this language expansion for true inclusivity. The African continent, the second largest continent in the world, is made up of 54 countries with thousands of languages.

With what our diaspora has been able to contribute, the most evident example comes from our economic contributions to this county. Look no further than restaurants in Silver Spring, Germantown; consider some of the African dance classes you have attended and enjoyed; recognize how you may have benefitted white-collar or blue-collar services provided by someone from the African diaspora. With an economic contribution in Silver Spring alone of over 30% (retail and food business)², we help maintain the vitality this County is known for.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests and we look forward to your continued partnership.

The African Affairs Advisory Group

² https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Attachment_Diverse-Community-Study_Final-Report_210412.pdf