

BLAIR

for COUNTY EXECUTIVE



ONE MONTGOMERY:
Building Fairness and Opportunity for All

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“Montgomery County is one of the best places in America to live. I was born and raised here. I have built a business here and raised a family. I feel blessed and just can’t think of living anywhere else.

Our County’s strengths have made us a magnet for hard-working and talented people who have come here from across America and across the world seeking a better life and more opportunity.

Among the nation’s jurisdictions, we are almost uniquely diverse – just less than 50 percent white and the balance nearly equally divided between Black, Latino, and Asian residents.

And that diversity is our strength – not a weakness.

Whatever our differences, we all want the same thing. A good job with good wages and a chance to move up or a business of our own. A decent home to live in, with safe streets and equal justice for all. A quality school system to enable our kids the best of chances to realize their full potential. A place to grow old with dignity.

Still, for all our promise and our prospects, not all have been able to share equally in building a brighter future for themselves and their families. And that’s just wrong.

If we are to move boldly into the future we must all move together. That’s not just the right thing to do. It’s the smart thing to do. We must be “One Montgomery.”

How can we be that One Montgomery when Black and Latino incomes are on average 60 percent of white incomes and those families are three times more likely to be living in poverty?

When nearly a third of Latinos of age do not even have a high school degree?

When 30 percent of Asians and 36 percent of Latinos struggle with the English language?

When infant mortality for Black women is 238 percent higher than for white women?

When the public school drop-out rate is 300 percent higher for Black youth and 657 percent higher for Latino youth?

When Black and Latino families are 50 percent more likely to pay more than 30 percent of their income in rent?

What the Washington Post calls our “exceptionally cautious” approach to the pandemic, compared to many of our neighbors in the region, hasn’t helped the matter.

However necessary to a point, school closures severely set back our children’s learning — especially for those kids in families with disadvantages.

Many Black and Latino and Asian-owned small businesses have been forced to close -- many permanently. That means dreams deferred and jobs lost.

And the pandemic has disproportionately affected those with already compromised health challenges, many of them Blacks and Latinos.

If there were problems before, the road back from the pandemic has left us with a truly steep climb.

It’s time for a change.

We need to build Montgomery back better than before.

Equity is at the core of my vision for progress. For years, I have been actively engaging community leaders throughout the county listening and learning more about we can make things more fair and more just.

When we give the same opportunity and support to all residents -- no matter their skin color, gender, income, where they come from or where in the county they reside — only then can we make sure all of Montgomery County can finally live up to its full potential.

We will need to think, lead, and act differently. That’s exactly what I will do as your next County Executive.

My vision starts here.”

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Blair". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "D" at the beginning.

David Blair

AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY.

We can achieve an equitable and inclusive community if we properly address systemic poverty and ensure our residents have access to jobs, with good wages – defined as an annual income of \$50,000 or more with benefits. Prior to the pandemic, Blacks, Latinos and individuals identifying as Other experienced significantly higher unemployment rates than Whites and Asians, according to the county’s 2019 Racial Equity Profile.¹ While Blacks, Latinos and those represented as Other accounted for a greater share of the county’s labor force than Whites and Asians, Blacks and Other groups were two times more likely to be unemployed.² Although Blacks represented 23.4% of the number of minority-owned firms in Maryland, they represented only 14.7% in Montgomery County in 2017.³ While Whites and Latinos represented 58.1% and 56.4% respectively of Small Business Development Center clients, a significantly lower number of Blacks, Others and Asians sought this support.⁴ Other, Black and Latino residents were about three times as likely to live in poverty compared to their White counterparts and about twice as likely as their Asian counterparts.⁵ These are figures that we cannot continue to ignore. The color of your skin can determine the opportunities available to you in Montgomery County even if discrimination was not intended.

A significant number of our residents speak a language other than English, with Spanish, Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese) and Amharic, Somali or other Afro-Asiatic the three most common.⁶ Nearly one-third of our residents were born outside the United States.⁷ Our cultural diversity has the potential to lead to economic growth and strengthen our county’s competitive position, yet today our assets are largely undervalued. As County Executive, I will effectively solicit input from a diverse set of stakeholders to devise an inclusive economic strategy, building from our vast global linkages and leveraging the skills of our entire population to help us think differently.



