

Good afternoon, Council President Kate Stewart and Council Members. My name is Debra Munk and I am Chair of the Board of Directors of InterFaith Works. I think we can agree that everyone in Montgomery County should have access to their basic needs. IW's mission is to provide vital services and a path to greater stability. We supply emergency shelter, supportive housing, employment programs, and essential needs (including clothing, food, and utility and rent assistance). We serve over 35,000 Montgomery County residents each year. As we assist our most vulnerable neighbors, we are finding that more are struggling to meet these needs amid rising costs and shrinking resources. Our vital support systems are stretched thin, a situation that will worsen without coordinated investment and a strong partnership between the nonprofit and government sectors.

InterFaith Works is not alone in this endeavor. Other County nonprofit organizations are also rising to meet this moment – each expanding its capacity to serve this growing demand for necessary resources.

IW is deeply grateful to County Council President Stewart and the Council for advancing this \$7.75 million FY26 Supplemental Appropriation to support the nonprofit sector. This investment demonstrates that you “get” the situation and value and support the work of the organizations working on the front lines of food insecurity and other critical needs. Thank you.

Additionally, we are particularly thrilled about the focus on capacity-building. Strong infrastructure is essential for nonprofits to effectively meet community needs now and in the future. This investment will help us build the organizational foundations necessary to sustain and expand our work.

We look forward to learning more about how the funds allocated to the Office of Food System Resilience will support food security for our neighbors, especially as demand continues to grow. We all have had to face the stark reality of an almost 30% rise in food prices over the past five years. A survey this summer by the Associated Press and the National Opinion Resource Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago found the cost of groceries has become a major source of stress for just over half of all Americans — outpacing rent, health care and student debt. For our County's most vulnerable residents, these elevated food prices have exacerbated their already challenging situations. This additional investment from the Council would enable IW to distribute an additional 130,000 pounds of food, including expanded distribution to six high-need sites across the county.

We recognize that our county is not flush with money, particularly with the impact of Federal Government layoffs. Thus, we are even more grateful that you have placed a high priority on the basic needs of our residents. It is our great hope that your advancement of the \$7.75 million FY26 Supplemental Appropriation to support the nonprofit sector will become a reality as you vote today. The need is great...and the time is now.