



Testimony to the Montgomery County Council
Regarding Bill 5-24, Child Investment Fund

For more than 40 years, the staff, Board and volunteers of Manna Food Center have been focused on eliminating hunger by distributing food, educating, and advocating. We are working toward a vision of Food for All, 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.” In an average month, we share food with 5,717 households. We recognize, however, that sharing food is the start to eliminating hunger, not the end of community-wide efforts that will have lasting impact on community health and food security.

Key to achieving our vision is a recognition that food security is not merely about a lack of food, but is also an economic justice issue. Manna is implementing strategies such as providing MCPS families gift cards and offering county residents vouchers for shopping at local grocery stores. We also have staff dedicated to helping eligible participants enroll in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) so they can purchase food for themselves and stimulate the local economy.

It is in this spirit of increasing economic opportunities that Manna has been supportive of MoCoBOOST, the first guaranteed income pilot in Maryland to provide direct cash assistance to households in Montgomery County. We agree with Child Investment Fund (CIF) co-sponsors Councilmembers Alborno and Jawando that wealth is often a determinant of outcomes related to access to health, education, housing, and economic opportunities. As an organization that is “participant-centered and data-driven” we are encouraged that the CIF is grounded in research as well as best practices from existing policies across the United States. The design of the Childhood Investment Advisory Committee and its responsibilities--including establishing the eligibility criteria; the scope of eligible expenditures; the status of the fund and fund performance relative to the programmatic objectives and goals; opportunities to establish public-private partnerships; and other pertinent policy considerations--seem legitimate and appropriate, in the context of the annual budget appropriations process.

Manna Food Center appreciates this opportunity to share our perspective that innovations such as the CIF are necessary to go beyond the charitable status quo of food assistance to investments that move our community forward in just, equitable, and verifiable ways.

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