

Good afternoon council members, imagine being an immigrant new to a community, raising a child with special needs in an education system that you are unfamiliar with and not knowing where to get help. That the life of many families in my community. For this reason, I would like to advocate and speak for children with Special Needs and their families that are always in desperate need to find the right resources and assistance.

This starts with a huge **lack of information, awareness, and services** for the vulnerable members of our community. I have personally been a victim and seen several incidents in my close community where many parents do not have access to resources that are available in the County. In addition, due to the alarming increase in the number of children with Special Needs, the county is not offering enough services to meet the demand. Due to this reason, various families will lack the ability to provide the appropriate and much needed services as part of an Early Intervention. Having a child with an additional/special need is extremely overwhelming for families and not knowing where to find the right resources such as therapy, curriculum activities, or an educational advocate adds another burden to the already existing pain.

Even though Montgomery County offers a variety of activities and services for kids with Special Needs, it is still not enough, and many are not accessible to the Immigrant community. Early intervention has been scientifically proven to highly benefit kids in the long run, however; there has not been enough work to create that awareness around the Immigrant Community.

Immigrant, low- and middle-income families are not able to afford private therapies and/or specialized curriculum activities. Our county should make every possible effort to create additional therapy and activity centers that can be accessed easily by families with. I believe it is very crucial to create awareness for Immigrant families to teach the importance of an Early Intervention. This can be done by having community Information sessions and symposiums at churches and community centers, creating an environment for middle/low-income families to connect and share information by inviting guest speakers and highly knowledgeable educators to share the importance of an Early Intervention and how to navigate several free resources. Having experienced educators and advocates provide families with the information to walk them through the process to navigate therapy centers, curriculum activities, and to collaborate services will tremendously help the communities that are in-need and create awareness.

Finally, I would like to highly emphasize the very limited number of services that the county offers for kids with Special Needs continue to not meet the increasing number of needs within our community. In addition, creating awareness continue to be the issue specially within the Immigrant community in the County. The county should allocate enough resources to meet the needs of the enormously increasing number of kids with Special Needs.

Thank you,

Hiwote Damtew – Proud CAI Participant 2024