

M E M O R A N D U M

March 13, 2023

TO: Health and Human Services Committee
Education and Culture Committee

FROM: Tara Clemons Johnson, Legislative Analyst

SUBJECT: **Update:** Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger and the Office of Food System Resilience

PURPOSE: To receive an update on the current status

Expected participants:

Annmarie Hart-Bookbinder, Food Security Manager, Montgomery County Food Council
Christopher Webster, Program Director, University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security
Elisa Gonzalez, PhD, Associate, Community Science Inc.
Heather Bois Bruskin, Director, Office of Food Systems Resilience

The purpose of this worksession is to receive an update on the Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger in Montgomery County and the Office of Food Systems Resilience (OFSR). The findings of the Strategic Plan and the OFSR will likely impact services provided in schools, community settings and recommend solutions to systemic food insecurity for children and families in the County.

Background

Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger

In December 2021, the Council adopted special appropriation 22-27 allocating \$100,000 for development of the Strategic Plan. The Montgomery County Food Council served as the project manager for this effort with the goal to build upon strategies in the Montgomery County Food Security Plan and the work of the County's Food Security Task Force by incorporating feedback from stakeholders, subject matter experts and residents. The intent of the report is to identify food access barriers and strategies to reduce food insecurity across all childhood age groups, including recommendations to systemically address childhood hunger and identify metrics for success.

Office of Food System Resilience

In July 2022, Bill 20-22 established the Office of Food Systems Resilience as a non-principal office of the County's Executive Branch. The OFSR will work to make the County's food system more resilient and equitable to improve the health of residents, the economy, and the environment. The Office will serve as the liaison between County agencies and community partners with the goal of addressing the conditions which lead to food insecurity for residents. In addition, there will be an enhanced County government focus on food systems data collection, monitoring, and reporting (including food access and security data).

Per the County Executive's press release regarding hiring the Director of OFSR (©32), the office will do the following –

The OFSR will develop a case management system for residents experiencing food insecurity and the long-term strategy for government investment in community nonprofits in the food security sector. Rising food costs and persistent rates of hunger across our county, a reduction in federal and private funding for food assistance programs, and deep systemic inequities and supply chain fragility that existed well before the pandemic, all require interagency strategies that maximize local dollars and leverage additional external funding to be better prepared for future crises. Two additional staff positions focused on data analysis, policy strategies, and community engagement will be posted for recruitment soon and hired this Spring.

Council appropriated \$1,087,854 for the new office as part of the FY23 operating budget supporting three new positions and operating cost. Operating costs include funding for existing programs and several grants local food providers will be able to access. The Director started March 2023 and will provide a brief update during today's worksession.

Overview of the Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger Process

The Montgomery County Food Council with support from Consultants Mr. Webster and Ms. Gonzalez will provide information on the process and takeaways of the Strategic Plan. Attached at ©1 is a detailed PowerPoint presentation. Summarized points from the presentation include the following

- The **Advisory Group** meetings consisted of 31 representatives from 23 public and private organizations. The group met on four occasions to guide development process; advise on data sources, resident engagement, and stakeholder outreach; provide feedback and direction on plan recommendations
- **Stakeholder meetings** - 13 Strategic Brainstorming Group meetings were held on 6 intervention pathways including: in-school strategies, out of school strategies, benefit information, emergency focus access, early childhood, healthcare and emergency food access/community food distribution. There were 20 key informant meetings and a total of 142 participants across 33 meetings.

Key Takeaways from the Data Review

- Children are far more likely to be food insecure than adults.

- Food insecurity is significantly more common in Black and Hispanic/Latino households.
- Over half of children in poverty speak a language other than English at home.
- The cost of living in Montgomery County is much higher than most places, and this means many children are living above the poverty level, but below self-sufficiency.
- Almost a third of the children facing food insecurity are younger than school age - meaning school-based interventions won't reach them (yet).

Key Takeaways from Residents and Subject Matter Experts Feedback

- Transportation is a major limiting factor in parents getting help.
- Not knowing where or how to ask for help is a major gap.
- The benefits application process is incredibly challenging to navigate.
- The high cost of living makes affording groceries hard for working families.
- Food security must include nutritional security.

Staff notes that the Strategic Plan is near completion and suggest the committees meet during summer 2023 to revisit and discuss the ongoing plans for implementation.

