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Dear County Council,

Thank you for your time the time to share with you about supporting a vibrant nonprofit sector in Montgomery County.

I serve as ED of Community FarmShare, - we are a Montgomery County nonprofit focused on local food systems resiliency and healthy food access by providing weekly fresh produce bags directly to families experiencing food insecurity which we purchase the produce from our local farm partners.

This year we will provide local fresh produce bags to approx. 625 residents **each week**, which means about 35,000 lb of fresh LOCAL produce to families in need. From a health perspective – we provide the much needed fresh produce that is in high demand, and the weekly bags mean that people know where their next meal is coming from. This also means that we are investing over \$100,000 this year directly into our local small scale produce farms in Montgomery County, building up their capacity to grow more and expand operations and also bringing new farmers into the program since this model provides a good market and opportunity for farmers to sell to. In this way, Community FarmShare’s work is key to addressing two key issues in our county – nutritious food access and food equity – and – building up a resilient local food system, that not only benefits families experiencing food insecurity, but ALL eaters. Living out in the Agricultural Reserve in Poolesville, it is absolutely clear to me that our county has incredible potential to grow more food for human consumption – and it’s the best produce in the county – grown for taste and nutrient value – not simply an ability to travel thousands of miles and sit on a shelf.

This year, we are partnering with school programs – Linkages to Learning and Community Schools – to provide farm produce to families in need in key identified MCPS schools that have both the most need and which also have the least current programs serving these communities.

Secondly, we are partnering on a pilot program this year with Mercy Health Clinic in Germantown, and hopefully with more Safety Net Clinics going forward. This partnership, together with the Primary Care Coalition, will establish a Food is Medicine Program at the clinic and will provide weekly fresh produce bags from local farms to people screened for food insecurity and diagnosed with uncontrolled diabetes.

This work fits hand in glove with existing County objectives and goals. This program achieves many of the Recommendations in the 5 year Food Security Plan, as well as the Climate Action Plan which states: “Sustainably farmed, local food has the co-benefits of sequestering carbon through the use of regenerative agriculture practices, reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with transporting agricultural products over long distances, and building greater self-sufficiency in the face of supply chain disruptions associated with climate change”.

My hope with this testimony today is that budget funds can be allocated to healthy food access programs associated with Linkages to Learning and Community Schools, as well as to the Primary Care Coalition and Community Health Safety Net Clinics dedicated to starting and expanding Food Is Medicine Programs that purchase fresh produce from our local Montgomery County produce farmers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you,

Jennifer Freeman

Executive Director, Community FarmShare