



November 28, 2023

**2023 County Council SUPPORT TESTIMONY
Special Appropriation #24-37**

POSITION: Testimony in Support of Special Appropriation #24-37
DESCRIPTION: Special Appropriation #24-37 to the FY24 Operating Budget Montgomery County Government, Office of Food Systems Resilience and Department of Health and Human Services Food Security Initiative, \$11,060,000 (Source of Funds: General Fund Undesignated Reserves) and Amendment to FY24 Operating Budget Resolution 20-184, Section G, Fiscal Year 2024 Designation of Entities for Non-Competitive Contract Award Status: Capital Area Food Bank, Inc.

Dear Council President Glass, Council Vice President Friedson, and the members of the Montgomery County Council,

The Montgomery County Food Council (Food Council) urges you to **SUPPORT** Special Appropriation #24-37 to increase funding for food system initiatives and programs throughout the County. This funding is needed to support key initiatives currently in place and pilot new investments that will strategically improve our local food system. It is vital that the funds are appropriated as soon as possible, not only to support continued direct food purchasing, but also to implement innovative pilot programs that will support long-term systemic change within our food system.

Evidence shows that Montgomery County residents continue to experience high levels of food insecurity. In September, the Food Council hosted three listening sessions that were attended by fifty food assistance providers and other community organizations. Providers consistently reported that the number of residents seeking services remains high—either matching what they were seeing during the height of the COVID crisis or at even higher levels—due to the high cost of living in Montgomery County (specifically rent, food, and gas), nationwide inflation, and decreases in federal nutrition program benefits. As a result, providers expressed that they are **unable to meet the food assistance needs of their communities**. Some providers are running out of food during distributions and are having to turn residents away. Some are changing their programs to stretch resources, such as by reducing the amount of food provided to each household during a distribution, not taking on



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new clients, or switching from drive through distributions to an appointment system. Clients are also having to wait longer to receive services such as food/meal delivery, which is needed by seniors, residents with young children, and those without transportation.

The recent Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger highlights the particular impact of food insecurity on Montgomery County children. According to Feeding America, at least 33,840, or 14%, of children in Montgomery County are food insecure. In addition, due to the high cost of living in Montgomery County as illustrated in the newly-released Self Sufficiency Standard, an additional 76,000 children live in households without sufficient income to meet their basic needs, but earn too much to qualify for SNAP benefits and/or free school lunch. The recently-released Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger (the End Childhood Hunger Plan) identified four major barriers to gaining access to food: high cost of living, difficulty navigating nutrition benefit application processes, not knowing where to ask for help, and lack of access to transportation.

The Special Appropriation is specifically tailored to address immediate needs and innovative plans for long-term solutions.: This funding serves two strategic purposes: direct food purchasing to meet an immediate need, and testing innovative solutions to become more targeted in our future investments. The End Childhood Hunger Plan engaged over 1,300 residents and 150 community stakeholders to investigate hunger in our County and recommend specific ideas and solutions. Piloting initiatives identified in the Plan, such as Food is Medicine programs, Retail Access initiatives, and improved Federal nutrition benefit navigation support allows the County and stakeholders to test which strategies are most effective for County investment in future years. This proactive approach ensures that future investments are strategically directed towards programs aligned with the long-term goal of enhancing the food system for all residents.

For these reasons, the Montgomery County Food Council supports Special Appropriations #24-37.

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources

For more information, please contact Massa Cressall, Interim Executive Director, at the email and phone number below.



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