This report contains:

Update of the Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger - PPT

©1-31

County Executive Press Release – Appointment of OFSR Director

©32-33

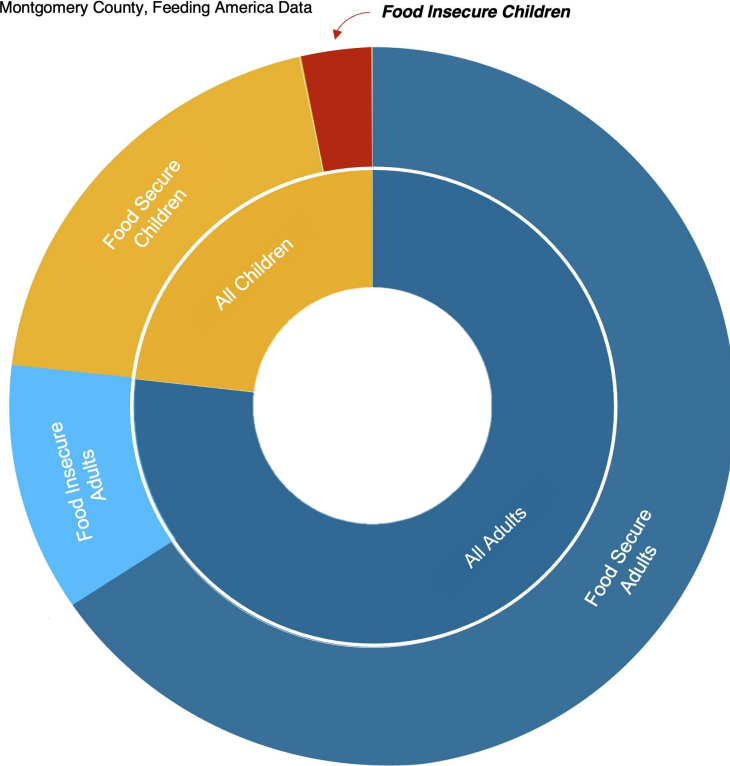


Strategic Plan to End **Childhood Hunger**

Measuring Childhood Hunger

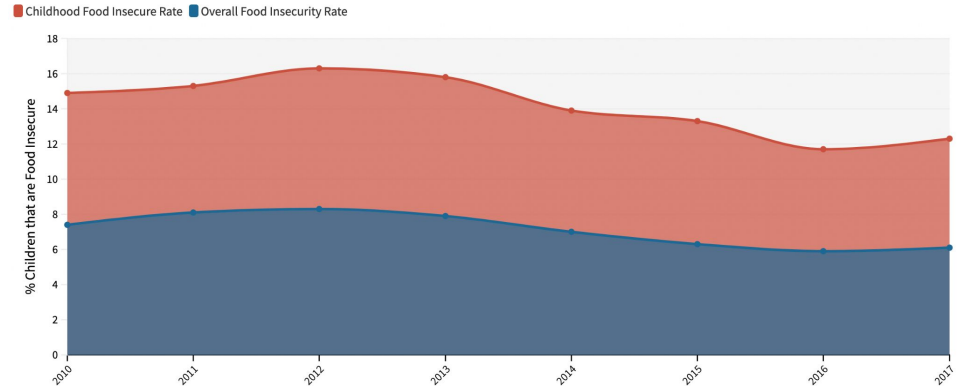
Feeding America Data

2020 Food Insecurity Breakdown
Montgomery County, Feeding America Data



14%
of all
Children
(33,840 kids)

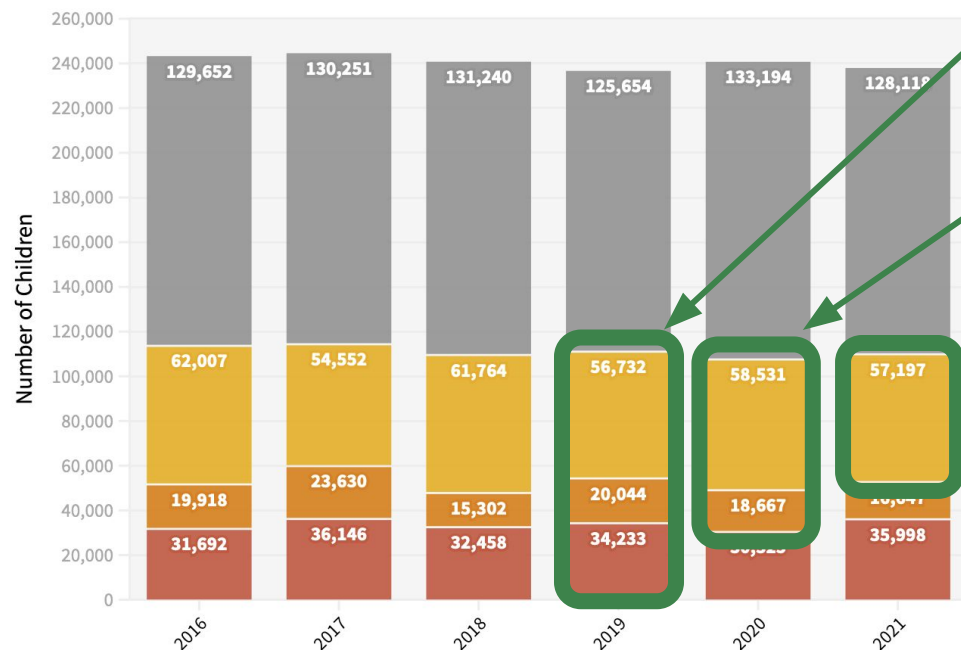
Historic Food Insecurity Rate Among Children
Montgomery County, Feeding America Data



