



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

October 13, 2021

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: REIA - Senior Nutrition Program Supplemental Appropriation # 22-17

- I. **FINDINGS:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice finds that Supplemental Appropriation #22-17 is likely to prevent existing food security disparities from widening in the County, but it is unclear to what extent the program targets populations facing the greatest risk of food insecurity in the County. While the program expands access to needed food assistance for eligible seniors, ORESJ cannot determine whether the program's reaches seniors of color at a rate proportionate to need.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #22-17 is to provide additional funding to the Department of Health and Human Services for the implementation of the Senior Nutrition Program. Additional funding is requested for the expansion of the program in response to Covid-19; expansion of the program will allow seniors and people with disabilities to continue receiving meals at home, reducing the need to leave home during the pandemic or overcome transportation or logistical barriers to reach in-person meal services. This program provides nutritional assistance to individuals not reached by local Meals on Wheels services.

Food insecurity¹ among older adults is a persistent problem in the US. According to Feeding America *The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2019* report, 7.1% of seniors were food

¹ The USDA defines food security as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life." Food insecurity is divided into low and very low food security. **Low food security** is reduced quality, variety, or desirability of

insecure and of seniors living below the poverty line 32.1% were food insecure². In Maryland specifically, it is estimated that 5.1% of seniors were food insecure, 2.6% of that group being very low food secure³. The Montgomery County Food Council has recognized Seniors aging in place and/or with medical dietary restrictions and people with disabilities with limited mobility and/or waiting for case management (among other groups) as residents in the County facing the greatest risk of food insecurity⁴.

A range of housing, health, and labor market inequities in addition to residential segregation have influenced who has faced the greatest risk of food insecurity in the US. Seniors of color are more likely to have experienced disparities in education access, housing affordability, employment outcomes, healthcare quality and access, and ultimately in the accumulation of wealth throughout their lifetime, resulting in greater vulnerability to food insecurity and its related health effects. *The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2019* report reveals deep and persistent disparities in food insecurity rates by race and ethnicity over time, explaining that Black and Hispanic seniors have food insecurity rates at more than twice the rate of White and non-Hispanic seniors⁵. Individuals with disabilities experience many of the same above-described inequities. Seniors with disabilities have food insecurity at rates almost three times higher than those without a disability⁶. It is also important to recognize that the intersectional identities of people of color with disabilities, particularly those that are older, make the experience of food insecurity more complex and detrimental to a high quality of life.

According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap project and projections from *The Impact of Coronavirus on Local Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021*, overall food insecurity was on the rise in Montgomery County between 2017 and 2019 and is projected to have risen again during the pandemic in 2020. This does not bode well given that the harms of the covid-19 pandemic have been disproportionately felt by low-income residents and people of color nationally and in Montgomery County. Older adults, especially, are facing the dual constraint of accessing nutrition support while social-distancing or remaining at home.

Based on learnings from the Great Recession of 2008, researchers at the National Council on Aging produced a report on the anticipated financial impacts of Covid-19 on older adults of

diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake. **Very low food security** is multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. Available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/>

² Dr. James P. Ziliak and Dr. Craig Gundersen. Feeding America. *The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2019*. August 2021. Available at: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/2021%20-%20State%20of%20Senior%20Hunger%20in%202019.pdf>

³ *The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2019*.

⁴ Montgomery County Food Council. Montgomery County Food Security Plan. 2017. Available at: https://communityfoodrescue.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/moco_food_plan.pdf

⁵ *The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2019*.

⁶ *The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2019*.

color. The report explains that “minority older adults are likely to experience particularly significant declines in financial well-being, which exacerbate economic disparities that have existed during most of their working years.”⁷ In addition, a 2013 analysis from the National Institute on Retirement Security found that even after controlling for age and income, households of color have substantially lower retirement savings than white households, pointing to inequities in access to employer-sponsored retirement plans or individual retirement accounts which drives down the level of retirement savings⁸. Given the National Council on Aging’s post Covid projection and links between financial insecurity—including lower levels of retirement savings—and food insecurity, prioritizing access to high-quality nutrition assistance programs for seniors of color will be key during pandemic recovery. This is especially true given that according to a policy expert at Brookings Institute, older adults are less likely to receive food assistance and participate in programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program at half the rate of all eligible populations⁹. Reported barriers to SNAP participation for older adults include “low awareness that they are eligible, inability to navigate the application process, low benefit levels, and a sense of shame about the need to rely on assistance programs.” There is no documented evidence that these barriers exist for seniors participating in the County’s food assistance programs, however awareness of these potential barriers and attention to reducing any that do exist could strengthen the County’s Senior Nutrition Assistance Program and expand the equitable distribution of resources. The Food Research and Action Center cites the Older Americans Act which directs service be targeted “with particular attention to low-income older individuals, including low-income minority older individuals, older individuals with limited English proficiency, and older individuals residing in rural areas.”¹⁰

- III. **DATA ANALYSIS:** In the Capital Area Food Bank Hunger Report 2021, there is a map depicting the distribution of income, job losses, food insecure households, and covid-19 cases in the Greater Washington region. The below census tracts within Montgomery County had the highest numbers of food insecure people in 2020 compared to other census tracts in the County. The census tracts and numbers of people experiencing food insecurity is based on Feeding America estimates released in June 2021.

