



April 10, 2026

Dear Council President Fani-González, Vice President Balcombe, and Members of the Council:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and individuals working to build a more resilient local food system, the Montgomery County Food Council (the “Food Council”) thanks you for the opportunity to testify on the FY2027 Operating Budget.

Over the past several years, Montgomery County has made meaningful investments in building a more resilient local food system. The creation of the Office of Food Systems Resilience, the sustained funding for food purchases, and national leadership in SNAP outreach clearly demonstrate Montgomery County’s immediate response and long-term strategy to addressing food insecurity. We are grateful for your continued leadership and your commitment to ensuring that residents without enough to eat are supported.

In 2025, that commitment was tested. The disruptions and uncertainties we experienced last year reminded many of us of the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once again, food assistance providers saw surging demand, shifting supply chains, and growing operational strain. But unlike in 2020, our community did not have to start from scratch. The County had invested in coordination and capacity, and our network was ready.

Resilience does not happen by accident; it must be maintained. Today, food insecurity continues to rise. Recent data show that approximately 34% of Montgomery County residents are experiencing food insecurity, an alarming increase that reflects broader economic pressures, including the high cost of housing, childcare, and healthcare. At the same time, many food assistance providers are facing declining resources and growing operational challenges.

Through ongoing engagement with our partners, we consistently hear the same concerns:

- Rising food and supply costs are stretching already thin budgets;
- Nonprofits are struggling to offer competitive wages and retain staff;
- Many organizations lack adequate, safe, and accessible space;
- The demand for services continues to grow, including among residents who do not qualify for federal assistance but still cannot make ends meet.



We urge the Council to continue investing in both immediate food access and long-term food system resilience. Specifically:

Sustain and strengthen funding for food assistance providers.

Reliable, flexible operating support is essential to ensure that organizations can meet rising demand while maintaining dignity and quality in service delivery. With rising food prices and operational costs, funding food assistance grants at the 2026 level means less volumes of food purchased at a time when demand continues to grow. Flat funding amounts to a real cut in service, especially as demand continues to rise.

Expand SNAP outreach and enrollment efforts.

SNAP enrollment has become increasingly difficult to navigate due to changes in eligibility criteria and work requirements at the federal level. At the same time, the federal match for SNAP Outreach community based organizations is dropping from 50% to 25% beginning in FY 2027. Sustained investing in SNAP outreach connects residents to critical nutrition benefits and brings significant federal dollars into our local economy. These organizations also play a critical role in connecting residents who are no longer eligible for SNAP to other food and wrap-around services.

Support local farmers and food producers.

Programs that connect local agriculture to food assistance, such as farm-to-foodbank initiatives, strengthen both food access and the local economy. We appreciate the County's continued support of local farmers, its leadership in advancing local institutional procurement, and its investments in local food aggregation. We strongly encourage the County to actively and consistently seek input from farmers and other stakeholders to ensure these investments are effective, equitable, and responsive to on-the-ground needs as they continue to grow.

Look beyond food to address root causes.

Food assistance plays a vital role, but it cannot solve food insecurity on its own. We encourage continued exploration and support of complementary strategies, including direct cash assistance and policies that address housing affordability, healthcare access, and livable wages. Investments in systems like Community Connect is vital to these efforts. We emphasize the need for strong coordination with the network of nonprofit organizations that provide complementary services to residents in need, and support for a flexible referral network that ties together a community of organizations willing to coordinate care.

Montgomery County has long been a leader in supporting its most vulnerable residents. The progress we have made is the result of strong partnerships between government and community-based organizations. As we look ahead, we must recognize that the challenges are evolving, and that resilience requires ongoing investment. The Food Council and our partners



remain committed to working alongside the County to strengthen our food system, support our neighbors, and ensure that every resident has access to the food they need to thrive.

Thank you for your leadership and for your continued partnership.

Sincerely,

Montgomery County Food Council & Partners

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AfriThrive

American Diversity Group

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CHEER

Community Engagement & Consultation Group

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Crossroads Community Food Network

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Shepherd's Table

So What Else

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