Considering Household Income

Children by Ratio of Household Income to Poverty Level Over Time

Below 130% of Poverty* Below 185% of Poverty Level 185% - 400% of Poverty Level Above 400%



In 2021, **110k** children living in HHs below Self Sufficiency Standard ...

... but, **73.8k** children in HHs with income too high to get SNAP ...

... and, **57k** children in HHs with income too high to get free school meals or WIC.

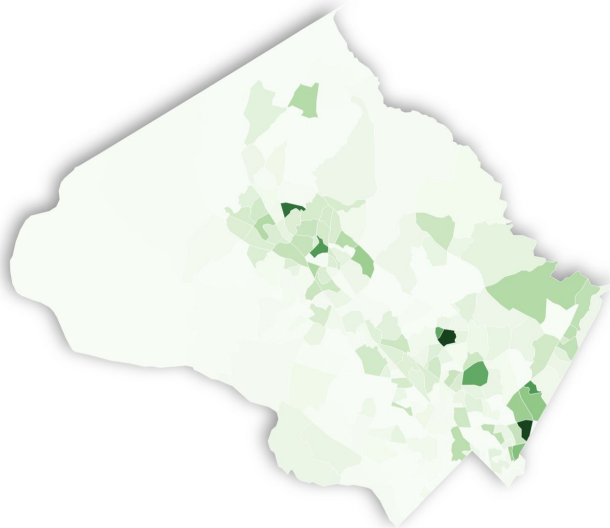
Source: US Census, American Community Survey, Table B17024. (2021) • *Census does not report specifically on 130% of poverty level so this is calculated as those below 125% plus 20% of those below 150%.

Mapping Household Income

Too much income for SNAP, but less than self sufficient

Children in Households with income between 130% and 400% of Poverty Level

1 1129

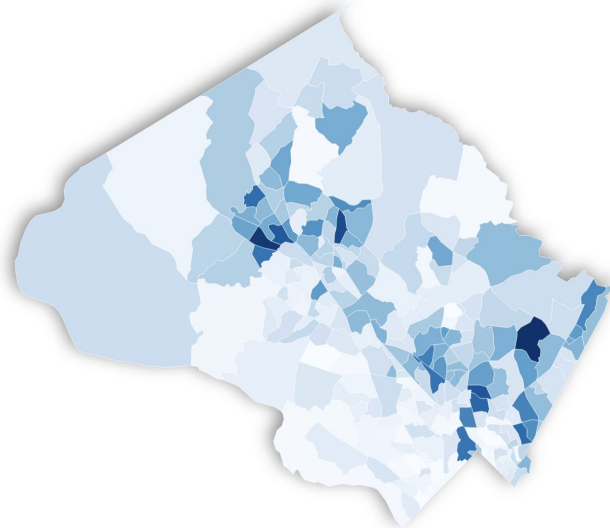


Source: US Census Data, 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B17024. • Census does not report specifically on 130% of poverty level so this is calculated as those below 125% plus 20% of those below 150%.

