



Silver Spring Christian Reformed Church  
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November 20, 2023

Montgomery County Council  
Stella Warner Council Office Building  
100 Maryland Ave.  
Rockville, MD 20850

**Public Testimony - Special Appropriation #24-37 to the FY24 Operating Budget**

Dear Montgomery County Council,

I am the Director of the Food Pantry at Silver Spring Christian Reformed Church, located on Arcola Avenue in the Kemp Mill neighborhood. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of Special Appropriation #24-37 to fund the continuation of food insecurity initiatives.

The Food Pantry at Silver Spring Christian Reformed Church is one of the community organizations that increased capacity to serve households with food insecurity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been able to continue serving many more households than we could before the pandemic in part because of the County's continued support.

In this testimony, I want to draw your attention to two benefits of County support. The first is the stated purpose of this bill - to address food insecurity. The second is more difficult to measure, but is nonetheless a tangible benefit - increase volunteerism and the opportunity for community building.

**Increased Capacity to Address Food Insecurity**

Prior to the pandemic, our pantry served 75-100 households per month at one choice-based food distribution. In April 2020, we opened the pantry weekly and were soon serving an average of 700 households *per week*. Due to generous support from Montgomery County, we were able to continue that level of service for 18 months. In September 2021, we reduced service to twice a month in response to changes in funding and volunteer availability, but the number of households coming continued to average about 700 households per distribution.

This spring, in anticipation of another reduction in resources and in order to reopen a choice pantry option, we shifted our operations again. We now operate two types of pantries. The first is a large community distribution that offers pre-packed food on a first-come basis once a month. The second is a referral-only pantry that offers participants a chance to choose their preferred foods once a month. We are still serving about 700 households at the community distribution and we have about 60 households coming to the referral pantry.

*In other words, we are still serving at least 10 times as many households per month now as we were prior to the pandemic.*

These increased operations require significant volunteer and food resources. We order and pack about 7,400 pounds of shelf stable food items for a community distribution, mostly supported through County funds. We also received 320 boxes of free pre-packed produce through County support. We use private donations to purchase and pack another 400 bags of produce.

*This level of support is not something that we could replace with private funds. Without continued support from the County, we would have to dramatically decrease our level of service.*

### **Increased Volunteerism and Community Building**

Another tangible benefit of this bill is continued support for volunteerism and community building.

Our pantry has a roster of over 100 volunteers and engages volunteers from a wide range of the community. If you were to come on a given day, you would meet an intergenerational group of volunteers from a range of linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. You might meet middle school students from St. Andrew Apostle Catholic School or high school students from Northwood High Schools' National Honor Society. You might meet a family serving with their young children or a girl scout troop. You would meet people who attend one of the synagogues in the neighborhood, and you would meet friends who found the pantry because they saw the lines and wanted to help. You would meet people who are setting up for the pantry while they wait for their food, and you might meet someone who completed community service hours and then decided to keep volunteering for years afterward.

In summary, not only does the proposed special appropriation directly address the needs of households that are experiencing food insecurity, it is also building a community of people who care and are working together. Thank you again for all the support you have already shown, and I urge you to support this Special Appropriation.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Renkema, MSW  
Food Pantry Director