



MONTGOMERY COUNTY (MD) ALUMNAE CHAPTER

Our Collective Impact: Empowering Our Community For Success

Written Testimony related to Council Session - Public Hearing FY27 Operating Budget Submitted April 8, 2026

Greetings, President Fani-González and Members of the County Council,

My name is **Nena Abdul-Wakeel**, and I am president and a member of the Montgomery County Alumnae Chapter of **Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated**.

I am here to express my **deep concern** regarding the decision to reallocate staff from the African American Health Program (AAHP) to the Department of Health and Human Services.

AAHP is not just another program.

It is a **trusted, community-based model** that has worked for decades to address persistent health disparities in Montgomery County. And the need remains **urgent**.

African Americans in Maryland experience **higher rates of hypertension and diabetes**. Heart disease remains the **leading cause of death**, with higher mortality rates in our community. And here in Montgomery County, disparities in **life expectancy and preventable hospitalizations persist**.

AAHP works because it is **culturally responsive, community-centered, and rooted in trust**. It connects residents to care, strengthens prevention, and helps manage chronic conditions.

The results speak for themselves.

The SMILE Program achieved a **93% breastfeeding initiation rate**, far exceeding the national average for African American infants. AAHP also achieved a **70% success rate in blood pressure control**, earning its **fourth consecutive Gold Plus Recognition** from the American Heart Association.

I am concerned that this staffing shift—**without a clear plan**—could weaken this critical infrastructure. I respectfully urge the Council to take the following actions:

First, protect and fully fund proven programs like the SMILE Program and Chronic Disease Program, ensuring **no disruption in services**.

Second, require **transparency and accountability** in all decisions impacting AAHP, including engagement with AAHP leadership.

Third, require a **clear transition and sustainability plan** with defined roles, measurable benchmarks, and timely reporting.

The African American Health Program represents **years of progress, trust, and measurable impact. Our community cannot afford to lose ground.**

We urge you to act **decisively** to protect and strengthen AAHP.

Thank you for your time and your leadership.