Too much income for FARMs, but less than self sufficient

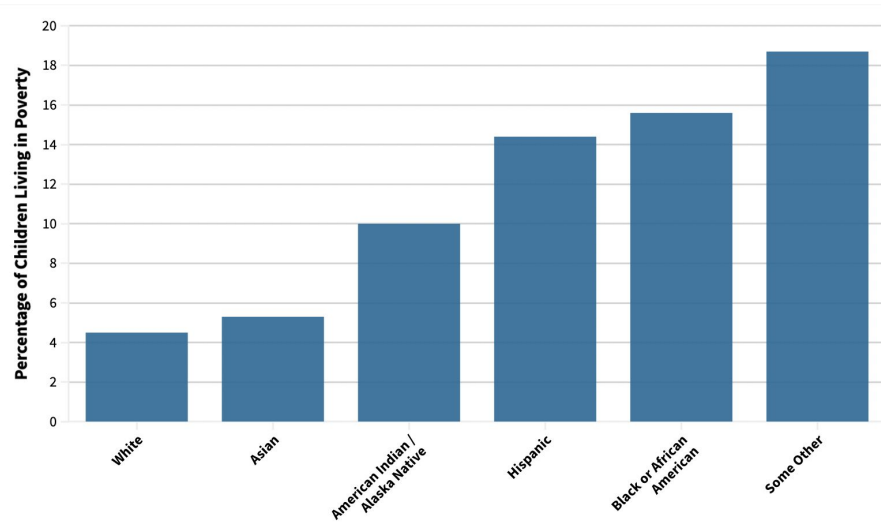
Children in Households with income between 185% and 400% of Poverty Level

7 980



Source: US Census Data, 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B17024.

Considering Race, Language Spoken

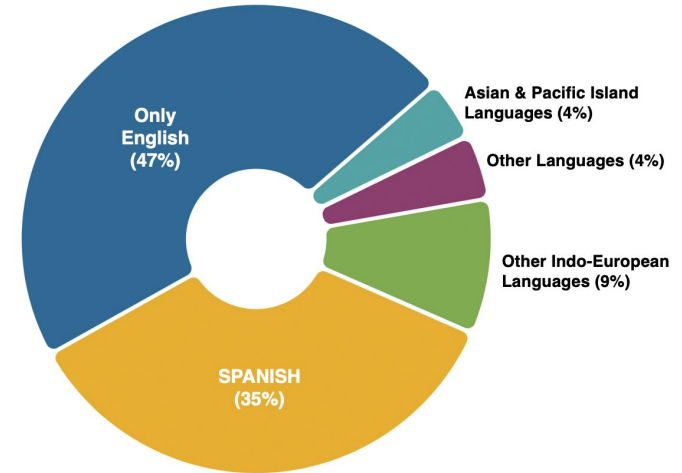


Percentage of Children Living in Poverty by Race

Note: all races include those reporting "alone or in combination"

Source: US Census Data, 2015: ACS 5-Year Estimates Selected Population Detailed Tables

Language Spoken at Home for Children 5-17 in Poverty



Source: US Census Data, 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B16009.

The Plan

Plan Creation Process

- **Advisory Group Meetings**
 - 31 representatives from 23 public and private organizations
 - Met on 4 occasions to guide development process; advise on data sources, resident engagement, and stakeholder outreach; provide feedback and direction on plan recommendations
- **Stakeholder Meetings**
 - 13 Strategic Brainstorming Group Meetings
 - Benefits program centered approaches
 - Early Childhood
 - School-based Strategies
 - Out-of-School Strategies
 - Emergency Food Access
 - Healthcare-focused Strategies
 - 20 Key Informant Meetings
 - Total of 142 participants, representing more than 70 organizations, across 33 meetings

Advisory Board



Maryland's Largest School District

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Maryland Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger and promoting well-being



Community Engagement

Adventist Community Services
Adventist HealthCare
AfriThrive
Alliance for a Healthier Generation
Benefits Data Trust
Capital Area Food Bank
Capital Kosher Pantry
Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Washington
CCI Health & Wellness Services
CentroNía
Charles Koiner Conservancy for Urban Farming
Community Health and Empowerment through
Education and Research (CHEER)
Children's Opportunity Fund
City of Rockville Department of Housing and
Community Development
Clifton Park Baptist Church
Community FarmShare
Critical Issues Forum
Crossroads Community Food Network
DHHS Asian American Health Initiative
DHHS Childcare Support Services
DHHS Food Security Task Force
DHHS Latino Health Initiative
DHHS: Planning, Analytics and Customer Service
DHHS Public Health Services
DHHS School Health Services
DHHS TESS Community Action Center Center
Empowering The Ages

Family Learning Solutions, Inc. Federal Plant-Based
School Food Advocacy Coalition
Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)
Food Security Community Advisory Board
Francophone Africans Alliance
Germantown HELP
Glenstone Museum
Harvest Intercontinental Church Olney-Mid County Hub
Healthcare Initiative Foundation
Healthy School Food Maryland
Holy Cross Community Health
Homestead Hustle & Healing
Horizon Childcare
Identity, Inc.
Karner Blue Capital, LLC
Linkages to Learning
Living Legends Awards
Manna Food Center
Mary's Center
Maryland Childhood Services
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
MedStar Montgomery Medical Center
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
(MWCOG)- FARM Policy Committee
Montgomery College
Montgomery County Collaboration Council
Montgomery County Council
Montgomery County Food Council

