



May 6, 2024

**Montgomery County Council
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

I am writing as the Chair of Nexus Montgomery Regional Partnership, which is a joint venture among Montgomery County's six hospitals. Nexus Montgomery's mission is to promote health, reduce avoidable hospital utilization, and manage total cost of care for our shared community in ways that no single hospital could achieve on its own.

Since Nexus Montgomery was formed in 2016, we have worked to increase Montgomery County's behavioral health treatment capacity and strengthen county-wide crisis response. For example, Nexus Montgomery provided start-up funds to establish two crisis bed houses and an Assertive Community Treatment team, and helped outpatient mental health centers improve access to post-hospitalization psychiatric care. We also collaborate to reduce avoidable emergency department (ED) utilization among patients with the most complex behavioral health needs.

The Nexus Montgomery Regional Partnership submits this written testimony in support of the Services to End and Prevent Homelessness FY25 budget. Nexus Montgomery asks the County Council to fully fund SEPH's request for:

- **Three peer support specialists at Interfaith Works to address behavioral health needs at Progress Place:** \$207,950 / 0 FT
- **Enhanced shelter capacity (hypothermia, overflow, and security services):** \$2,865,686 / 0 FTE
- **Continued funding for the Medically Vulnerable Adult Initiative:** \$800,722.

As the Interagency Commission on Homelessness 2023 report explained, inadequate behavioral health services, coupled with the impacts of the opioid epidemic, have fueled recent increases in homelessness and created additional barriers to engaging vulnerable adults to get them housed.¹ In the absence of adequate housing resources, engagement and support, individuals experiencing homelessness often come to our hospital emergency departments (EDs), which increases wait times for all patients and strains already limited resources that are needed for medical emergencies.

Support for Montgomery County's unhoused population, especially those experiencing behavioral health challenges, is essential to divert this vulnerable population from hospital EDs and ensure that they access the resources they need. Peers in particular are an essential component of the county's behavioral health workforce: the proposed funding for the three peer support specialists will help direct and support individuals experiencing homelessness to access appropriate resources, instead of relying on hospital EDs. Enhanced funding for shelter capacity will also reduce the burden on EDs, where homeless adults seek shelter during hypothermia season. Finally, funding for the medically vulnerable

¹<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Homelessness/Resources/Files/Documents/Annual%20Reports/2023-ICH%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

adult population, especially for psychiatric services, is critical to support patients' health and well-being and reduce preventable hospitalizations and behavioral health crises.

Nexus Montgomery Regional Partnership urges the County Council to fully fund SEPH's proposed budget in FY25.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Annice Cody". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Annice Cody, President, Holy Cross Health Network, and
Chair, Nexus Montgomery Regional Partnership

Member Hospitals:

- Shady Grove Medical Center
- White Oak Medical Center
- Holy Cross Hospital
- Holy Cross Germantown Hospital
- Suburban Hospital (Johns Hopkins Medicine)
- MedStar Montgomery Medical Center