



**Testimony to the Montgomery County Council
on Recommended Fiscal Year 2025 Operating Budget
April 9, 2024
Submitted by Manna Food Center**

Good afternoon, my name is Mardia Dennis, Director of Development and Communications at Manna Food Center, and lifelong resident of Montgomery County. I am here to represent Manna's Board, staff, and volunteers who are working toward sharing food, educating, and advocating to eliminate hunger in Montgomery County.

As the largest community-based organization dedicated to food security and community health, Manna annually redirects nearly 4.6 million pounds of food to more than 50,000 county residents each year. A few datapoints of note from fiscal year 2023:

- Food For Families impacted 40,375 individuals (unduplicated) and 16,391 of those neighbors received Manna's service for the first time
- Operated 25 distribution sites throughout the county including choice pantry options in Silver Spring, Glenmont, and Gaithersburg
- Completed 5,021 home deliveries and conducted 32 pop-up pantries bringing fresh produce, eggs, pantry staples and highly sought after proteins to residents who face additional constraints like transportation
- Manna's Farm to Food Bank program addresses the need for additional fresh inventory for Montgomery County's service consolidation hubs, specifically, as well as a network of food assistance providers more generally and shared close to 850,000 pounds of food that includes produce grown right here by Montgomery County farmers; 30% being women or Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) owned/ operated.

Key to Manna's vision of a community where "all people at all times have access to safe, sufficient, nutritious food in order to lead fulfilling lives and contribute to making our county a place where all live in dignity," is a focus on the future. We are leaders in school-based programs: Currently we reach nearly 60 schools with a combination of weekend bags, in-school pantries, and gift cards. 4,265 children are regularly receiving nutritious, culturally relevant food thanks to Manna programming. All of this work is made possible through a combination of county and state funds, alongside individual donations and foundation and corporate support.

From its conception, Manna has been working with groups such as the Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) and our participants to help create the Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger. Both the County Council and the County Executive have been

champions of the plan and for FY25 it is critical that financial resources necessary to implement the plan are put in place.

If our county is to fulfill its commitments to children and their families, then the FY25 budget must contain resources for organizations such as Manna to actualize the variety



of proven approaches, as well as novel pathways aligned with the current strategies to end childhood hunger. As many on this esteemed council know, this is not our first-time sharing testimony. Manna has been a longtime partner in implementing various elements of the plan, like direct financial benefits through SNAP enrollment and in-School Food Assistance as described above. However, what may be new information, is Manna has been an innovator in novel pathways by prioritizing making data driven decisions and sharing that data with our peers and partners. Partnership indeed is a key value at Manna, and that is why we strongly endorse the County Executive's FY25 budget recommendations of \$3 million to continue providing food assistance through the consolidated service hubs; food staples transition of \$1.75 million; \$6 million for new competitive grants; and \$1.8 million for the Retail Food Access Program. Additionally, at a minimum, the County Executive's recommendation for a 3% increase in base budget contracts must be retained. We have heard numerous times that you all depend on nonprofits to help execute budget priorities, and therefore I am urging you to show us that through actual dollars and not just words of encouragement.

Thank you.

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