Montgomery County Infants and Toddlers Program
Montgomery County Office of Community
Partnerships
Montgomery County Office of Emergency
Management and Homeland Security
Montgomery County Public Libraries
MCPS, Community Schools
MCPS Department of Food & Nutrition Services
MCPS, Head Start Policy Council
MCPS, Student Support Services
Montgomery County Department of Recreation
No Kid Hungry
Nonprofit Montgomery
Primary Care Coalition
Rolling Terrace Elem. (MCPS)
Share Our Strength, No Kid Hungry Maryland
Shepherd's Table
Sheppard Pratt Early Head Start
Sheppard Pratt Family Services, Inc.
Small Things Matter
Suburban Hospital
Takoma Park Silver Spring Co-Op
Universities at Shady Grove
University of Maryland Extension SNAP-Ed
University of Maryland School of Public Health
UpCounty Hub
Women Who Care Ministries
YMCA Youth & Family Services
...and more!

Resident Feedback

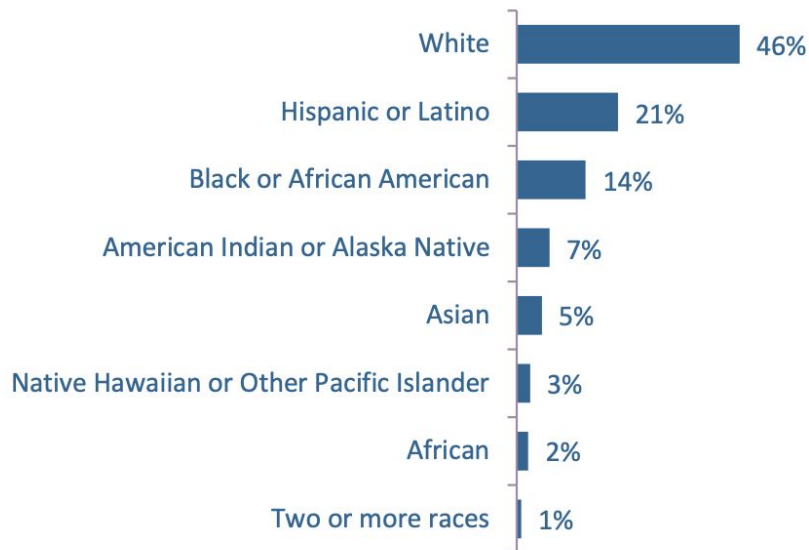
Resident Feedback

- **Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey**
 - Conducted electronically in English and Spanish
 - 1,315 respondents
 - 84% English, 16% Spanish
- **Resident Listening Sessions**
 - 3 sessions held in Spanish, 1 session held in English
 - Total of 40 participants
 - Hosted by community partners



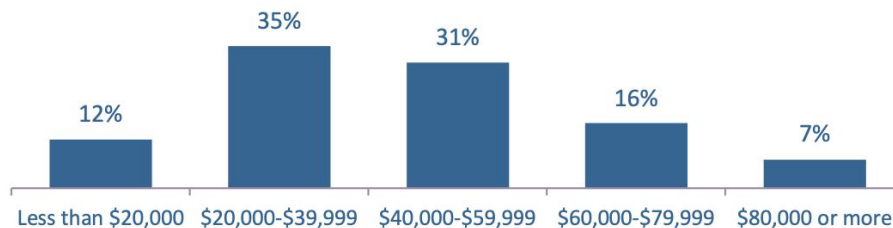
Resident Survey

Race and ethnicity of survey respondents (n=1,232)



1,315
respondents

Total annual household income (n=1,198)

