

Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement

Office of Legislative Oversight

EXPEDITED OFFICE OF FOOD SYSTEMS RESILIENCE – ESTABLISHED BILL 20-22:

SUMMARY

The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) anticipates that Expedited Bill 20-22 will have a small, favorable impact on racial equity and social justice (RESJ) in the County, as the Office of Food Systems Resilience could help to improve food security and other favorable outcomes disproportionately for Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color (BIPOC).

PURPOSE OF RESJ IMPACT STATEMENT

The purpose of racial equity and social justice (RESJ) impact statements is to evaluate the anticipated impact of legislation on racial equity and social justice in the County. Racial equity and social justice refer to a **process** that focuses on centering the needs, leadership, and power of communities of color and low-income communities with a **goal** of eliminating racial and social inequities.¹ Achieving racial equity and social justice usually requires seeing, thinking, and working differently to address the racial and social harms that have caused racial and social inequities.²

PURPOSE OF EXPEDITED BILL 20-22

Food systems resilience refers to a food system's capacity to deliver desired outcomes, such as food security, when exposed to stresses and shocks.³ As noted by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, for a household to be food secure, "food must be available and accessible, each individual must be able to utilize the food they obtain, and the food system must be stable over time to guarantee ongoing availability and accessibility."⁴

The purpose of Expedited Bill 20-22 is to establish an Office of Food Systems Resilience as a non-principal office under the County's Executive Branch. The responsibilities of the Office of Food Systems Resilience, if enacted, will include:⁵

- Serving as a liaison between government and food systems stakeholders⁶
- Serving as a central liaison and coordinator for County government food systems initiatives and projects
- Developing and maintaining a strategy for improving the efficiency, equity, sustainability, and resilience of the food systems in the County
- Advising the County Executive and County Council on food systems related policy issue
- Delivering a report on the state of the local food systems at least annually
- Developing a system to collect and analyze local food systems data for decision making and strategic planning
- Setting policies and procedures for grants impacting the local food systems
- Pursuing other funding to support local food system initiatives
- Supporting disaster response feeding planning and operations
- Working to address racial inequities and developing practices to ensure social justice in the local food systems

Expedited Bill 20-22 was introduced to the Council on June 21, 2022 and was enacted on July 12, 2022.

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Of note, Montgomery County's Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) has published three Racial Equity Impact Assessments for supplemental appropriations for the Food Security Task Force.^{7,8,9} Given that Expedited Bill 20-22 also affects food security, OLO builds on ORESJ's analyses for this RESJ impact statement.

FOOD SECURITY AND RACIAL EQUITY

As a result of entrenched racial economic inequities, BIPOC systematically experience worse economic outcomes than White people. As described by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston:¹⁰

"[T]he practices and policies that laid the groundwork for and built the U.S. were explicitly designed to ensure an absolute accumulation of intergenerational wealth and concentrated power for white people, particularly men. A legacy of land theft, slavery, racial segregation, disenfranchisement, and other exclusive policies against Black and Indigenous people and people of color produced a racialized economy that decimated these communities and intentionally barred survivors and descendants from building wealth, socioeconomic well-being and resilience."

Poorer economic outcomes for BIPOC translates into higher levels of food insecurity. The USDA considers a household food insecure if their "access to adequate food for active, healthy living is limited by lack of money and other resources."¹¹ Food insecurity is associated with hunger, increased rates of mental health conditions and other negative health outcomes such as cognitive problems in children, and chronic disease in adults.^{12,13}

Available data suggests that Latinx and Black households are two to three times more likely to experience food insecurity than White households.¹⁴ For example, 12.8 percent of Black and 11.3 percent of Latinx households in the County participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) compared to 3.7 percent of White households.¹⁵ The median income of local households participating in SNAP is \$35,988 compared to \$111,812 for households overall.¹⁶

ORESJ notes that racial economic inequities that drive disparities in food security in the County include lower median incomes, higher rates of poverty, and employment inequities among BIPOC residents.¹⁷ They also note that participation in SNAP likely underestimates the extent of food insecurity locally. As they explain, "there are many families in Montgomery County who are ineligible to receive food-related federal assistance but still do not have sufficient incomes for meeting all their basic needs, putting these residents at higher risk of experiencing food insecurity."¹⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and exacerbated existing racial inequities in food security.¹⁹ A recently released report from the Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) points to continued food insecurity in the region amid the lingering pandemic and rising inflation.²⁰ CAFB's survey found that 30 percent of people in Montgomery County experienced food insecurity in 2021, compared to 33 percent of people in the Greater Washington region. The report also confirmed racial disparities in food security, with 43 percent and 26 percent of Black and Latinx residents in the region experiencing food insecurity last year, compared to 16 percent of White residents.

ANTICIPATED RESJ IMPACTS

The Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget (OMB) estimates that the Office of Food Systems Resilience will cost \$6.6 million over the next six years.²¹ The first year's budget for the new Office is approximately \$1.1 million, with 32.1 percent allocated to staff and 67.9 percent allocated to operating costs.²² Operating costs include funding for

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the Farm to Food Bank Program, the Montgomery County Food Council, and several grants programs, indicating that local food providers will receive increased investment from the establishment of the new Office.

