

Testimony Montgomery County Council
John F. Ross
11/19/25

Thank you, President Stewart.

I'm here to thank you for your prompt action to support emergency supplemental funding for Montgomery County food insecurity organizations in these trying times.

I run Nourishing Bethesda, a food pantry that serves currently more than 8,000 people a month.

The impact from the federal shutdown hit us like a tidal wave, our numbers of new clients jumping more than 20 percent in five weeks. We're up 244 percent in the number of new monthly households from one year ago.

We're breaking our records—and believe me, these are records we're not looking to break—last week we served more than 1,100 children. A record. Last week we served 2,356 individuals. A record.

Long lines. Long faces. Hard times.

These clients are not numbers to us. They are our friends and neighbors, your friends and neighbors; nurses at Walter Reed Medical Center who had to work during the shutdown without pay. It's the NIH scientist who can't put food on his table. It's the restaurant worker whose hours are cut because fewer people are going out to dinner and tips are slight.

We here in Montgomery County are right in the midst of a perfect storm: it's not only the shutdown, but the layoffs, and the economic disruption trickling down to the hourly wage workers who are one paycheck away from disaster. Stubbornly high food and housing costs. Uncertainty about SNAP benefits and Medicare. This is not going away just because the federal government opened again. We are anxious about State reductions due to its growing deficit.

In all of this hardship, I'm pleased to report that a bright and strong fire has been lit: our tireless volunteers and small staff and local community have doubled down in support of helping our neighbors in need.

Our regional district services director, Peter Fosselman, has launched a food drive, supported by the Chamber of Commerce, police department, Bethesda Urban Partnership, the animal shelter, the rescue squad, County offices, and Imagination Stage. Anchor community orgs pulling together to support our most vulnerable.

One mom and pop store, Peter's Carryout, has even created a sandwich for us—and has agreed to give us \$5 for every one of these subs sold.

We're seeing hundreds of new donors. And support from the Bethesda Chamber of Commerce, the Capitol Area Food Bank, and expert support from Heather Bruskin at the HHS's Office Food Systems Resiliency.

Our staff and volunteers are standing up. Our community is standing up. And we are grateful that the County Council and Montgomery County government, too, are leading at this critical moment to vote with dollars to support a strong community.

On behalf of all of us that comprise Nourishing Bethesda: thank you for stepping up today.

Thank you.