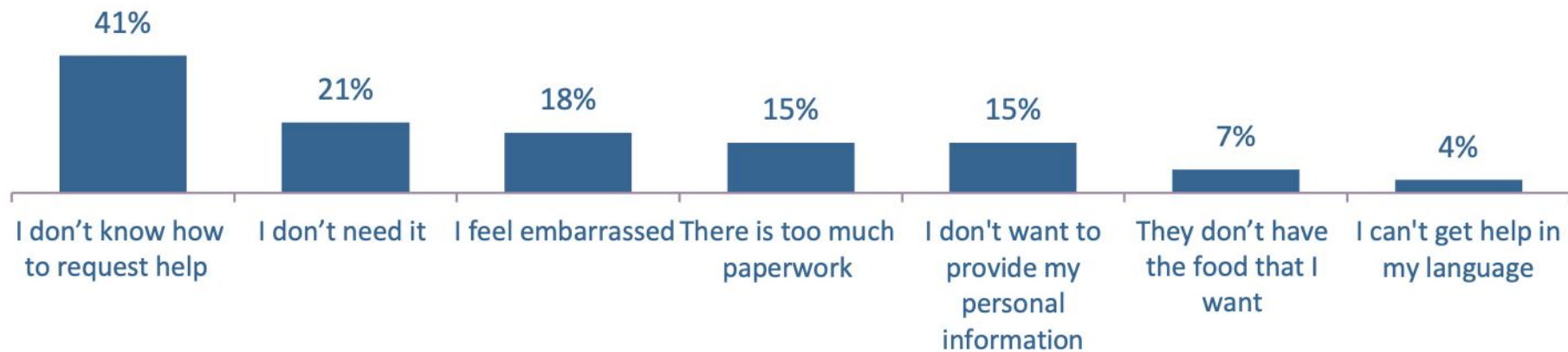


Accessing food assistance



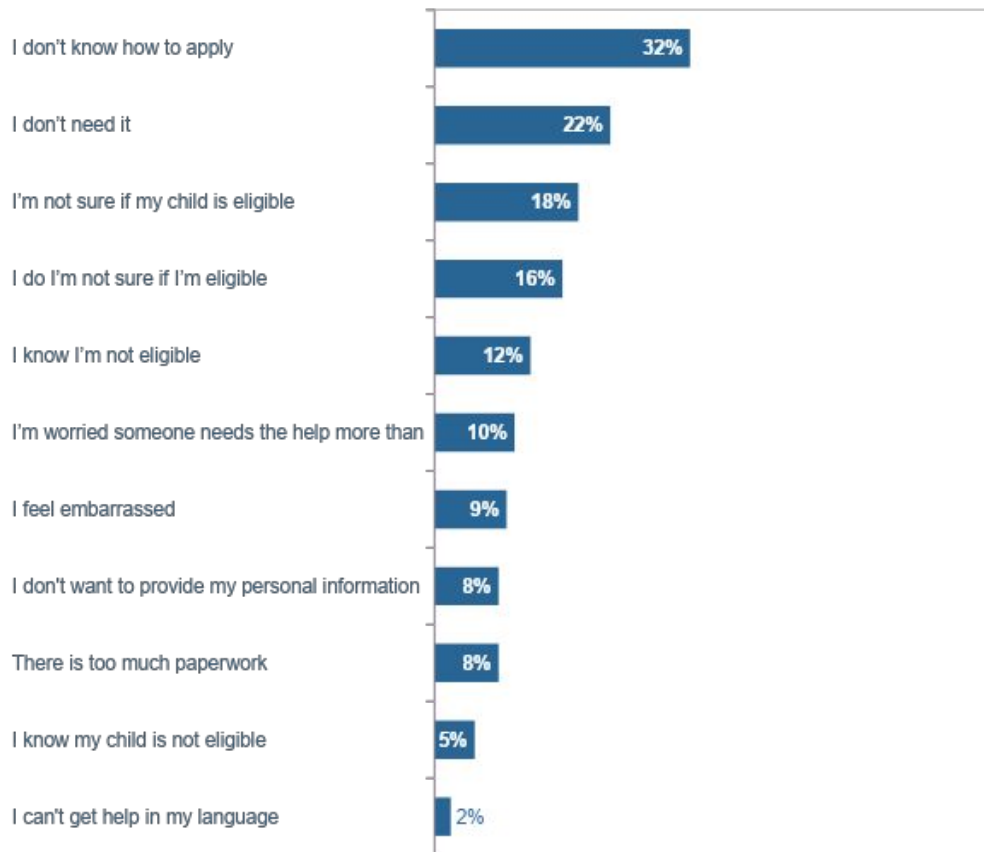
Barriers to accessing support

Reasons that kept respondents from asking for help from programs. (Select all that apply) (n=391)



Barriers to accessing support

Reasons that kept respondents from participating in food benefit programs. (Select all that apply) (n=324)



Key Takeaways

From the Data

- Children are far more likely to be food insecure than adults.
- Food insecurity is significantly more common in Black and Hispanic/Latino households.
- Over half of children in poverty speak a language other than English at home.
- The cost of living in Montgomery County is much higher than most places, and this means many children are living above the poverty level, but below self-sufficiency.
- Almost a third of the children experiencing food insecurity are younger than school age - meaning school-based interventions won't reach them (yet).

