



Chair James P. McGovern  
Ranking Member Tom Cole  
House Committee on Rules  
The Capitol  
Washington DC 20515

**Re: Statement of Up 3 Us Foundation on Ending Hunger in America**

Dear Chairman McGovern, Ranking Member Cole and Distinguished Members of the House Committee on Rules:

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to your effort to seek solutions to the seemingly intractable problem of hunger in America. Up 2 Us Foundation is a young organization, launched just prior to the start of the worldwide pandemic, with the idea that by harnessing the power of community we can come together to make a difference in the lives of our neighbors. As a grassroots, community-based organization, we believe our story holds important lessons for national policymakers—local organizations like ours can make a significant impact with just a modest level of support. We are nimble, adaptable to changing circumstances, and able to leverage a wide network of diverse partnerships to expand our reach. Federal, state and local policymakers should nurture and support organizations like ours; just a small investment in infrastructure can empower us to touch many more lives than would be suggested by our organization size. In this statement, we offer our story and the words of our clients, partner organizations and volunteers to show what a small group of committed individuals can do when those around us are in need.

Up 2 Us, located in Montgomery County, Maryland, was founded by a mother-daughter team, Tazeen and Marium Ahmad, in the summer of 2019, with a mission of improving the quality of life, first by providing dependable access to nutritious food to families in need. Our first move was to join the Montgomery County Food Security

*"I just received food from your food bank. You are greatly appreciated and I just want to say thanks. Thank you thank you. If I can come up there and volunteer to help you sometime, just let me know. .... I'm between jobs. I worked in the restaurant world and am just struggling a little bit..."*  
Up 2 Us Client

Taskforce, which immediately linked us to a wealth of expertise and like-minded organizations that informed the launch of our programs. Through the Council, we were connected with our first client organization, a local elementary school in need of weekend food bags for the families of children in their summer program. While we were able to serve most of these families, to make sure all of the families' needs were met, we partnered with another, more established food provider that agreed to supplement our contributions. That fall, we were serving families of very

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How is it going? If I heard the door knock and when I opened I found the bag with food, thank you very much God bless me. I had no milk for my children and from heaven I received what was left in the bag, thank you very much

young children in a Head Start program and older students in a high school vocational program. All of this was made possible through a partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank which provided us with low- and no-cost food.

In 2020, we began applying for grants to expand the number of families we could serve through our weekend bag program. Then the pandemic hit, and everything changed. As schools closed their doors, we realized our service model needed to change. In this case, being small and nimble was an advantage. Rather than delivering food to schools, as we had been doing, Up 2 Us quickly pivoted and began to deliver groceries directly to families' homes. Word spread, and the demand for our home-delivery service grew exponentially. To meet the need, we assembled a strong team of volunteers—individuals who, because of the pandemic, had more time and flexibility, as well as a desire to help. Our new model was creative, but cumbersome: we would meet the food delivery trucks in a local parking lot, transfer our bulk food orders into a number of personal cars, and then, still working out of the founders' home, assemble grocery bags in their kitchen and dining room. Volunteers would then arrive, load their cars with bags, be given their delivery route and head out to make deliveries.

Thank you so much, there was a flood in my apartment in October...and I have \$21 in the bank. Thank you for your help! Have a Happy Thanksgiving!

In May 2020, through our participation in the Food Security Taskforce, we learned of an opportunity to organize drive-through mass distributions of fresh produce. Montgomery County had been allocated boxes of produce from the USDA's Farmers to Families program and we agreed to pass out as many boxes as we could. Partnering with the County school system and later with Montgomery College, we held a series of five Saturday drive-through produce give-aways, distributing 400-500 boxes of produce weighing 25 pounds each week. Cars lined up for

*"Shortly after Vida Senior Centers had to close on-site programs due to COVID-19 global crisis in March of 2020, the congregate meals, our seniors relied on for food security, stopped, the Up 2 Us Foundation decided to join our efforts and approached us with donations of fresh produce, fruits and vegetables for our seniors. This was particularly helpful in those early days of the pandemic, as we struggled to ensure that none of our low-income seniors had to go without access to healthy nutrition ingredients for them at home food preparations."*

Maria Teresa McPhail, MD,,Vida Senior Centers

miles to get food for their children and families, in stark testament to the dire need. We obtained additional produce through relationships we formed with other distributors participating in the Farmers to Families program which we gave to a range of community organizations who in turn fed their members, clients and constituents. We partnered with churches, mosques, senior centers, schools, and other organizations allocating 150 boxes

here, 300 boxes there—tailoring our deliveries to their needs. And of course, we provided large quantities of fresh produce to our own clients, to whom we were still making home deliveries of groceries.

Thank you very much for clarifying every concern everything makes sense Blessings of God pour for you from the Father above Have a nice evening ❤️❤️

***In all, through the summer and fall of 2020, we delivered over 33,000 boxes of produce through the USDA program —more than 850,000 pounds of produce directly to families at the height of the pandemic.*** We did all this in our first year of existence, made possible through hard work, kindness, and compassion for those in need as well as our dedicated partnerships.

Hi Ms Mariam Happy new year to you too Thank you very much we received the delivery God bless you abundantly !!❤️❤️

While we had been fundraising continuously since our inception, by the spring of 2020, the need for a larger investment in organizational infrastructure had become apparent. In 2020, we received both an emergency food security grant and a capacity

building grant from Montgomery County, totaling nearly \$100,000. These infusions allowed us to meet our basic needs and obtain permanent space so that we could continue to serve the community.