Develop a COVID Displaced Workers Job Program (Reskilling for Recovery) to eliminate involuntary unemployment caused by the COVID recession.

Montgomery County suffers from a shortage of good jobs.⁸ The jobs we lost during the Great Recession a decade ago were mostly replaced by lower paying ones, and we continue to lag the region in wage growth.⁹ While more people are returning to the workplace, COVID hit people of color and women the hardest. As County Executive, I will immediately engineer a community employment program called Reskilling for Recovery focused on inclusion that puts people back to work on public works projects and connects individuals to jobs in the private and nonprofit sectors. I will reach out to our private and nonprofit employers to identify employment opportunities and if need be, temporarily shift a greater percentage of our economic development funding to provide short-term employment for those displaced by the pandemic, putting them on a pathway to long-term, good-paying jobs.

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Expand opportunities for women, people of color and disabled business owners.

Businesses owned by women, people of color and disabled individuals are often shut out of loan programs, contracting opportunities and even prime real estate space. The City of Charlotte is connecting with more businesses owned by women, people of color and disabled individuals and helping them build capacity through a mix of technology improvements, outreach, training and with greater access. We should be pursuing similar initiatives.¹⁰ We need to reevaluate our procurement process, ensure that it is readily accessible and drive a greater share of local investment back to our community. In 2017, 23% of the county's contract dollars were awarded to minority, female and disabled (MFD) firms.¹¹ It has not changed. Not only does the goal need to be higher, but also someone should be asking: Why has the rate remained stagnant?

Build a vibrant, growing economy to provide equal access to opportunities.

We have more workers in low-paying jobs today than we had 15 years ago. Let's start now to conduct thorough assessments of our unemployed and underemployed, discover what talents and skills they possess, and then identify economic and job opportunities for the county to pursue. We need an economic plan tackling the legacy of race, like the cities of Atlanta¹² and New Orleans¹³ have, that acknowledges the historical struggles of Black and Brown communities plagued by high rates of poverty, low household income and persistent unemployment, and ensures our future leaves no one behind.

In 2018, I called for creating Small Business Coordinators to connect entrepreneurs and small business owners to services and support to save them time and provide value. I called for creating a virtual one-stop app to navigate compliance, so answers are at one's fingertips. I applauded the County Council back then for creating a microloan program for immigrant entrepreneurs and proposed expanding the program to help more MFD entrepreneurs – and these ideas are just the tip of the iceberg for what we should be doing to promote business development.



We can also inspire our global thinking and build our international economic presence by harnessing our population's combined talents and resources.

Establish Community Benefits Agreements.

We need to ensure that certain large-scale, high-impact development projects include Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) that define the local benefits the community will receive as part of the development project, such as contracting with businesses owned by women and people of color, hiring preferences, job training programs, living wage requirements, and affordable housing units, among others. Communities in the cities of Los Angeles, Denver, San Jose and Pittsburgh have benefited from CBAs and Montgomery County can too.¹⁴ As County Executive, I will establish clear, transparent guidelines for the use of CBAs to encourage investment by developers in low-income neighborhoods where they profit and hold them accountable for the commitments that they make to help our most vulnerable residents maintain basic services.

Ask the community and reboot.

A good leader must effectively communicate during an emergency. I have spent the past several years listening to community leaders across the county and trying to better understand the needs of our geographically diverse county. As County Executive, I will govern with a steady hand and actively engage community stakeholders to better understand what programs and policies demonstrate desired results and what needs changing. When we make a conscious effort to consult communities of color, we are better able to identify inequities and address them, with a better perspective. As County Executive, I will be a leader who collaborates.

Our county's political process must be represented by the people it serves. If we are to address issues now holding our economy back and limiting our potential to be a great place to live, work and raise a family, it requires that we ensure those at the table and charged with decision-making reflect our diversity. That is why I cofounded Rise and Run – a campaign training program supporting Black political leaders of tomorrow to secure elected positions in Montgomery County to better achieve an inclusive voice in our government.

Montgomery County still had not fully recovered all the jobs lost prior to the Great Recession when COVID hit.¹⁵ I sounded the warning sirens years ago and responded with a comprehensive Jobs and Economic Plan designed to build our future together. I believe that vision still has a place in our county today.



Now as I see more economic decline, my desire to make Montgomery County the Startup Capital of the East Coast, promote entrepreneurship, enhance our research and development and most of all invest more in our people is even more critical. It is why I sought collaboration with The Universities of Shady Grove (USG) to launch an Entrepreneurship Lab last year during the pandemic because we cannot afford to wait for jobs to come, we must create them. As County Executive, I will ensure our communities of color and women share in our economic prosperity.

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A SAFE COMMUNITY.

We can achieve an equitable and inclusive community if we ensure everyone is safe. Public safety is a core function of government and we owe it to residents to make them feel safe and secure. As County Executive, keeping the public safe will be a priority.

I support the General Assembly's police reform measures to increase oversight and accountability of misconduct by repealing the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights.¹⁶ Under this change, civilians will have greater oversight authority and inquiries into police misconduct will no longer be blocked. These reforms will help restore public confidence in police.

Montgomery County benefits from a low crime rate. Among 3 of the 4 offense categories (i.e., crimes against 1. person, 2. property, 3. society and 4. Group B offenses that are reported to the FBI), crime declined from 2018 to 2019.¹⁷ Additionally, crime declined overall during the same period.¹⁸ Property offenses — the only crime category that experienced an increase — increased by just 2.3% over the previous year.¹⁹



However, we cannot overlook the impact policing has on certain race groups. For example, Blacks represent just 18% of county residents but represent 32% of traffic stops, 44% of arrests and 55% of use of force cases, calling into question racial equity in our police department's policing.²⁰ Latino residents also suffer less favorable police outcomes compared to Whites and Asians. Racial inequities throughout our justice system harm communities of color, keeping them out of the labor force and preventing them from securing housing and public support for themselves and their families. There are areas within our police department that need to improve to disrupt patterns of bias so that we can examine options and make informed decisions. However, reform should not weaken our ability to protect the public.

Earlier this year, the current administration's Reimagining Public Safety Task Force issued a report²¹ that lays out a number of police reform recommendations – some good, some bad. While I appreciate the Task Force's work, I also believe that all voices should be heard. This will provide us the confidence to ensure recommended actions will not diminish our ability to prevent crime.

As County Executive, I will:

- Challenge and reevaluate police contracts to ensure officers do not receive excessive protections from discipline for illegal and unethical behavior. We must improve accountability in policing if we are going to improve public trust in police;
- Direct 911 callers to crisis resolution teams, with representation from mental health and emergency medicine;
- Ensure language access to non-English callers to Emergency Call Centers, improving accuracy and efficiency;
- Provide a dedicated team of sworn officers to assist with traffic stops rather than rely on a fully automated traffic enforcement system to reduce violent police encounters;
- Call on state lawmakers to further decriminalize marijuana drug crimes, and advocate that they legalize the sale and use of recreational marijuana for adults;
- Increase community-based interventions focused on prevention, including in schools;
- Enhance law enforcement training across-the-board, and specifically, implicit bias training and cultural competency training to improve public encounters with civilians and the organizational culture;
- Collect more meaningful data that could be part of an ongoing assessment to develop a better understanding of racial and social disparities within law enforcement culture;
- Raise awareness about the dangers of domestic violence and its warning signs;
- Incentivize officers to pursue higher education;
- Expand youth programming through the Police Athletic League; and
- Enhance recruitment opportunities to increase diversity.

We can achieve an equitable and inclusive community if we ensure everyone is safe.

AN INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM.

We can achieve an equitable and inclusive community if children have sufficient support to succeed in school. Although it is noteworthy that the School Board launched the Equity Accountability Dashboard to reduce educational disparities among MCPS student groups, the resources needed now, after a year of school closure and virtual education, are likely greater and the achievement gap is likely even wider, particularly for students of color.

As County Executive, I will use my budgetary authority to:

- Increase investment in MCPS and continue to target our resources to further enhance student achievement, particularly to those most disadvantaged;
- Pay our school employees more to serve our highest need schools and work to eliminate the teacher quality gap that exists; and
- Ensure we are directing capital investment toward schools with the greatest needs and largest student populations and continue to reduce our reliance on relocatable classrooms for student instruction.



In 2019, the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) determined the county made little progress on closing the achievement gap, despite the superintendent calling it a crisis in 2017.²² It specifically concluded that, “wide performance gaps by race and ethnicity existed across each measure it reviewed.”²³ A subsequent study conducted in 2020 by the Council for Advocacy and Policy Solutions (CAPS), a nonprofit think tank that I founded, determined that schools in our lowest income communities and communities of color are where student educational performance is worst.²⁴ The 2019 Early Care and Education Initiative championed by then Council President Navarro and widely supported by the County Council was a significant achievement to expand educational opportunities for our youngest residents. Now we need to work together to do even more to help close the achievement gap.

Although MCPS distributes more funding to its highest need schools, the reality is that the funding is not enough to show improvement. This is why I was a vocal advocate for the state to adopt the Kirwan Commission's educational reform plan (known as the Blueprint for Maryland's Future) to increase state funding in our schools.²⁵ Yet its passage is only the first step. Now we must ensure those new funds are appropriately invested to create a world-class education system and to ensure all students have access to a quality education.

As County Executive, I will also fight to:

- Expand Pre-K. We are one of the richest counties in the nation. If Washington, DC can offer universal pre-K, so can we.
- Ensure all students graduate with the education and skills to succeed in college or pursue a career.

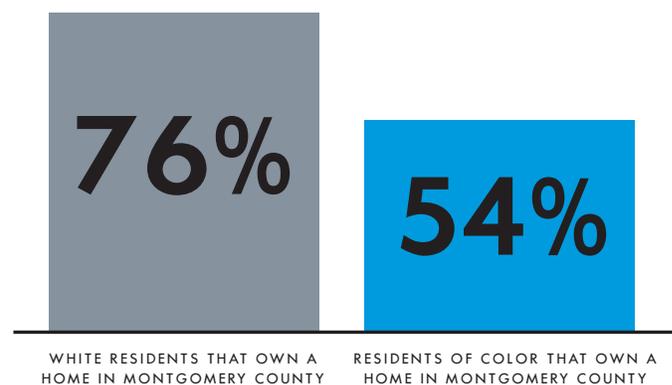
I have been a supporter of the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence and will continue to support their mission if elected.

ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

We can achieve an equitable and inclusive community if we provide affordable housing and opportunities for homeownership to our residents. Exclusionary zoning and discriminatory lending policies, like red lining, set housing policy in the past and determined how our county was defined. By including communities of color in the policymaking process, we can begin to erase the geographic lines that separated our population and held many of our residents back.

Last year, home prices increased by 14%, with the median home in the county selling for \$500,000.²⁶ Home prices are forecasted to continue their climb well into 2022 and possibly beyond, fueled in part by limited inventory. Data from 2018 on homeownership shows that 76% of White residents own homes compared to 54% households of color.²⁷ According to the county's 2019 Racial Equity Profile, a greater share of income of Black and Brown residents goes toward housing than other race and ethnic groups.²⁸

2018 County Data on Homeownership



With the population expected to grow and increasingly diversify, we need to urgently address the lack of affordable housing. Part of the solution will result in revising outdated zoning laws to allow for more housing options tailored to both smaller units and multi-generational dwellings. It will also mean incentivizing development around Metro stations along the Red Line and eventually the Purple Line, and along bus rapid transit (BRT) corridors. This will allow us to set new housing permitting goals and to study the merits of housing co-ops that join people together to collectively own and manage their homes, like the one in Greenbelt, Maryland, which is one of the nation's oldest and largest housing cooperatives.²⁹ Without sufficient available land for development, we will need to reexamine policies that hamper redevelopment and reuse of underdeveloped land and determine if their utility is still indeed valid in today's Montgomery County.