Key Takeaways

From Resident and Community Engagement

- Transportation is a major limiting factor in parents getting help.
- Not knowing where or how to ask for help is a major gap.
- The benefits application process is incredibly challenging to navigate.
- The high cost of living makes affording groceries hard for working families.
- Food security must include nutritional security.

Identified Strategies

Identified Strategies

Direct Financial Benefits

Expansion of SNAP
Enrollment Programs

Address Benefit Inadequacy,
Especially During the Summer

Provide Direct Benefits to
SNAP Ineligible Households

School & Childcare Adjacent Food Assistance

Expansion of
Free School Meals

Expansion of Child and Adult Care
Food Program

Expand Early Head Start,
Head Start, and Pre-K

Community School
Distributions and Pantries

Expansion of
Weekend Bags

Novel Approaches & New Pathways

Direct-to-Household
Food Assistance

Improved Data-driven
Decision Making

Food is Medicine

Caretaker
Nutritional Training

Financial Literacy
Training and Education

Gardening
Grant Program

Identified Strategies

Big Ideas

Expansion of
Free School Meals

Address Benefit Inadequacy,
Especially During the Summer

Provide Direct Benefits to
SNAP Ineligible Households

Expansion of SNAP
Enrollment Programs

Direct-to-Household
Food Assistance

Improved Data-driven
Decision Making

Quicker Changes

Expansion of Child and Adult Care
Food Program

Community School
Distributions and Pantries

Food is Medicine

Gardening
Grant Program

Caretaker
Nutritional Training

Financial Literacy
Training and Education

Expansion of
Weekend Bags

Expand Early Head Start,
Head Start, and Pre-K

Identified Strategies

Provide Direct Benefits to SNAP Ineligible Households

DIRECT FINANCIAL BENEFITS

Background

Some households with children in Montgomery County do not qualify for SNAP, but still struggle with food insecurity.

Proposal

Provide SNAP-equivalent benefits to children in low-income families in Montgomery County who are not eligible for other state or federal food benefits.

Impact

SNAP-equivalent benefits for 6K kids

High Cost

\$10M per year

DIRECT FINANCIAL BENEFITS

\$300K per year

Identified Strategies

SCHOOL & CHILDCARE ADJACENT FOOD ASSISTANCE

Expansion of Free School Meals

Background

Free school meals are a good way to link food insecure children with reliable, nutritious meals, but not all food insecure children are eligible for free meals or avoid free meals due to stigma.

Proposal

Expanding the school lunch program to either all students, or to those living below the Self-Sufficiency Standard.

Impact

Free school meals for 3K – 10K kids

High Cost

\$2M - \$12M per year

Identified Strategies

Address Benefit Inadequacy, Especially During the Summer

DIRECT FINANCIAL BENEFITS

Background

Many households struggle with benefit inadequacy, which is greatest during the summer when children are not receiving free meals at school.

Proposal

Providing a food benefit that would allow families to shop at their preferred grocer can effectively combat food insecurity experienced while children are not in school.

Impact

\$100 - \$500 p/summer for 70K kids

High Cost

\$300K - \$30M per year

Identified Strategies

Expansion of Child and Adult Care Food Program

SCHOOL & CHILDCARE ADJACENT FOOD ASSISTANCE

Background

There has been a dramatic decrease in the number of home daycares providing free meals to food insecure children under the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Proposal

Providing access to computers to complete the newly required CACFP paperwork, helping the care staff create culturally-relevant menus, and increasing outreach to CACFP eligible childcare centers.

Impact

Free daycare meals for 1.5K kids

Medium Cost

\$150K per year

Identified Strategies

SCHOOL & CHILDCARE ADJACENT FOOD ASSISTANCE

Community School Distributions and Pantries

Background

Community Schools are a critical pathway to providing wrap-around services to children in areas of concentrated poverty.

Proposal

Ensure that new MCPS Community Schools have an in-school pantry or at-school distribution to address food insecurity as part of those wrap-around services.

Impact

At-school food access for 3K kids

Medium Cost

\$670K per year

Identified Strategies

Improved Data-driven Decision Making

NOVEL APPROACHES AND NEW PATHWAYS

Background

Collecting data on food insecurity is notoriously difficult, but without reliable data, it can be difficult to make decisions on which interventions to fund and which to discontinue.

Proposal

Updating FoodStat and expanding the data sources analyzed to include grant and programmatic data from County-funded childhood hunger interventions.

Impact

More efficient programs

Low Cost

Positions already funded.

