

Dr. Sheryl Brissett Chapman
[REDACTED]
Silver Spring, MD 20910

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Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) Operating Budgets

Dear Council President Fani-González, Vice President Balcolombe, & Council Members:

I regret that I am unable to attend this year's Council Operating Budget hearings in person as I will be out of the country during this phase of the budget cycle. However, I appreciate the opportunity, as a 40-year resident, community member, and public advocate for Montgomery County, to provide the Council with my views, as you collectively deliberate on an upcoming budget during these fraught and challenging times.

As a proud civic activist and an early participant in the Downtown Silver Spring revitalization efforts, I am gratified to be a part of a community that has always sustained diversity. Because of efforts begun in your very offices and sustained by members of many and varied groups in this region, Silver Spring and Montgomery County have been designated one of the best places in America to raise a family. This is a community that despite challenges, provides opportunities for generations of families and individuals to thrive.

It is imperative that I bring to you, despite the complexity of our current budget situation – both capital and operational – my unique and authentic perspective. I am a retired, Black, Female, Nonprofit Executive. An academic and a Montgomery College Trustee. I have served as an Advisor to the last three County Executives as a member of the African American Advisory Group. I am currently working as one of the inaugural Board of Directors for the Potomac Community Foundation, a group focused on legacy preservation for African Slave Descendant Communities. Protecting and perpetuating the unambiguous and far-reaching contributions of the enslaved and the American citizens who descended from them is key to unpacking the continued growth, diversity, and success of this County. Concisely, I understand the pulse of this County, and I want to specifically lift the Black Physicians & Healthcare Network (BPHN). The BPHN model was launched under my former leadership of The National Center for Children and Families (NCCF) at the request of this Council and in response to the differential and deadly effects of the COVID pandemic on the Black people of this County.

As you deliberate on the competing concerns of today's political landscape – Federal layoffs, record deportation numbers, rising costs, lack of affordable housing – I ask you to consider how all these challenges disproportionately affect Black families. Families who are already the victims of redlining, discrimination, and lower starting points on the economic ladder despite educational attainment.

As I suggested to you last year – without **health, life is not, in general, sustainable**. Individually, poor health results in premature death, trauma, costly hospitalizations, mental health distress. As a society, poor health causes repeated and unrelenting disruption to institutions and municipalities.

Public health is essential, but it is, at its core, an individual experience. BPHN in its few short years has demonstrated that helping the Black descendants of slavery (and those who have migrated from across the Diaspora) discover their entitlement to wellbeing is crucial and transforming. Providing access to health care professionals they trust and believe in is key to everything from vaccination uptake to preventive care; key to sustaining aging parents; key to supporting people with developmental disabilities; key to undoing childhood trauma. Indeed, it is key to uplifting an entire community.

Without the unique and specifically designed programming of BPHN, life looks vastly different for members of Montgomery County's Black Community.

It looks like a Black mother of three who never received treatment for her post-partum depression and now has no energy to lead her children through their education in a State that will penalize them if they are not on grade level in Reading and Math or have poor attendance. It looks like the oldest sibling taking care of themselves, the baby monopolizing all of Mom's limited energy and the middle child getting lost in the shuffle, becoming a behavioral problem at school or suffering from her peers bullying her.

It looks like a young Black man who works as a counselor in a Middle School after care program who never addressed his own trauma over the loss of a brother in a drive-by shooting when he was himself eleven years old. Recently, when the school was locked down because a student brought a gun to class, this man became so intensely triggered that felt unable to help his own students and was afraid to go to work at a job he desperately needed, and where his young charges adored him. He is now planning to drop out of post-secondary school without finishing his credentials because he does not think he can cope with or provide much needed support to the students in the school environment.

It looks like 69-year-old Black woman forced to retired due to a chronic condition affecting her teeth and back. She is now discovering that not only does she not have the ability to get specialized treatment, but her retirement savings will not sustain anything other than food, clothing, and subsidized senior housing. She has no funds left for medications, specialty

care, or emergency bills. She is alone, her pain is excruciating, and she does not have the knowledge or skills to navigate the systems and bureaucracy she needs to receive support.

I could go on and on with the lives that I have seen and touched as a Black woman, professional, and advocate. **I am also this story.** I am aging. I now have a confederation of physicians who are my added support group. I have early indicators for health challenges that need addressing to help me continue to live a long and healthy life. I have prepared for the aging and eventual deaths of my parents and now see what that means for my children to prepare for me. And it is exceedingly difficult, even with resources and access.

I see the power of this model. BPHN has been evaluated, assessed, and proven to be the lifeline that so many Black families reach for in this County. We must continue to invest in the model, refine, and expand it. It has made an enormous impact on the County and has rival communities clamoring for the same program.

Health is an essential economic, and social, and goal, not simply physical. We organize our families around it. Without adequate well-being, there are well-documented financial and human costs. If there is one marker of wealth in this society, it is having access to excellent, consistent healthcare. *With health and with resources to sustain that health you are wealthy person. It does not get better than that.* This is a universal truth and for too many Black folks in Montgomery County, this is still an uphill battle with gaps and disconnects in services.

So, please accept my best wishes in your deliberations, Council members! I appreciate your invaluable time in reading about my express concerns. I look forward to your decision in May!

Warmly,

Sheryl Brissett Chapman, Ed.D., ACSW