

African American Community Roundtable of Howard County  
5-18-2015

Dear Madame Chair and Council Members,

My name is Rev. Robert Turner and I am speaking tonight as both a resident, clergy person and 2<sup>nd</sup> vice chair of the African American Community Roundtable.

The Roundtable is an active coalition of over 20 social, civic, professional, religious, cultural and political groups working to improve the quality of life for African-Americans throughout Howard County. To fulfill our mission, we are focused on ensuring that families are connected to critical resources that ultimately empower residents and encourage social and economic well being.

One of our core areas of activity is to promote healthy living, and it is for that reason that I am here tonight to ask you to say yes to health by voting for Council Bill 17.

At its heart, CB17 is a bill that helps level the playing field by making healthy choices more available, affordable and noticeable. We know that chronic diseases are nearing crisis levels and they are rooted in unhealthy lifestyles, particularly poor nutrition. But rather than eliminate unhealthy options, this bill respects the individual's right to choose. At the same time it recognizes that government must play a leading role in promoting health.

African Americans in Howard County are almost three times more likely to visit hospital Emergency Departments for diabetes, and have the highest percent of adults who are obese compared to all other races/ ethnicities. African American individuals are also more likely to have high blood pressure and high cholesterol than most other races. Given these statistics, our organizations and their members are especially vulnerable to the unhealthy environment that we have allowed the beverage and junk food industries to create.

The health of African Americans can be improved through education, which we are doing in partnership with many others, and through the creation of a healthy environment in Howard County, which we are asking you to do.

Even more vulnerable than African American adults are African American children. The 50,000 children who visit Howard County parks and playgrounds and summer camps each year do not think in terms of the lifelong impact on their health. As parents, we hope our kids carry the valuable and important lessons we impart with us wherever they go. But as parents, we also want our community to reinforce these lessons. The Howard County Public School System has shown great leadership in improving the nutritional standards for food and drink served to children, and this bill would mirror those improvements.

What you have before you is a choice: You can continue with the status quo – the same status quo that has lead to the alarming reality that half of all African American children will develop diabetes in their lifetimes. Or you can reject the status quo and say yes to health.

The choice is yours.