⁷ Marc A. Cohen, PhD, Jane L. Tavares, PhD, Susan Silberman, PhD, and Lauren Popham, PhD. National Council on Aging. *Potential Financial Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Minority Older Adults: Learnings from the Great Recession in 2008*. May 2020. Available at: <https://www.ncoa.org/article/potential-financial-impacts-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-minority-older-adults>.

⁸ Nari Rhee. National Institute on Retirement Security. *Race and Retirement Insecurity in the United States*. December 2013. Available at: <https://www.nirsonline.org/reports/race-and-retirement-insecurity-in-the-united-states/>

⁹ Annelies Goger. Brookings. “For millions of low-income seniors, coronavirus is a food-security issue”. March 2020. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/03/16/for-millions-of-low-income-seniors-coronavirus-is-a-food-security-issue/>

¹⁰ Alexandra Ashbrook and Susan Beaudoin. Food Research & Action Center. “Helping Older Adults Struggling Against Hunger Access Food in the Age of Covid-19”. Available at: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC-Brief-Helping-Older-Adults-Struggling-Against-Hunger-Access-Food-in-the-Age-of-COVID-19.pdf>

Census tract	Number of people experiencing food insecurity
7002.05	1,080
7008.18	1,090
7007.19	1,280
7008.16	1,110
7032.14	1,330
7032.12	1,050
7025	1,270

Source: Capital Area Food Bank. Hunger Report 2021: Insights on Food Insecurity, Inequity, and Economic Opportunity in the Greater Washington Region. Available at: <https://hunger-report.capitalareafoodbank.org/#food-insecurity-and-other-inequities>

An analysis of Senior Nutrition Program client data and 2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates of Montgomery County residents 55 and over (55+), reveals some interesting program utilization patterns compared to the 55+ population in Montgomery County. In the Congregate Meals Program, it appears African American and White residents are underrepresented among program clients compared to their representation in the 55+ population overall. By contrast, Asian residents make up 58% of program clients but only make up 15% of the 55+ population in the County. In the Home-delivered meals program, the opposite patterns are true among African American and Asian residents. African Americans make up 39% of the home-delivered meals program compared to 16% of the 55+ population overall. Asian residents, by contrast, make up 7% of home-delivered program clients but 15% of the 55+ population overall. The percent of White residents receiving home-delivered is similar to the percent of White residents who are 55+. It is notable that there was no data available about the ethnicity of program clients.

Nothing conclusive can be drawn from these program utilization rates without context about median income for 55+ residents by race and ethnicity. It is also important to take into consideration disability status, eligibility criteria, and outreach methods. Despite the limited scope of this analysis, long-standing inequities facing Black residents and other communities of color in the US, suggest that further inquiry about disproportionate utilization rates may help to identify opportunities for program expansion, particularly in light of racialized Covid-19 impacts.

Congregate Meals				
Race of client	Number of clients who are 55+	Percent of clients who are 55%	Number of residents in Montgomery County who are 55+	Percent of residents in Montgomery County who are 55+
African American Female	428	10%	26,334	9%
African American Male	159	4%	19,505	7%
Total African American	587	13%	45,839	16%
American Indian/Alaska Native Female	17	0%	570	0%
American Indian/Alaska Native Male	7	0%	439	0%
Total American Indian/Alaska Native	24	1%	1,009	0%
Asian Female	1,601	36%	23,793	8%
Asian Male	981	22%	19,594	7%
Total Asian	2,582	58%	43,387	15%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Female	43	1%	56	0%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Male	22	0%	53	0%
Total Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	65	1%	109	0%
White Female	786	18%	93,073	32%
White Male	388	9%	80,124	27%
Total White	1,174	26%	173,197	59%
Total program clients	4,432	100%	263,541	100%
Hispanic/Latino Female	Data not available	Data not available	16,914	6%
Hispanic/Latino Male	Data not available	Data not available	13,042	4%
Total Hispanic/Latino	Data not available	Data not available	29,956	10%
Total County Residents 55+			293,497	100%

Home delivered meals				
Race of client	Number of clients who are 55+	Percent of clients who are 55%	Number of residents in Montgomery County who are 55+	Percent of residents in Montgomery County who are 55+
African American Female	160	27%	26,334	9%
African American Male	68	11%	19,505	7%
Total African American	228	39%	45,839	16%
American Indian/Alaska Native Female	0	0%	570	0%
American Indian/Alaska Native Male	1	0%	439	0%
Total American Indian/Alaska Native	1	0%	1,009	0%
Asian Female	27	5%	23,793	9%
Asian Male	15	3%	19,594	7%
Total Asian	42	7%	43,387	15%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Female	not reported	not reported	56	0%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Male	not reported	not reported	53	0%
Total Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	not reported	not reported	109	0%
White Female	182	31%	93,073	32%
White Male	139	23%	80,124	27%
Total White	321	54%	173,197	59%
Total program clients	592	100%	263,541	100%
Hispanic/Latino Female	Data not available	Data not available	16,914	6%
Hispanic/Latino Male	Data not available	Data not available	13,042	4%
Total Hispanic/Latino	Data not available	Data not available	29,956	10%
Total County Residents 55+			293,497	100%

Source: HHS/Aging & Disability, Montgomery County, Senior Nutrition Program. Data from 10/01/2018 to 9/30/2019. Author's calculations of 2019 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates "Race by age and sex".

cc: Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive