



Dear Council President Fani-Gonzalez, Council Vice President Balcombe, and Councilmembers,

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the **Food Justice Coalition**, a collective that envisions, strategizes, and organizes towards a Montgomery County with **food accessibility, affordability, and sovereignty**. The Food Justice Coalition is facilitated by Manna Food Center, Shepherd's Table, and Impact Silver Spring, and led by neighbors most impacted by food and housing insecurity, food assistance providers, and people passionate about food justice. We are a multigenerational group of public servants, parents, immigrants, survivors of gender-based violence, and more. As food assistance programs at the federal level become more difficult to access for working families, immigrants, the elderly, and our unhoused neighbors, our county must make meaningful investments in our local food assistance infrastructure. We are urging the council to **pass another \$3.5 million to OFSR** matching the Public Service Support Package of 2025, **pass recommended enhancements to the Food System Education Grant**, and **NOT make the recommended reductions to the Retail Food Access Program and the Food as Medicine Grant**.

We collectively experience and witness the effects of limited access to abundant, consistent and nutritious food. We must continue to expand food access in Montgomery County given that 40% of adults say their finances are getting worse, and over 60% of residents report using their savings to pay for housing and other bills. Meanwhile, 39% of our residents have stopped saving for retirement, college, or other future expenses. *(Statistics sourced from Capital Area Food Bank's 2025 Hunger Report)*

Our county's food insecure households are already experiencing forced tradeoffs between food and other essential expenses such as transportation, housing, healthcare, and childcare (CAFB 2025 Hunger Report). Compounding these issues, the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) estimates nearly 80,000 individuals across the state are at risk of termination or reduction of their SNAP benefits. In addition, the Center on Budget and Policy priorities has reported that "116,000 people in the region are expected to lose Medicaid coverage." Montgomery Planning also reported a 4.6% unemployment rate for Q3, 2025, compared to a 2.6% unemployment rate in Q3, 2024.

These numbers are not abstract. Members of the Food Justice Coalition and our county at large live through these difficult realities everyday. We know the struggle of lacking the funds necessary to put food on the table, or not having access to healthy foods while staying at a shelter. We also know what it's like to be the ones sourcing and distributing food amid rising food and fuel prices.

Accessibility is key to our households, individuals, and families with a variety of needs. For families with children who have special needs, or immigrant communities who make up a third of this county's population, accessibility translates to having **dignity and choice**. Children with limited food preferences, immigrants looking for culturally-relevant food, and youth with medical needs are relying on sustained funding to programs such as MC Groceries and Food as Medicine. Our coalition members have faced and observed an increasing demand and need for these services.

Affordable food is what keeps Montgomery County running! For many of our coalition members, food assistance has made a significant difference in a working household's ability to stay afloat until the next paycheck. We share when possible - our members engage in mutual aid, cook for our neighbors, and share groceries when we have abundance. Meanwhile, barriers to SNAP access have become more complex, uniquely impacting veterans, unhoused neighbors, former foster youth who are now subject to work requirements. One of the cascading effects of the loss of SNAP for families is that children previously directly enrolled in free and reduced lunch or Medicaid through SNAP may be at risk of losing these lifelines. This will inevitably create rising costs for impacted families who will have to spend more on meals for children, increase hunger for parents who may need to forego meals, and increase childhood hunger – which is already at 11% in Montgomery County (CAFB 2025 Hunger Report). As food affordability is increasingly threatened at the federal level, Montgomery County must invest in keeping food affordable for our constituents. We deserve systemic solutions for systemic problems.

Sovereignty in receiving food assistance is especially under threat this year, as both community members and providers must pivot to counter multi-layered challenges. Amidst deportations and threats to our communities and civic networks, first response organizations in the county have had to completely reshape their work, including shutting down physical spaces and moving to delivery models. Having ownership over food access and food production can reshape food sovereignty in the county. For those facing mental health challenges due to lack of housing or witnessing the disappearance of community members, access to community gardens can become a key therapeutic intervention that also promotes food systems knowledge and employment. Additional funding to community food assistance can also make the difference in whether an

individual is able to receive a hot meal, or have groceries delivered by trusted organizations to the safety of one's home. Additional MC Groceries funding will enable more families to access food in the manner that feels safest to them, hence allowing them to exercise autonomy in feeding themselves and their loved ones.

We dream of, and must work towards a county where no one has to choose between going hungry and fulfilling other essential needs.

Given our current context, the needs of our members, and the unique opportunity to demonstrate food justice leadership in Montgomery County, we urge the Council to make the following critical amendments to the proposed budget.

We urge the council to **pass an additional \$3.5 Million to OFSR, matching the Public Service Support Package of 2025**. We are still facing a multipronged crisis with federal food assistance funding uncertainty, rising food production costs, and worsening finances for adults in Montgomery County. We need continued County-level investment to address it.