Identified Strategies

NOVEL APPROACHES AND NEW PATHWAYS

Food as Medicine

Background

Clinicians and pediatricians are in a unique position to screen children for food insecurity, and “prescribe” free food to children as treatment.

Proposal

Expanded food as medicine programs would allow health professionals to refer families with children for benefits, resources, and support.

Impact

Food prescriptions for 500 kids

Medium Cost

\$400K per year

Identified Strategies

NOVEL APPROACHES AND NEW PATHWAYS

Gardening Grant Program

Background

Gardening is a cost-effective way to supplement food insecure children's diets with nutritious fruits and vegetables.

Proposal

Expansion of gardening grant programs could focus on funding the establishment of community gardens and/or indoor gardens aimed at combating childhood food insecurity.

Impact

Fresh vegetables for 100s of children

Low Cost

\$100K per year

Next Steps

- Investment Decisions for FY24 Budget
- Formal Launch
 - County Council Engagement
 - MCPS & Board of Education Engagement
 - Food Security Partner & Community Engagement
- Implementation Planning- Leadership, Timeline, and Resource Needs

Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich Appoints First Office of Food Systems Resilience Director Heather Bruskin

For Immediate Release: Friday, March 10, 2023

Montgomery County has named its first director, Heather Bruskin, for the newly created Office of Food Systems Resilience (OFSR), established to streamline and coordinate the County's efforts to address local food system challenges. Ms. Bruskin is an expert in food security, economy, education and environmental policy creation and implementation.

OFSR was created based on the recommendation of the Montgomery County COVID-19 Food Security Task Force and established by the County Council in July 2022 under Bill 20-22 to serve as a liaison between County government agencies and community food systems partners such as nonprofits, farmers and businesses.

The Office of Food Resilience will be charged with developing and maintaining a strategy for improving the efficiency, equity, sustainability, and resilience of the food system in Montgomery County. Ensuring greater County government focus on food systems data collection, monitoring, and reporting (including food access and security data) is a priority of the OFSR.

"The Office of Food Systems Resilience is an important step in the County's efforts to address the root causes which lead to food insecurity for our residents," said County Executive Elrich. "I look forward to working with Ms. Bruskin in this new capacity to ensure our residents receive all available resources to end the cycle of food insecurity."

The County is home to approximately 1.05 million people, of whom 87,190 (8.3% of total population) are estimated to be food insecure according to Feeding America's Meal Gap Map. According to the American Community Survey, there are significant disparities in risk for hunger in our community, particularly related to race (8-14 percent food insecurity rates for Black and brown residents compared to just 5 percent of white residents) and age (14 percent or 34,000 residents 18 & younger.) Additionally, the high cost of living in Montgomery County results in thousands of additional households with incomes that are too high to receive benefits assistance but too low to make ends meet.

For more than 12 years, the new director has been a leader in community-based organizations. Her roles have included financial management, strategic planning, data collection and analysis. She has been actively involved in engaging residents, employees and volunteers in collaborative and effective program operations.

Ms. Bruskin has a master's degree from the University of Virginia and a bachelor's degree from Tufts University.

"Launching this innovative new office will connect my passion for building resilience, justice, and sustainability in our food system to a role in public service," said Ms. Bruskin. "I look forward to a continued partnership with the community toward systems change, expanding upon the County government's investments in ensuring equitable and dignified access to nutritious, culturally diverse foods for all residents. It also will be important that we harness the unique strengths of business, nonprofit and government partners to enhance the health of our people, our economy and our natural resources."

The OFSR will develop a case management system for residents experiencing food insecurity and the long-term strategy for government investment in community nonprofits in the food security sector. Rising food costs and persistent rates of hunger across our county, a reduction in federal and private funding for food assistance programs, and deep systemic inequities and supply chain fragility that existed well before the pandemic, all require interagency strategies that maximize local dollars and leverage additional external funding to be better prepared for future crises. Two additional staff positions focused on data analysis, policy strategies, and community engagement will be posted for recruitment soon and hired this Spring.

As the Executive Director of the Montgomery County Food Council, Ms. Bruskin led the County's primary food system advocacy nonprofit organization through significant expansion. Under her leadership, the Food Council launched a nutrition benefits outreach and enrollment direct service program in partnership with the State of Maryland, connecting more than 1,000 residents to food assistance resources and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Ms. Bruskin serves in leadership roles with numerous local and regional food systems and nonprofit organizations, including currently as the elected co-chair of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council and as an appointed member of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Food and Agriculture Regional Committee.

Food Resources in Montgomery County can be found at
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/get-help/food.html>.

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Categories: Executive Office