

**TESTIMONY OF VANESSA K. PIERRE FOR THE 2021 OPERATING BUDGET
HEARING ON BEHALF OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW FARMERS
MARKET IN WHITE OAK, MD.**

Good Evening Council President Katz, Vice President Councilmember Hucker and Councilmembers.

My name is Vanessa Pierre and I am a resident of the White Oak Community of Silver Spring. I am here to talk to you today about securing financial support the establishment of a farmer's market in White Oak.

I moved to White Oak in October 2016 hopeful and eager to begin a new life with my three children here in Montgomery County. There were many adjustments to be made moving from sunny South Florida to the hustle and bustle of the Washing DC Metro area.

We excitedly traded our flip flops for snow boots and bathing suits for winter coats full of optimism at the new life we were embarking on.

Many decisions had to be made before coming here and in our early days settling in. To say there was a lot to learned would be a gross understatement.

Where would we live?

Where would the children go to school?

How on earth do you operate a fireplace?

We managed, we learned, and it was not easy but our decision to become a part of this community never wavered until recently. Recently our decisions have become less about planning our new life and more and more about basic survival.

What used to be as simple as planning the weekend activities has become a question whether to pay the rent or buy groceries?

Do we put gas in the car to get to work or fill the fridge?

We came here full of pride and optimism just having sold our home and in just three short years the burden of our finances left us no choice but to depend on SNAP benefits leaving us at times completely degraded.

After everything is paid and we have evaded eviction another month a new question emerges.

How do we make \$50 last two weeks for a family of four? Surely fresh and healthy foods are no longer an option.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Council it is widely known that food security is an issue in our county, and I commend your current and ongoing initiatives such as “A Food Secure Montgomery”.

I am here today to talk to you about the absence of affordable healthy food options in the White Oak neighborhood and a plan to combat that.

In a neighborhood such as White Oak where transportation is the number one concern for its residents the only options not requiring the use of public transportation for fresh groceries are Giant and Shoprite which are two of the most expensive markets in the area. Not to mention the nearest farmer market is in downtown Silver Spring.

With such little options families such as mine are forced to choose quantity over quality for ourselves and our children contributing to a myriad of health issues and associated resulting costs.

The issue of food insecurity in The White Oak Community has both blatant and ripple effects on the community such as

- Increase in chronic illness
- Adverse childhood experiences
- Increase in preventable mental health issues

Farmers market benefits include:

- Supporting our local farmers
- Keeping our money in the community
- Flexibility for pop up locations that accommodate all residents
- Opportunity to take advantage of Federally sponsored program including SNAP benefit match.

It is my hope today that you will be inspired to take the first steps necessary to end food insecurity by providing access to more affordable grocery options, naming supporting the establishment of a new East County Farmers market.

Together we can heal our community from the inside out, one healthy meal at a time.