



MARYLAND
FOOD BANK

*Your
Holiday
Presence
Matters*

FALL 2024



Letter from **PRESIDENT CARMEN DEL GUERCIO**

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Carmen Del Guercio
Maryland Food Bank

As we approach the holiday season, and I reflect on the year that was, the word that comes to mind is “presence.” Whether you have been giving to the Maryland Food Bank for decades or have recently joined our Sustainers Circle, it is because of you that we can have a thoughtful and deliberate presence in about 1,000 communities from Cumberland to the Chesapeake Bay.

The Maryland Food Bank’s 50th anniversary is not far off, and it is simply astonishing to think how much has changed—just how different of an organization we are in 2024.

In our infancy, Anne Miller’s act of handing out surplus frozen doughnuts from her garage in the late 1970s was what food assistance looked like in our state: a passionate and caring Marylander literally sharing extra resources with her neighbors. It was a simple, transactional relationship with food-insecure Marylanders: “Extra food is available, people in need can come pick it up.”

While Anne’s efforts were commendable, the potential for even greater impact was significant.

As we grew, learned, and gained experience throughout our early years, we realized that Maryland deserved a long-term solution to feeding neighbors, so we deliberately began to form more partnerships with retailers and local farmers. During those decades, we were bringing in a larger variety of food and fresh produce. We started sharing nutrition education information, and our relationship with Marylanders strengthened. But it was still one-way: “We know what’s best; hopefully people will listen.”

While that period was an improvement over our earliest efforts, we still weren’t going deep enough. We didn’t dig down to the root causes of hunger and ask neighbors “What brings you here today?”

It’s now the fall of 2024, and we’ve been asking our neighbors that very question for quite some time. Neighbor voice and feedback has helped transform food assistance from a last-resort safety net to a neighbor-centric, two-way relationship that helps ensure that the right resource is in the right place at the right time: “We’re listening to neighbors, because they know best.”

And that neighbor voice is amplified through our partner network, the true subject matter experts who are “of” their communities, not just “in” them.

As you read on, you’ll see how on-going grant support is elevating our partners’ presence in the eyes of neighbors in Catonsville, Curtis Bay, and Pasadena who are visiting Neighbor Choice pantries and accessing fresh produce grown by and for Communities of Color (pgs. 4-8); why Team-ing up for hunger is so powerful (pg. 10); and I know that Jeni Murphy, sharing her particular root cause challenge, will move you as she did me.

Thank you, and I look forward to another year of increased presence for our neighbors in need,

CARMEN DEL GUERCIO

PRESIDENT & CEO, Maryland Food Bank



MFB IN THE NOW

Warming Hearts & Minds: the MFB Education Garden

Thanks to food bank friend Medifast, the MFB Education Garden had a high yield of FUN for our next generation of farmers. In 2024, 50 kids from local organizations learned a lot about where their food really comes from! Check out this garden yearbook, then set up your garden visit – klong@mdfoodbank.org.



Thinking Inside the Box: Improving Holiday Meals

“Money is tight, and I am honored and blessed that the Maryland Food Bank is out here to provide this turkey and fixings, it will allow me to enjoy that big meal with others,” Sam, older adult, Community Services Foundation Help Center.

Holiday Meal

Thanks to you, Sam and tens of thousands of other Marylanders have the ability to enjoy a traditional holiday meal this year. And this year, neighbors will enjoy Holiday Meals featuring foods 100% made in the U.S.A. But these are not randomly selected products – the have all been taste-tested and approved by our sourcing team.

“What better way for us to make sure that the food we are distributing is actually good, if we don’t have first-hand experience. So I sat down with my team, prepared and tried the foods inside, and made some changes based on that feedback,” said Zachary Jeffries, sourcing manager, MFB.



Objecting to Hunger Since 1987

For nearly 40 years, the Lawyers Campaign Against Hunger has raised more than \$7.5M in support of their food-insecure neighbors. In 2024 Kelly Robier, associate at Kramon & Graham, is serving as the campaign's lead.