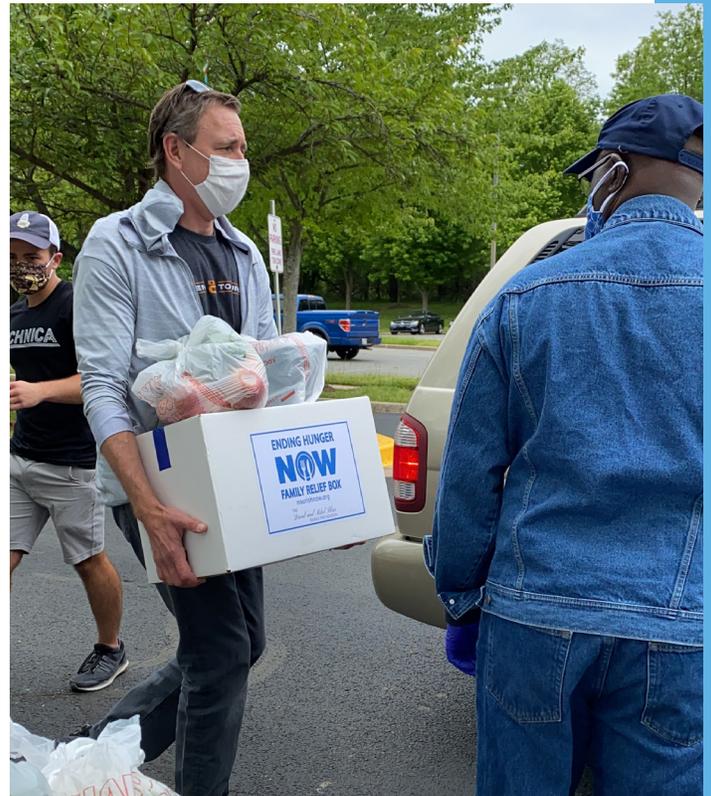
ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE.

We can achieve an equitable and inclusive community if we acknowledge and address the inequities in health care that have persisted in our county for decades. The COVID pandemic only made these disparities more visible, but they have always been there. Vaccine distribution underscores everything wrong with our health care delivery system, assuming people would have access based on vaccine availability alone. Yet county leaders ignored the reality that not all residents have digital access and the first-come-first-serve online appointment process meant those without technology would also wait longer for a vaccine. The process also ignored the reality that not everyone can afford a car or has access to transportation to easily access vaccination sites. Despite months of data about the prevalence of COVID among people of color and high rates of illness and death among Black and Brown residents, the county's response to vaccine distribution failed to prioritize this population and failed to devise a plan to adequately address vaccine hesitancy.

Prior to COVID, health disparities plagued the county. Heart disease, diabetes and HIV, in addition to other health outcomes are examples where Blacks fare worse than other demographic groups.³⁰ Black women also experience higher rates than Whites of maternal and infant mortality.³¹ An interesting realization from the 2019 county health disparities report is that health interventions should be devised around access to services and targeted to the population most affected. In 2018, I proposed making Ride On buses free and they should be, but at a minimum we should offer all residents free Ride On service to get to doctor's appointments. Additionally in 2018, I proposed establishing a Home Visitation Program to connect families to social services available within the community modeled from a successful program in Durham, North Carolina called Durham Connects.

Beyond this, we need to continually strengthen the community at-large so that our status as the healthiest community in Maryland applies to all groups of residents, not a select few. We need to increase opportunities to provide culturally competent health care, particularly around preventative care and ensure no group is shut out. We also need to empower our nonprofit organizations and clinics as partners in creating a healthier community where healthy food is plentiful and easily available and where walking, biking and other healthy behaviors are encouraged. In a wealthy suburb like ours, access to health care should be universal.

Throughout the pandemic, I have partnered with organizations to address food insecurity in the county, distributing food to what at times seemed like a never-ending parade of residents. We need a long-term solution to help residents who are food insecure and should look to our restaurants, farmers, local food producers and grocery stores to play a greater role and lean more heavily on our state and federal partners to help finance our efforts.