We urge the council to **keep the enhancement to the Food Systems Education grant**, which would create necessary training and educational programs to maximize resident-led community gardening efforts.

We urge the council to **NOT make the recommended reductions to the Retail Food Access Program and the Food as Medicine Grants**. These reductions require grantees to continue the same amount of service, while receiving less funds and facing decreased purchasing power. These programs which grant grocery vouchers, and provide assistance and screenings for residents facing food insecurity, cannot be jeopardized.

With continued instability at the federal level and deficits at the state level, now is the time to act. We must meaningfully invest in food accessibility, affordability, and sovereignty now. We look forward to the Council's continued partnership in working towards this future.

In community,
The Montgomery County Food Justice Coalition



Shepherd's Table
TOGETHER MEETING NEEDS. CHANGING LIVES.



impact
SILVER SPRING

Organizational Signatories (26)

Organization	Signee	Organization	Signee
Colesville United Methodist Church	Michelle Stewart-Young, Chair, Outreach & Missions Ministry	ISKCON of DC	Volunteer, Sharmila Das Adhikary
Living Faith Lutheran Church, Rockville Maryland	Michael Lidell, Council President	Difference Makers Christian Business Alliance (DMCBA)	Nicollette Glasser Maunganidze, Ministry Chair
East Silver Spring ES	Mada Gray, Community School Liaison	Saint Luke Lutheran Church	Deacon Kyle Warfield
Gaithersburg Community Soup Ktichen	Treasurer	Stedwick Elementary	Community School Liaison
Germantown HELP Inc.	Executive Director	Arcola ES	Heather Hunter, Community School Liaison
Harvest Mid county hub	Nina Nelly Mobula, Operations Manager	The Farm at Our House	Marc Grossman, Farmer
Asian Community Relief association	Executive Director	Meals on Wheels Takoma Park/Silver Spring	Javonte McDonald, Executive Director
Small Things Matter	Executive Director	Oak Chapel UMC Food Pantry	Volunter Co-leader
Heritage House	Property Manager	AfriThrive, Inc.	Dr. Charles Choti, Director - Community Engagemet & Partnerships
YMCA Linkages to Learning	Community school coordinator	Saint Luke Lutheran Church	Ruth Manchester, Parish Nurse and Director of Caring Ministries
Gaithersburg HELP	Executive Director	Mid-County United Ministries	Dayna Brown, Executive Director
St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Fairland	Janis Smith, Parish Administrator and Treasurer	Ethiopian Community Center in Maryland, Inc.	Staff Member
Montgomery College- Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus	Food Security and Basic Needs Coordinator		

Anonymized sign-ons were also provided by (5):

Manager, Local African Grocery Store; President, Farmer-Forward Non-Profit; Principal, MCPS Elementary School; Community School Liaison, MCPS Elementary School; Executive Director and Distribution Manager, Farm-Based Non-Profit

Montgomery County Residents and Community Members Signatories (84)

Indhu Balasubramaniam	Laurie Savage, Savage Acres Farm	Linda Simon Harold Hill	Rosanne Sabatelli
Belinda Hilliard	Jennifer Rossmere	Naomi C. Kabasela	Robert Poli
Emily Dematatis	Tracy Schwanger	Marcia Meltzer	Eve Robbins-Spevack
Barry Jackson	Rosa Lovos	Meghan OConnell	Kelly Williams
Kenitra Davis	Nix	Katie Leiser	Vincent Wilson
Wanda Ray Canada	Deena Groshong	Isabella Majorowitz	Vanjalic Tolbert
Alice Kukapa	Lucinda Snow	Elizabeth Titilayo Martins	Mary M. Bennett
Michael Larkin	David Clam	Riley Hanrahan	Michelle Rogers
Alexis Davis	Aiman Abdelmouti	Lisa Morris	James Keough
Marcus Moore	Deborah Howard	Ronald Quarles	Jackie DeCarlo
Charlene Lacovaro	Sharon D'Emidio	Amelie Zurn-Galinsky	Zohra Kanga
Lea Ann Moricle	Hany Metry	Erin Antognoli	John Sullivan
Azizah Z Muhammad	Johnny Lubis	Janice Solomon	Gwen Niner
Tawanda Abeelmouti	Gloria Kalotra	Alicia	Jennifer Renkema
Aiya Abdelmouti	Danny Chang	Fran Rothstein	Carolyn Jefferson
Walter R. Groshong	FAITH MINIK	Kenneth Gear	John S
Julian Cantella	Michele Dastin	Masoumeh Hamedanizadeh	Rosel Halle Kalman
Sarah Samuel	Edgar C. Lee	Kelly	Renée-Lauren Ellis
Shannon Shea	Mansfield Kaseman	Valerie G. Frank	Vivian Rayford
Molly Jackman	Michal Powers	Margaret McIntosh	Sherry Marshall
Marjheory	Rosanne Sabatelli	Jason Mills	Christine Baker