“Those who experience housing instability and food insecurity are disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system and the legal system as a whole. Food insecurity fundamentally affects a person’s ability to thrive,” said Kelly. “Early in my legal career I made a commitment that I would use my position to do good in the world because from a young age I was taught the importance of giving back to my community. That’s why the opportunity to lead the Lawyers’ Campaign Against Hunger feels like such a natural fit,” she continued.



Checking in on Community Support

Feeding people, strengthening communities, and ending hunger for more Marylanders. “Strengthening communities” is much more than the center portion of our mission statement, it is the very foundation of MFB 3.0, our strategic plan to help more Marylanders thrive.

For nearly 50 years, your belief and support have allowed us to have more meaningful presence in more places. Your backing directly leads to increased investments in more local communities, where neighbors can see, taste, and experience our mission statement at partner sites statewide.

That’s why our granting program is so important to the long-term ability of Marylanders to thrive. This investment in local communities is the key to unlocking the potential of a hunger-free state.

We’re humbled that so many neighbors were comfortable sharing their stories and their experiences with the resources that you so generously help provide. You’ll hear how the simple act of allowing choice at local pantries is making a meaningful difference; how culturally relevant crops bring a sense of relief to individuals; just how impactful making access to fresh produce grown by and in Communities of Color is and more ways our partners are making good on the promise of our mission statement, statewide, everyday.

Since 2018, we’ve granted more than \$4.7M to dozens of partners who know what their neighbors are going through, and what solutions will actually work, locally.





“There is not enough work for me to afford the whole family’s food. This place doesn’t make me feel bad about it. The people are nice, and I can take food home that we like.” — Anonymous

The Power of Voices Lead to Neighbors Making Choices

Adjacent to a second-hand shop in a strip mall just off Pulaski Highway in Edgewood, MFB Network Partner Epicenter had a deliberate vision for providing resources to community residents in a more thoughtful way.

“It was early 2022, and with fresh memories of handing out pre-packaged foods during the pandemic, we reached out to our contact at the food bank, Rebecca Mann, to discuss creating a shopping experience for our neighbors who are really just going week to week right now. What you see here today, is a direct result of those conversations with Rebecca,” said Zach McClellan, director of development, Epicenter.

The choice pantry is an example of what McClellan described as a sticky space an area designed to have neighbors “stick around” and have conversations with Epicenter staff and other neighbors, which often leads to increased knowledge about the underlying reason (root cause) that drove that neighbor into food insecurity in the first place.

Epicenter received \$75,000 in funding from the Maryland Food Bank’s Neighbor Impact Grant program.

Demonstrating how important choice was to her, one Epicenter neighbor chose not to share her name, but made her feelings on the subject very clear.

“Yes! I will tell you how this place makes me feel. It makes me feel GOOD! Did you see what I just did there? I grabbed the canned green beans, but now that I see these fresh ears of corn—I’d rather have that—and it’s MY choice!”

Just four miles to the southeast, Celestial Manna is able to offer a choice pantry to Pasadena neighbors featuring culturally familiar and relevant produce—thanks to a grant from the Maryland Food Bank.

“We have local farmers that are starting to produce foods that are good for other cultures because not everyone eats the same thing. Now, we have things like two different eggplants, white ones from I think Southeast Asia, plus these small purple ones that are Indian and we have okra, which is very popular with our population from India,” said Teresa, one of Celestial Manna’s volunteers.

“We’re trying! I was raised to not ask for help, but we just can’t do it all alone anymore, so I had to. So thankful that people are nice here. No one makes you feel any sort of way, and they let you pick out your own food.” — Edgewood resident



Johns Hopkins + MFB =

28,568 meals
to 1,000 patients
& families



While learning the specific reasons why an older couple from China chose the white eggplant were difficult due to a language challenges, pleased expressions and an earnestly uttered “Thanks, good food, helps very much,” were enough to show why this level of intentionality is so important to our neighbors.

