

Statement of Carrie Stoltzfus, Executive Director, Food & Friends, before the Montgomery County Council

April 20, 2022

Good afternoon Council President Albornoz, Councilmembers and neighbors. I am Carrie Stoltzfus, the Executive Director of Food & Friends. I'd like to share some of the important work Food & Friends is doing to improve the lives and health of Montgomery County residents, and to thank you for your support through the Senior Nutrition Program.

For the past 34 years, Food & Friends has been providing freshly prepared, home-delivered, medically tailored meals and groceries to individuals living with serious illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes, and heart and kidney failure. Our clients are referred to us from their healthcare providers, and we function as a prescription for nutrition for those living with complex and debilitating health issues. Each client is also paired with a registered dietitian to help them better understand how their nutrition affects their health and their ability to manage their illness at home. Last year we delivered over 1.2 million meals and 1,600 nutrition encounters to nearly 4,000 people across the Metropolitan Washington Area, at no cost to those who receive it, and nearly 150,000 of those meals were delivered to over 450 Montgomery County residents. This represents almost a third of the meals delivered in Maryland and 12% of our total meals delivered across the region. We are able to make this impact thanks to a dedicated staff of 60 and a network of thousands of volunteers, many from Montgomery County.

Food & Friends' clients are acutely ill and therefore are often unable to take advantage of other nutrition programs or shop at a grocery store. Almost 80% report income of less than \$1,500/mo. For those who are in need of our services, there is no substitute to home delivered, medically tailored meals. Not only are we a lifeline for each of our clients, but our services improve health outcomes and lower the cost of medical care. Participation in a medically tailored meal program is associated with improved mental health, fewer hospital and nursing home admissions, and lower overall medical spending.

We have continued to meet the needs of our neighbors during the pandemic, growing the number of residents we care for and even expanding our eligibility to meet the needs of a new population, those with cystic fibrosis. We haven't missed a day of service throughout the pandemic, ensuring that our most vulnerable neighbors are able to shelter safely at home while their nutritional needs are taken care of.

We are appreciative of our current funding through the Senior Nutrition Program within the Department of Health and Human Services, but it represents only 7% of the almost \$1.5 million Food & Friends will spend taking care of Montgomery County residents this year. We

would appreciate the opportunity to work with the council to find other funding sources to serve those living with serious illnesses in the County. Half of our organizational budget is raised through philanthropic sources, and the support of the county is critical to leveraging that. But in the coming years we need that support to grow.

We applaud the work of Councilmembers to ensure the county is an affordable, safe and healthy community for all people. We are excited for the strategic focus on food security through the Montgomery County Food Security Plan and the proposed Office of Food System Resilience. We look forward to shared public-private efforts to address this and other social determinants of health such as healthcare access. Food & Friends is positioned to help meet these strategic goals as we actively engage in grassroots coalition efforts with Nonprofit Montgomery, the Montgomery County Unite 2 Integrate Diabetes Coalition, the Montgomery County Food Council and the national Food is Medicine Coalition.

At our core, it is our belief that anyone can get sick, and that everyone can help. We appreciate the Council's support of our mission and I look forward to our continued partnership.