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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 17, 2023**

**Jackson County Executive requests funding approval to expand community-based preventative health services program**

\$5 million investment proposal will broaden reach to "Our Healthy Jackson County"

**KANSAS CITY, Mo.** – As Black Maternal Health Week 2023 comes to an end, Jackson County Executive Frank White, Jr. is requesting that the County Legislature approve funding to expand prevention programming in a county initiative which would include addressing maternal and child health. County Executive White is proposing the use of \$5 million to expand "Our Healthy Kansas City Eastside," a community-based initiative to promote equity and access to preventative health care services. The Jackson County Legislature will consider the proposal, Ordinance 5718, at its meeting today at the downtown courthouse at 3 p.m.

"We are building community and saving lives with this unique program," said **Jackson County Executive Frank White, Jr.** "I am extremely proud of its success but we have so much more work to do to give everyone – from our precious babies to our respected seniors – a fighting chance at a healthy, prosperous life. Our next phase of work will focus on some of the most prevalent chronic diseases and devastating health disparities affecting Jackson County. With the support of our Legislature and the continued leadership of our partners, advocates and volunteers, I am confident we can expand our reach and make an impact that will last a lifetime."

"Infant mortality is a public health crisis in some of our neighborhoods," said **Traci Johnson, M.D., UMKC School of Medicine Assistant Professor and infant mortality disparities researcher.** "We know that infant mortality issues are maternal health issues. Improving

maternal health will directly result in fewer preterm births, which is the lion's share of what causes infant mortality."

If approved, funding for expanded programming would allow coordinators and community partners to continue their work to reduce the burden of COVID-19 in our most socially vulnerable neighborhoods, while providing new preventative health services related to infant mortality, diabetes and heart disease prevention, and cancer screenings.

According to Jannette Berkley-Patton, Ph.D., director of the UMKC Health Equity Institute, the leading causes of death in the state of Missouri are heart disease, cancer and COVID-19, and underserved populations are experiencing a greater burden of these health conditions. This is particularly the case among Jackson County residents who are African American, Latino or live in under-resourced areas. Preventative action, such as health screenings and healthy lifestyle changes, have been proven to drastically reduce the risk of chronic diseases and improve overall health.

Early prevention can also reduce infant mortality cases. "Infant mortality is the death of a child up to one year of life," said **Dr. Johnson**. "Some neighborhoods in Jackson County suffer infant mortality rates that are three times the national rate."

"The success of Our Healthy Kansas City Eastside is evidence that working collaboratively with community and health partners can greatly increase the reach of health care in the most underserved neighborhoods and have a positive impact on our entire community," said **Dr. Berkley-Patton, Our Healthy Jackson County Team Lead**. "Our data indicates that many people living in these communities have poor health, are living with chronic diseases and have not seen a doctor lately. We would embrace the opportunity to expand the program to offer critical health services at our community-clinics in trusted, accessible settings in Jackson County."

The program began in 2021 during the coronavirus pandemic in an effort to address health inequities and access to vaccinations. Under the leadership of Berkley-Patton, more than 60 neighborhood associations, businesses, youth organizations and faith organizations mobilized to offer free health services by meeting people where they live, work, play and worship. With an initial investment of \$5 million, the program administered nearly 13,000 COVID-19 vaccinations and provided more than 4,100 health services, including blood pressure checks, blood glucose screening, mental health screenings, dental assessments and STI testing in six months.

Research collected from residents during 123 community clinic events and community forums laid the groundwork for the proposed expanded health services programming. As a result, the program is being rebranded to ["Our Healthy Jackson County."](#)

"The beauty of Our Healthy Jackson County is that it uses the strengths of more than 60 organizations and over 150 community health liaisons to affect the health of our residents," said **Calvary Temple Baptist Church Rev. Eric Williams**, faith sector lead for Our Healthy Jackson County and executive director of Calvary Community Outreach Network. "Never before have I seen this type of cross-sector collaboration. We are deeply committed to this work!"

A presentation previously given before the Legislature is attached and supporting testimony by Dr. Berkley-Patton, Dr. Johnson, Daniel Smith and Minister Gregg Wilson can be heard here: <https://tinyurl.com/2p8nc44u>.

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