



**Testimony to the Montgomery County Council
Submitted by Manna Food Center
April 7, 2021**

Good evening, my name is Lorna Forde, and I am the Chair of Manna Food Center's Advocacy Task Force. Manna's vision is a community where all people, at all times—even during a pandemic—have access to good food in welcoming spaces. President Hucker, I want to thank you and all the members of the Council for being such important champions of food security, especially in these particularly challenging times.

With the County's support, the leadership of the COVID-19 Food Security Task Force, and through the generosity of donors, Manna has been able to stay safe and keep serving. We have been responding to a 40% increase in demand for our food services since the pandemic began. We have never had to turn someone away for lack of food, which is a testament to our team and to the leveraging of our existing infrastructure as the county's designated food bank.

Another hat I wear in the community is as a member of Montgomery County Alumnae Chapter, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. My chapter made a significant donation during the pandemic, which – in concert with local African American churches – helped to ensure that “stay put packs” of healthy foods reached some of our most vulnerable neighbors once the stay at home orders began. The ingenuity of the Manna team to create a unique offering during a crisis, and the spirit of collaboration among faith groups and civic organizations, is the epitome of the best of Manna Food Center and the community that surrounds it. County support makes these types of connections possible.

I am also proud that--alongside donors, volunteers, and county partners--Manna has been able to:

- Scale up service delivery for existing participants while also welcoming 7,427 new households into our Food for Families program.
- Transform our school-based program in partnership with MCPS to combat childhood hunger through Smart Sacks and support learning through our virtual classes and videos.
- Deepen and create partnerships with multi-cultural organizations to deploy promotoras and other trusted messengers in immigrant communities to make sure we reached priority zip codes where COVID-19 was hitting the hardest.

- Re-engineer our Community Food Rescue program to allow first for contact-less home deliveries for some of our most vulnerable residents, including, seniors and currently to allow for the expansion of our Food to Food Bank program.
- Purchase food in bulk for small and emerging organizations, including five of the consolidated services hubs, to make sure that the resources available reached those ready and able to help locations across the County.

As an active member of the Montgomery County Food Council, we urge the County Council to maintain the significant progress and momentum of the County's COVID-19 Food Security Response Strategy by allocating sufficient funding to the many critical food system-related organizations in Montgomery County. We recommend support for the staffing and operations of the Montgomery County Food Council especially.

Recognizing that transportation is a critical issue facing those we serve, we applaud the Council's recent efforts in extending free fares for Ride On through the summer. We stand with the Montgomery Better Buses coalition in urging you to maintain Ride On's funding, keep fares free, and support the plan to reimagine and redesign bus routes in Montgomery County, including implementation of the Bus Rapid Transit system.

As an active member of Nonprofit Montgomery, and as a leader in the sector, we urge that the Council:

- Maintain the recommended 1.5% increase for nonprofit contracts with the Department of Health and Human Services that is recommended in the County Executive's budget.
- Add an additional 1.5% increase to nonprofit contracts in DHHS for a total increase of 3%, and in recognition of variety of ways nonprofits support the quality of life beyond safety net services,
- Provide a 3% increase for nonprofit base budget contracts in all other County Departments

Previous investments like these have translated into the tremendous level of service that Manna and others were able to maintain and expand this past year. Continued support is needed in order to ensure that the high-quality, responsive, equitable services Manna provides can continue. All of us in Montgomery County face an uncertain future. After almost 40 years of service, Manna knows that a slow recovery is likely for the most marginalized neighbors among us. We also know that with the county's financial support and a spirit of partnership, we can make sure there is Food for All.

Thank you.