The COVID pandemic only made the inequities in health care more visible, but they have always been there.

A UNIFIED COMMUNITY.

I grew up in Darnestown and drove past the Pleasant View Church and schoolhouse in Quince Orchard countless times, never realizing its significance. The site memorializes our deep history as a segregated county and reveals the courage and conviction of a united Black community. As I have learned more about these historical landmarks and more about the families connected to them, my wife and I have joined their efforts to help restore the church and schoolhouse so that our history is preserved for future generations. When we pursue progress from a perspective of honest accountability, we open doors to the future and build a unified sense of community that we all desire. No one in Montgomery County should feel like they live in the shadows ever again.

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CONCLUSION

There is an abundance of data indicating Montgomery County is not inclusive. However, recognizing these issues is not enough, we now need to devise immediate, pragmatic solutions to address these inequities. There can be no greater urgency. As County Executive, I will work to achieve real results, with meaningful action. I will be a County Executive who listens to the people around him. I have successfully practiced collaboration and empowerment for decades and will use these skills to move our county forward and to recover the right way, the most equitable way. It starts here.

- ¹ Racial Equity Profile Montgomery County, Office of Legislative Oversight (Jupiter Independent Research Group), Report 2019-7, June 20, 2019, https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/OLO2019-7-6_20_19.pdf
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- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2018 Estimates
- ⁷ Ibid.
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- ⁹ U.S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006-2019
- ¹⁰ How Charlotte, N.C., is Expanding Opportunities for Minority Businesses, *Governing*, October 9, 2018, <https://www.governing.com/cityaccelerator/blog/Charlotte-procurement-post-lc.html>
- ¹¹ Office of Procurement, Montgomery County, <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/countystat/pro.html>
- ¹² ONE ATL, Economic Mobility, Recovery & Resiliency Plan, <https://www.investatlanta.com/economicmobility>
- ¹³ EQUITYNEWORLEANS, The Road to Equitable Government, <https://www.nola.gov/mayor/news/archive/2017/042017-pr-may-or-landrieu-announces-new-orleans'-f/>
- ¹⁴ National Examples of Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs), http://somervillecdc.org/sites/default/files/scc-minimal/files/national_examples_of_community_benefits_agreements_cbas.pdf
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- ¹⁷ 2019 Annual Report On Crime & Safety, Montgomery County Department of Police, [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/pol/Resources/Files/annual-reports/CrimeandSafety/2019%20MCPD%20Annual%20Report%20on%20Crime%20and%20Safety_FINAL%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/pol/Resources/Files/annual-reports/CrimeandSafety/2019%20MCPD%20Annual%20Report%20on%20Crime%20and%20Safety_FINAL%20(1).pdf)
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ 2021 Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Report Recommendations, Reimagining Public Safety Task Force, <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/rps/Resources/Files/reports/rps-task-force-recommendations-report.pdf>
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² MCPS Performance and Opportunity Gaps, Office of Legislative Oversight, December 3, 2019, <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/OLORReport2019-14.pdf>
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- ²⁴ Mapping Inequities in MCPS High Schools, Council for Advocacy and Policy, May 19, 2020, <https://capsmd.org/issues/education/facts/mapping-inequities-in-mcps-high-schools>
- ²⁵ “Business Leaders Urge Funding Adoption of Kirwan Commission Reforms,” *Maryland Matters*, December 11, 2019, <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2019/12/11/business-leaders-urge-funding-adoption-of-kirwan-commission-reforms/>
- ²⁶ “Montgomery County median home price hits a half-million dollars,” *WTOP*, November 23, 2020, <https://wtop.com/business-finance/2020/11/montgomery-county-median-home-price-hits-a-half-million-dollars/>
- ²⁷ 2018 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau
- ²⁸ Racial Equity Profile Montgomery County, Office of Legislative Oversight (Jupiter Independent Research Group), Report 2019-7, June 20, 2019, https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/OLO2019-7-6_20_19.pdf
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