



April 7, 2026

To County Council President Natali Fani-Gonzalez, Vice President Balcombe,  
and Council Members,

Manna Food Center respectfully submits this testimony today to celebrate the council's efforts to end hunger in Montgomery County over the years, and request renewed dedication towards establishing food security in Montgomery County during turbulent times.

Manna Food Center has served residents in Montgomery County since its humble beginnings in a vacant elementary school in 1983, serving just a few hundred recipients with a single pledge of \$3,100, and a donation of 16,000 pounds of food. In 2025, 42 years later, Manna reached 176,156 neighbors through our Food for Families program, and distributed 3.14 million pounds of food, while purchasing over 224,644 pounds of produce from 33 local farms for redistribution to 70 beneficiary organizations. We are honored to call Montgomery County our home, and are deeply rooted through our diversified programming that connects to schools, faith-based organizations, farmers, small businesses, grocery stores, and many other aspects of civic life.

Our work is possible because Montgomery County residents care deeply for one another, volunteering time, talent, and treasure towards our local food system. Meanwhile, for our innovative growth over the years we must thank the robust network of local food producers, food assistance providers, partnered non-profits, other charitable organizations, and critically, Montgomery County's own dedication to food systems change.



We are proud to work with a County Government that has meaningfully committed to building local food systems resilience through multi-pronged approaches. Our county's food-related grants and programs reach farmers and food producers, seniors who have lived in MoCo for decades and recent immigrant families who are still making MoCo their home, children in school and unhoused neighbors, among many others. We are grateful especially for the county's quick responses to the shifting conditions in the DMV, including the emergency funds released in November to sustain our communities through the rolling impacts of federal job losses and government shutdowns. We are also incredibly grateful for the passage of the County Values Act and the Trust Act, which enable our staff and participants to safely interact within our food assistance network.

It is precisely *because* we are heartened by this county's ability to meet moments of crisis with resilience and strength that Manna requests careful attention and strategic investment into our local food system at large for fiscal year 2027.

Manna is now serving more than 11,000 families each month due to growing need after the November federal government shutdown, and massive federal job losses in our region. Comparing February 2025 and 2026, we documented a 20% increase in the number of families we served. Food insecurity in Montgomery County alone has risen from 27% to 34% in two years, with impacted households experiencing forced trade-offs between food and housing or transportation. The Capital Area Food Bank Hunger Report documents that over 40% of adults in our county report worsening finances in 2025.

Through innovative and diversified partners who provide support with food and other basic needs, we have been able to continue to meet these waves of



increased need. However, this has made us acutely aware of the far-reaching effects of Medicaid and SNAP access reduction or loss, widespread fear of federal policing agencies leading to mental health impacts for children and adults alike, deportations removing primary breadwinners from low-income, working class families, and rising numbers of county residents losing housing.

We are seeing that much like adaptations our County's social services network was forced to make during COVID, many of our partners are having to redesign their models to serve *more* families and households, while guaranteeing safe access. A first-response organization has had to close its physical locations and move entirely to a delivery-based model, in less than a year. An organization supporting immigrant survivors of gender-based violence now needs to adjust to the reality that many of their clients have lost their SNAP eligibility, and will no longer receive that nutrition assistance. Food pantries hosted within faith-based organizations are reporting a steady rise in numbers, without the necessary infrastructure that will allow them to continue to meet the need.

As the central food assistance provider in Montgomery County, Manna Food Center is fortunate to have the partnerships, fundraising apparatus, local contracts, and infrastructure to enable us to stretch our capacity in the face of challenges. Our concern is that this does not hold true for many of our partners. A decentralized, multipolar network of food assistance is most cost-effective and efficient for us all, alleviating food deserts through wider area coverage, and combatting food apartheid by ensuring food reaches our most vulnerable and historically marginalized communities. We believe that strategic, forward-looking and preparatory investment will create an invaluable buffer to unpredictable federal and state level shifts or emergencies over FY27.

For these reasons, we recommend the following key budget actions:



1. Utilize the emergency funds of November 2025 as a guiding compass, and grant the Office of Food Systems Resilience an operating budget that matches FY26 total expenditures, i.e. a \$3.5 million increase to the recommended budget, to be disseminated across a variety of programs.
2. Protect the \$150,000 enhancement as a Food Systems Education Grant for the resident and community garden program, and if possible, increase by an additional \$50,000 to meet high demand for community garden plots, education, and community event programming.
3. Prevent any reductions to the Food as Medicine Grant, instead increasing it from \$750,000 (FY26) to \$1,000,000 (FY27) in anticipation of Medicaid coverage losses across the county and the DMV at large. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that 116,000 residents across the DMV will lose Medicaid coverage this year. This increase to Food as Medicine will be able to alleviate some of these impacts on children in particular.
4. Prevent any reduction to the Retail Food Access Grant, or MC Groceries, whose partnership with Instacart creates the unique opportunity for residents to receive groceries of their choice from the safety of their home – a feature that can provide food assistance to even the most vulnerable families in our county.
5. Increase the Community Food Assistance Grant by \$300,000 so that food assistance organizations such as Manna can create novel and necessary partnerships with other first response, social service, and legal aid organizations to disseminate food to communities navigating multiple simultaneous challenges.
6. Increase the School Based Food Assistance Grant by \$200,000 to respond to students who may be losing SNAP, Medicaid, or both, whose families may be afraid to participate in federal nutrition assistance programming, or whose schools may become ineligible for Community Eligibility Provision due to lowered direct enrollment rates.



We deeply appreciate the council's time and careful consideration on this matter, and commitment to ending hunger in Montgomery County. Please do not hesitate to contact us if any further information is necessary or useful.

Thank you,

Manna Food Center

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'C' and a long, sweeping tail.

Craig L. Rice, CEO

240.268.2524

[craig@mannafood.org](mailto:craig@mannafood.org)