And while some neighbors come to Celestial Manna for the familiar crops, others are finding healthy food choices in a comfortable environment. “I don’t know why it matters, but I’ll tell you I’m retired from the federal government, and that’s how I thought this place would be—you know, that government issue stuff—but it is not!” shared an older adult who asked to be called Anne. “My doctor told me as I get older, I need to eat less meats and increase my vegetables, which I can choose from here. They treat me like a human being and let me pick out my own food, imagine that,” she continued.

Healing the Body and Mind with Fresh Food

Anne’s doctor is one of a growing number of healthcare providers who are advocating for Marylanders to make better choices and lead healthier lifestyles. So many of the issues plaguing society—high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, weight management—can often be alleviated, if not eliminated when a person’s diet features fresh and nutritious food.

Not everyone has the resources to afford or easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables. In very different ways, both Johns Hopkins and the Black Yield Institute are working to break down those barriers.

In 2019, we teamed up with the Harriet Lane Clinic at Johns Hopkins Children’s Center (HCC) to set up Maryland’s first food pantry in a hospital setting. And when the pandemic broke, the pantry took on a whole new level of importance to the community. Post-pandemic, we have actually expanded the partnership, and thanks to your generosity, we’re now able to support Hopkins’ efforts to connect neighbors who visit their emergency clinic with the on-site food pantry.



"The food pantry is such a reliable and critical resource for our patients, but also a cornerstone of the educational mission of our HCC program. Knowing the pantry is stocked and well received by our patients allows our advocates and our medical providers to feel comfortable asking our patients about any food security issues they may be experiencing, knowing there is an immediate support available. That food is often the entry point into a longer relationship between advocate and family to work together to address the root causes of food insecurity. The partnership with the Maryland Food Bank is critical to the overall success of our HCC program and mission."

Creating Connections in the Community

"People are primed for change, even if they may not be prepared for it," said Twan Jordan, director of operations and culture, Black Yield Institute.

On a sweltering Friday afternoon in late July, Twan, alongside several of his colleagues from Black Yield Institute were acting on their mission to strengthen local food systems by putting land, food, and money back into the hands of the people actually who live there by sharing produce from Black-owned businesses with neighbors in need on Hazel Street in Curtis Bay.

As one family approached the table, brimming with fresh fruits and vegetables, the dad was speechless at first, but then, under his breath intimated "Man, this kind of stuff just isn't available anywhere around here that we can get to easily. You ever try getting a bus with two kids and going grocery shopping? I don't want to say too much, but this, this is really something to my family..."

And sometimes just being in a community is enough. "My mommy passed by here on her way to pick me up from camp, and brought me and now I got to pick out cucumbers, two squashes, bananas, green peppers, and RED PEPPERS, MY FAVORITE, FAVORITE, FAVORITE, of ALL the veggies," shared Samantha P.



Building the Future of Food Assistance

Sometimes the barriers neighbors face originate not with traditional root causes, but with unfortunate (yet solvable) issues of space with some of our partners.

Just across Rte. 695 in western Baltimore, MFB Network Partner Catonsville Emergency Assistance (CEA) has been providing food and support to community residents for more than 35 years. Due to a number of local partnerships, including MFB, CEA was able to continue to grow and expand their service footprint, eventually landing in a convenient, yet small house at 25 Bloomsbury Avenue in 2006. And while that facility helped the community, challenges with flooding, tight spaces, a dangerously steep basement staircase, and the lack of an ADA compliant ramp makes it difficult for CEA to achieve the level of intentional service they want to provide to neighbors.



“This is not like where I’ve been, this is good. Being able to choose what I want instead of being handed things just feels different, not weird or anything at all...”
— Delí L.

With your backing, we were able to fulfill CEA’s grant request, funding their purchase of the property next door, at 23 Bloomsbury.

“Eventually, we want to offer a choice pantry, but for now, we have additional space to store more fresh foods. It’s so much easier for staff to manage intake and distribution with the expanded space, and when it is all done, neighbors will have a nice, quiet space to come in, sit down, and really talk about what their true needs are,” said Caitlin Kirby, director, CEA.

