



January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Testimony of Laura Hale  
American Heart Association  
**Support of CB3-2021**

Dear Members of the Howard County Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association. The American Heart Association supports the Council's proposed special appropriations to address critical financial relief related to the ongoing pandemic, particularly those related to longstanding inequities associated with housing, early education, and food security. As the Council continues to allocate COVID dollars, we encourage members to remain focused on these essential community needs including healthy food access, hypertension control, and social determinants of health, which this Council has always prioritized.

Addressing health inequity is a longstanding priority for the AHA, which is more critical now since the COVID-19 crisis has magnified and exacerbated existing disparities, particularly among under-resourced communities who are more susceptible to COVID-19 complications. To reverse these known and troubling outcomes, collective and intentional action is necessary to address health disparities and inequities.

Howard County has long been a national leader in promotion and implementation of innovative strategies to eliminate disparities and create a more equitable community. But despite the county's leadership, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need to target funding and resources to communities that have been historically underserved.

Unemployment, housing instability, inequitable access to health care, and food insecurity are all realities that have impacted communities of color and low-income populations the most, both nationally and in our community. The result is a compounding factor that worsens the health outlook for these vulnerable populations.

This is particularly important since in Howard County we still see inequitable outcomes related to race, geography and income.

- Over 400 Howard County residents died from heart disease in 2018<sup>i</sup>
  - African-Americans have the highest rates of heart disease and stroke<sup>ii</sup>
- 23.30% of adults in Howard County are overweight or obese<sup>iii</sup>
- African-Americans have 2 years lower life expectancy than Whites<sup>iv</sup>
- 47% of adults and 17% of teens do not regularly engage in Physical Activity<sup>v</sup>

The AHA supports the Council's efforts to address these health inequities through current and recent appropriations of CARES funds. These allocations have addressed critical social determinants of health through programs to support complete streets, investments for those living with disabilities, food access, youth development, diminish housing instability, support early education, and more. To strengthen these

needed community supports, we also ask the Council to consider funding additional programs, aimed at reducing health disparities including additional investments in food access.

We are pleased to see the Council taking such strong action to reduce the burdens of food insecurity and access to healthcare. The key dollars spent towards programs such as Neighborhood Ride and others will allow for those most effected by Covid-19 to be able to access health foods and healthcare. We encourage the Council to build upon previous efforts to expand food security programs throughout the County, particularly those targeted to immigrant, African-American, and Latinx communities. For example, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's largest nutrition assistance program and provides monthly cash benefits to reduce food insecurity and help those households rise out of poverty. SNAP incentives in the form of coupons or point-of-sale discounts can help people eat more fruits and vegetables and increase the quality of their diet. The AHA encourages the Council to consider increased appropriations for the Maryland Market Money program so more residents can use and expand SNAP benefits at farmers markets and other locations to buy fresh, locally grown produce.

Additionally, we encourage the Council to expand on existing initiatives to promote self-measured blood pressure monitoring (SMBP). Left undetected or uncontrolled, hypertension can lead to heart attack, stroke, heart failure, as well as other conditions that impact health and quality of life. Ensuring that residents with hypertension are not left behind during the ongoing pandemic, especially those that are low-income or medically underserved, requires targeted efforts to ensure patients can manage their underlying conditions at home. This is especially important for patients who are required to stay home during the pandemic. The Council has previously taken important steps to achieve these goals, and we encourage additional programmatic appropriations through COVID funding.

As evidenced through recent CARES-funded initiatives, Howard County has long been a leader in promoting health equity for all residents. We support and appreciate the Council's investments in healthcare access and food security programs, and we ask the Council to expand this important work and ensure that available COVID dollars are always allocated with health equity at the forefront, to ensure the county remains a healthy, livable, equitable community for all residents.

---

<sup>i</sup><https://www.livestories.com/statistics/maryland/howard-county-heart-disease-deaths-mortality>

<sup>ii</sup><https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS/Resources/Files/Reports/PopHealthReportFINAL.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup>[https://www.opendatanetwork.com/entity/0500000US24027/Howard\\_County\\_MD/health.health\\_behaviors.adult\\_obesity\\_value?year=2015](https://www.opendatanetwork.com/entity/0500000US24027/Howard_County_MD/health.health_behaviors.adult_obesity_value?year=2015)

<sup>iv</sup><https://health.maryland.gov/talbotcounty/Documents/2018%20Maryland%20Vital%20Statistics%20Annual%20Report.pdf>



HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL  
AFFIDAVIT OF AUTHORIZATION  
TO TESTIFY ON BEHALF OF AN ORGANIZATION

I, Laura Hale, have been duly authorized by  
(name of individual)

American Heart Association to deliver testimony to the  
(name of nonprofit organization or government board, commission, or task force)

County Council regarding CB3-2021 to express the organization's  
(bill or resolution number)

support for /  opposition to /  request to amend this legislation.  
(Please circle one.)

Printed Name: Laura Hale

Signature: L. Hale

Date: 1/5/21

Organization: American Heart Association

Organization Address: 217 E. Redwood St.  
Baltimore, MD 21202

Number of Members: 3,000

Name of Chair/President: Deepak Swri

***This form can be submitted electronically via email to [councilmail@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:councilmail@howardcountymd.gov) no later than 5pm the day of the Public Hearing or delivered in person the night of the Public Hearing before testifying.***