

Good afternoon, Councilmembers. I appreciate this opportunity to address you today regarding a pressing issue that affects countless families within our community: food insecurity.

In the face of recent cuts to federal food assistance programs, rising unemployment, and increasing fear around seeking support, Manna Food Center stands as a beacon of hope for Montgomery County residents. We are proud to support our community through various initiatives, including:

- Providing weekend food support, monthly choice pantries, or grocery gift cards to 91 Montgomery County Public Schools sites, directly benefiting students and their families.
- Delivering fresh vegetables, eggs, meat, and pantry staples monthly—many of these items are brought straight to families' doors or made accessible through Lyft rides.
- Increasing access to culturally specific foods by partnering with 12 local businesses, that redeem monthly grocery vouchers.
- Hosting bi-monthly pop-up distribution events that not only provide fresh produce but also connect individuals to essential wrap-around services.
- Supplementing our food assistance peers through Community Food Rescue and Farm to Food Bank by distributing county-grown or recovered food.
- Helping dozens of households each month navigate the complexities of applying for federal nutrition benefits to which they are entitled.

The County Executive's recommended budget allows Manna to continue these vital services, supporting roughly 10,000 individuals per month. While we are deeply grateful for this support, I must emphasize that it is simply not enough.

The situation we are facing today calls for a more significant financial commitment—one that empowers food providers to respond swiftly and comprehensively to the ever-growing need. You, the Council, have the opportunity to take a stand.

- Amid mounting immigration concerns, you can ensure that food assistance remains accessible and safe for all families.



- In light of federal layoffs, you can allow us to remain agile, responding to needs in a way that maintains dignity and provides options for how assistance is received.

- As food costs continue to rise, you can support our efforts to expand partnerships with local farmers, offering health-promoting food that strengthens our local food system and enhances its resilience in times of crisis.

The need for support is urgent. If you called Manna today, you would face a daunting six-week wait for an appointment at our White Oak market, which is already staffed five days a week.

Therefore, I implore you to consider the impact of your budget decisions on the lives of our residents. Let us work together to guarantee that no family goes hungry. Together, we can make a lasting difference in our community. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to food security for all.

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