And about 25 miles to the northwest, Morgan Chapel Church seeks to revive a community resource that was once heavily in fashion a few generations ago, but has the potential to alleviate a number of issues that today’s neighbors face in Carroll County—a resilience hub, which to some degree resembles Epicenter’s sticky space in Edgewood (which you read about on Page 5.)

“Building off of the food pantry, we want to build that resilience hub—a widely known place where the community comes together and ‘gets lost’ in collaborating, learning, whatever,” shared the church’s Reverend, Jim Skillington. “In those days, they’d come together, have a spaghetti dinner, they’d spend time together. We’re going to do that here,” he continued.

This shift in perspective, where neighbors and partners lead the way is already showing signs of success. Neighbors are feeling more comfortable at choice pantries; are pleasantly surprised by the availability of culturally familiar foods; and are finding ways to explore the potential of food as medicine.

The momentum we’re seeing after just a few years of offering grant programs is humbling, and we look forward to continuing to provide resources to the true subject matter experts on hunger.

“My kids will be so happy. I got to pick things out I know they will eat. It’s food they know, and I don’t have to explain. And produce too—that is good for them and me!” — Susanna



What's really behind hunger?

How a vehicle breakdown uprooted the Murphy Family.



The Speakers Bureau helps strengthen communities by incorporating neighbor voices (like Jeni's) into our work and decision-making processes as an organization—everything from providing feedback on our feeding programs to statewide advocacy efforts.

Most people have an idea of what hunger is, but understanding what causes it in the first place is a different story.

Over the years, neighbors have helped us try to understand by sharing their personal experiences with us. And while they differ in the details, most stories illustrate a lack of resources and a domino effect on their lives, restricting their ability to access and consume healthy food.

In September 2024, 54% of Marylanders said they had to sacrifice food for transportation more than once in the past year, and nearly 20% are forced to make that decision each and every month.

Recently, a member of our Speakers Bureau shared her experience when her car broke down, and how the lack of a resource that we might take for granted suddenly meant that her family was one of those making the tough choice between food and transportation:

My name is Jeni Murphy, and during what was an already rough time for our family, I found myself having to depend on public transportation. But I live on the Eastern Shore, and we don't really have a widespread public transportation system here.

There are a few buses, but the routes are limited. Working in Salisbury and commuting an hour wasn't bad when I drove, but all of that changed, when our car broke down, and was not worth the money to repair. And our budget was stretched thin already...

3:00 a.m. — Wake up and figure out how to get to work. I'd start by looking for an Uber, and even if it was available, it would cost \$25+ each trip, which would quickly eat up more money. So, I would text a neighbor and ask for a ride to the Cambridge Walmart so I could catch the Delmarva Community Transit (DCT) bus.



Find out how you can help the Maryland Food Bank alleviate the root causes of hunger—like a lack of transportation—for more Marylanders like Jeni.

Transportation

OR

Food?

4:45–5 a.m. — Arrive at Walmart with just a few minutes to plan my day before the bus came (if it was on time). Thankfully, I had an EBT/SNAP (food stamp) card and ID and could ride for \$1. Much better than Uber and helped us save money for a new vehicle.

5:10 a.m. — Board the bus to Salisbury.

6:05 a.m. — Exit the bus at the Calvert Street parking lot, walk several blocks, then cross Route 50 to the office—which was in the basement of a church. (I usually didn't mind the walk, except when it was dark or raining). Then, I'd lock the office door and try to catch up on paperwork.

10:00 a.m. — Open the office, assist consumers for four hours.

2:00 p.m. — Close the office to the public, finish paperwork and wait for public transportation to be available to begin my journey home.

3:30 p.m. — Lock the office for the day, cross Route 50, walk several blocks back to the Calvert Street parking lot, wait for the bus back to Cambridge

3:55 p.m. — Arrive at the bus stop. (The bus was listed to arrive at 4:10 p.m. and would leave to go back to Cambridge around 4:25pm. Only thing was if you didn't get on the bus when it got there, you could miss it!)