Data demonstrates that BIPOC residents are most likely to experience food insecurity in the County. If the Office of Food Systems Resilience works as intended, fewer residents will experience food insecurity, which could also lead to other quality of life improvements, such as decreases in hunger and negative health outcomes. Thus, OLO anticipates that Bill 20-22 will have a favorable impact on RESJ in the County, as the new Office could help to improve food security and other quality of life outcomes among residents who are disproportionately BIPOC. However, it is unclear the extent to which the new office will address the underlying causes of food insecurity and support vulnerable residents with moving towards a more permanent state of food security. Given the budget authorized for the new office and the uncertainty around the strategy for resolving food insecurity among residents more permanently, OLO anticipates that the favorable RESJ impact of the Bill will be small.

RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS

The Racial Equity and Social Justice Act requires OLO to consider whether recommended amendments to bills aimed at narrowing racial and social inequities are warranted in developing RESJ impact statements.²³ OLO finds that the Bill is likely to have a favorable impact on RESJ, and as such, does not offer recommended amendments.

CAVEATS

Two caveats to this racial equity and social justice impact statement should be noted. First, predicting the impact of legislation on racial equity and social justice is a challenging analytical endeavor due to data limitations, uncertainty, and other factors. Second, this RESJ impact statement is intended to inform the legislative process rather than determine whether the Council should enact legislation. Thus, any conclusion made in this statement does not represent OLO's endorsement of, or objection to, the bill under consideration.

¹ Definition of racial equity and social justice adopted from “Applying a Racial Equity Lens into Federal Nutrition Programs” by Marlysa Gamblin, et.al. Bread for the World, and from Racial Equity Tools. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

² Ibid

³ Jenileigh Harris and Emily J. Spiegel, “Food Systems Resilience: Concepts & Policy Approaches,” Center for Agriculture and Food Systems, June 2019. <https://www.nal.usda.gov/legacy/aglaw/food-systems-resilience>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Expedited Bill 20-22, Office of Food Systems Resilience – Established, Montgomery County, Maryland, Introduced June 14, 2022. https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2022/20220621/20220621_4C.pdf

⁶ The Bill notes that stakeholders will represent various community organizations and agencies, including local food assistance providers, the Montgomery County Food Council, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Office of Agriculture, the Department of Planning, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Office of Community Partnerships, the Office of Grants Management, the Office of Procurement, the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, and the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice.

⁷ “Supplemental Appropriation: Food Security Bridge Funding Proposal REIA,” Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice, Montgomery County, Maryland, July 9, 2021. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/FoodSecurity.pdf>

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⁸ “Supplemental Appropriation #22-27: Food Security Bridge Funding Proposal updated REIA,” Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice, Montgomery County, Maryland, November 3, 2021. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-27.pdf>

⁹ “Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) for Supplemental Appropriation #22-79 Bridge Funding for the Food Security Task Force,” Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice, Montgomery County, Maryland, April 13, 2022. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-79.pdf>

¹⁰ “Turning the Floodlights on the Root Causes of Today’s Racialized Economic Disparities: Community Development Work at the Boston Fed Post-2020,” Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, December 2020. <https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/community-development-field-notes/2020/racialized-economic-disparities.aspx>

¹¹ “Food Security and Nutrition Assistance,” Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Last Updated June 3, 2022. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-security-and-nutrition-assistance/>

¹² “Food Insecurity,” Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Accessed July 1, 2022. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/food-insecurity>

¹³ Craig Gundersen and James P. Ziliak, “Food Insecurity and Health Outcomes,” Health Affairs Journal, November 2015. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0645>

¹⁴ Trends in U.S. Food Security, Food Insecurity by Race and Ethnicity, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Last Updated September 8, 2021. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/interactive-charts-and-highlights/#trends>

¹⁵ Table S2201: Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), 2020 American Community Survey, Census Bureau. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=SNAP%2FFood%20Stamps&g=0500000US24031&tid=ACST5Y2020.S2201>

¹⁶ Table B22008: Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months by Receipt of Food Stamps/SNAP in the Past 12 Months, 2020 American Community Survey, Census Bureau. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=SNAP%2FFood%20Stamps&g=0500000US24031&tid=ACSDT5Y2020.B22008>

¹⁷ “Supplemental Appropriation #22-27: Food Security Bridge Funding Proposal updated REIA”

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ “2022 Hunger Report,” Capital Area Food Bank, Released June 16, 2022. <https://hunger-report.capitalareafoodbank.org/report-2022/>

²¹ ²¹ Fiscal Impact Statement, ²¹ Expedited Bill 20-22, Office of Food Systems Resilience – Established, Office of Management and Budget, Montgomery County, MD, June 9, 2022.

²² Ibid

²³ Bill 27-19, Administration – Human Rights – Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice – Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Committee – Established, Montgomery County Council