

Subject: Urgent: Maintain Full Funding for the Food Voucher Program

Dear Members of the County Council,

My name is Agar Mbianda, and I have been a resident of Montgomery County, Silver Spring, for seven years. I am writing to urge you to, at a minimum, maintain your funding for the food voucher program through the Office of Food System Resilience.

As you are aware, food insecurity remains a persistent and critical issue in Montgomery County, affecting thousands of residents, including immigrant families, seniors, and individuals living on fixed or low incomes. Many of these residents rely on food assistance programs to meet their most basic needs, and, crucially, to access culturally appropriate food—foods that align with their traditions, religious beliefs, and dietary practices. The food voucher program is not just a safety net; it is a lifeline that allows families to purchase items that are familiar, nourishing, and meaningful to them while simultaneously supporting local grocery stores and small businesses.

The impact of this program is clear. Manna Food Center serves approximately 800 households per month with a redemption rate of 98%. This high utilization rate reflects the community's deep reliance on the program. Furthermore, results from recent listening sessions show that 98% of recipients are satisfied with the program's effectiveness. However, the same percentage expressed a need for increased voucher value, highlighting the rising cost of food and the ongoing struggle to afford essential groceries.

Without continued funding, many immigrant residents—particularly low-income households, seniors, and working families struggling with the rising cost of living—will face increased hardship. The challenges of economic uncertainty, inflation, and high housing costs make it even more essential for the County to uphold this program. Food insecurity is about more than hunger; it is about dignity, choice, and cultural identity. This program ensures that residents are not forced to compromise on their beliefs or nutritional needs due to financial constraints.

Reducing or eliminating funding for this initiative would have devastating consequences, forcing families to make impossible trade-offs between rent, utilities, medical expenses, and food. The ability to access nutritious, culturally familiar foods is fundamental to well-being and community cohesion. As someone who has witnessed firsthand the impact of this program in my community, I urge you to prioritize and maintain full funding to ensure that all residents—regardless of background or income—can access the food they need to thrive.

Montgomery County has long been a leader in fostering diversity and inclusion. Preserving the food voucher program is a tangible way to demonstrate that commitment. I appreciate your time and dedication to ensuring that all community members have equitable access to essential resources.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to your support in safeguarding this crucial program.

Sincerely,
Agar Mbianda