4:10 p.m. — Pay my \$1 fare and ask the driver for a transfer ticket. This allowed me to transfer to the Easton bus without paying an extra dollar. At that time, I didn't have a reliable ride home from Walmart, which was several miles from home, and walking that whole way was out of the question.

4:40 p.m. — Kindly ask the driver to deviate from the standard route. Most were ok with it, which helped shorten the distance I would still have to walk. Bus drivers would slow down, but never pull to whole way over to the shoulder, and I swear it felt like they never fully stopped the bus!

5:10 p.m. — Rush to exit the bus as safely as possible.

5:12 p.m. — Walk about a quarter mile on the highway, then take the shortcut to my neighborhood through the woods. During the weeks when the sun was out longer, it wasn't too bad. But on cooler, or bad weather days, it wasn't pleasant, and never the safest thing to do, but I had to make it work.

6:30 p.m. — Finally arrive at home, find the time and energy to eat, shower and get ready for the next day.

We've all experienced minor inconveniences, and the frustration we feel trying to work around them. But when Marylanders like Jeni share their story, illustrating the ripple-effects of a lost resource, we get a glimpse of understanding about deeply a root cause of hunger can affect a family's day-to-day life.

TEAMING UP TO FIGHT Against Hunger

Now let's check out the scorecard!



Together we've

hosted 51 events

raised more than \$2.3M

supplied hundreds of thousands of meals to food-insecure neighbors

Combined, the Maryland Food Bank (1979), Baltimore Orioles (1954), and Colts/Ravens (1953) have been Maryland institutions for nearly 200 years! Each entity, on its own impacts and influences the local communities in different ways.

So when these kinds of revered organizations team up, our entire state wins...



Loading Up All The Bags since 1998

25 events, providing hundreds of thousands of meals by raising more than \$550K

"Our long-standing partnership with the Maryland Food Bank is a true reflection of our dedication to community service," said Jennifer Grondahl, Senior Vice President of Communications and Community Development for the Baltimore Orioles. "The Food & Funds Drive is more than just an annual event; it's a celebration of unity and compassion that brings our fans and staff together to make a meaningful impact. Seeing the positive effects of our collective efforts is incredibly fulfilling and reinforces our commitment to helping those in need."

Tackling Hunger In Baltimore and Beyond since 1997

26 events, providing hundreds of thousands of meals by raising nearly \$1.8M

"We love the work the food bank does all year long. With inflation and the effects they've seen on food costs, it's really important and pivotal for us to partner with them and bring awareness to their efforts," said Kelly Tallant, Senior Manager of Community Relations for the Baltimore Ravens.



Resolving to Help Neighbors in Need

While deciding to join a gym, decluttering your garage, or putting reminders on your calendar to call your Mother more often are admirable New Years resolutions, why not try something a little different this time, and resolve to help your hungry neighbors feel the hope and promise of a new year.

1 in 3 of us will continue to face hunger in 2025, but with your thoughtful support, we can expand the presence of the Maryland Food Bank into more communities, and help more Marylanders thrive.

\$100

Means one Marylander won't have to face the tough choice of "Heating or Eating"

\$250

Brings the Neighbor Engagement Team to an event to provide SNAP assistance to hungry neighbors

\$500

Helps Maryland families account for the continuing high costs of food, services, and other goods

\$2,500

Supports a critical community resource by stocking a school pantry's shelves

\$5,000

Brings fresh & nutritious produce to an under-resourced community via Pantry on the Go

\$10,000

Fuels a FoodWorks students' culinary training journey to a good paying career

Strive to help more of your neighbors thrive in 2025 - reach out to Itolstoi@mdfoodbank.org today!



To support our mission of feeding people, strengthening communities, and ending hunger for more Marylanders, please visit mdfoodbank.org/donate

mdfoodbank.org



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