Due to our own fundraising and the generosity of others, we had grown too big and our operations too complex to continue using the founders’ personal residence as a base of operations. Hughes United Methodist Church in Wheaton, which hosts a community social service hub, kindly allowed Up 2 Us to use space in their basement to accept deliveries and organize our distributions, though we still lacked

*“Hughes United Methodist Church partnered with Up 2 Us Foundation back in 2020. We shared storage space and helped with food distribution. This foundation is very intentional in educating young people regarding the food crisis in the community. It is also wonderful to see the incredible engagement they have with young volunteers. The impact their organization does on the neighbors is impressive. During Covid-19 they have served thousands of vulnerable families.”*

Rev. Diana Wingeier-Rayo, Hughes United Methodist Church

storage capacity. That’s when we decided to reach out to the owners of Westfield Wheaton Mall, which we knew was struggling with a large volume of unused commercial space due to the impact of the pandemic on businesses. We were able to negotiate a low-cost lease, paying only the taxes and utilities, for space vacated by a restaurant. We purchased a van, which simplified our deliveries, a commercial-grade refrigerator and freezer and industrial-grade shelving to store dry goods. We moved into our new space on November 1, 2020.

*"The ACES and Up2Us Foundation partnership is extremely valuable in meeting the food security needs for our Scholars and their families. Through this collaboration, our families have access to healthy food, winter coats, and one-on-one assistance with completing SNAP application. These wrap around services from non-profit organizations make all the difference for our students as they pursue their academic and career goals."*

Kimberly Bloch-Rincan,  
Achieving Collegiate Excellence & Success

At last, we had adequate storage and cooling capacity, and a place for our clients to visit us. Those clients who were able began to pick up distributions from our new Wheaton Mall center, while we continued home deliveries for those not able to get out. This reduced our need for volunteer delivery people, at a time when many had gone back to work and were no longer available during the week. We raised funds to hold several special holiday distributions, both at our center and

through our partner community organizations. As students began returning to schools, we resumed our weekend food bag deliveries, through a program we now called Groceries Supporting Educational Success. In the summer of 2021, we added a partnership with Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) – a collaborative effort among Montgomery County Public Schools, Montgomery College and the Universities at Shady Grove, designed to provide at-risk high school students with a seamless and supportive pathway to a bachelor's degree. Under the partnership, and in recognition of the connection between educational success and food security, 69 families of ACES students have become Up 2 Us clients.

As pandemic emergency funding has dried up, we have used creative approaches to sustain our core programs under a reduced budget. In the fall of 2021, for example, we reorganized our distribution model by consolidating distributions into twice-monthly events rather than pickups and deliveries by appointment throughout the week. This model has allowed us to make even more efficient use of our volunteer time and provide additional services to our clients, such as help signing up for SNAP benefits.

Thank you, I'm blessed by your kindness! It's truly comforting in a crisis to be able to count on your help! Happy Thanksgiving!

Thank you very much for your generous gift We received two bags of grocery along with 20 dollar gift card God bless you and Have a Happy Thanksgiving !!!Lots of Love



We have also been able to leverage partnerships to stretch our budget for food further. No longer receiving produce boxes through the Farmers to Families program, we have obtained a series of grants from the Capital Area Food Bank in the form of credits for food purchases. In addition, Montgomery County

has provided us with a weekly allocation of fresh produce. We fill in the gaps through our own purchases to ensure we provide our clients with well-balanced, nutritious and culturally appropriate food packages to meet their needs. We also listen to client feedback and adjust `the

contents of our food bags accordingly. For example, we have eliminated canned food, incorporating as much fresh produce as we have access to, and providing staples and the components of basic, nutritious meals. ***Our food bags, assembled on a shoestring budget, are now quite substantial, including fresh produce, dry goods and, more recently, protein such as chicken and holiday turkeys.***

Despite the belt-tightening, we remain committed to preserving flexibility to address emerging needs quickly and efficiently. As Afghan refugees began pouring into the country and into Montgomery County, for instance, we again sought to form partnerships to do our part. We connected with Nourishing Bethesda, an initiative of St. John's Norwood Episcopal Church in Chevy Chase Maryland, which was providing food for Afghan refugee families temporarily housed in local hotels. We also met directly with many of the refugee families and heard their appreciation for the food they were receiving, but we noticed that many lamented a lack of access to culturally important foods such as halal meat and Afghan naan. We saw a niche to fill. Within less than a month, we identified suppliers of these foods and are now filling that gap, adding the meat and bread to the weekly food distributions organized by Nourishing Bethesda.

*"Up2US Foundation provides halal chicken and freshly baked Afghan bread to Nourishing Bethesda's weekly food distribution for over 100 Afghan refugees temporarily housed in local hotels. Their warmth of caring, plus their culturally appropriate contributions, bring joy and community to our new neighbors."*

The Rev. Anne E. Derse,  
St. John's Norwood Episcopal Church

Our future goals include partnering with a local community health center to provide healthy meals for pregnant and postpartum women, and addressing the needs of formerly incarcerated individuals, particularly women.

*"I have volunteered for Up 2 Us, delivering food to our neighbors in Bethesda and Aspen Hill. One of my food drops, to my utter surprise, was for a beloved [former school system] employee whom my children and I adored ... I was shocked!"*

Up 2 Us Volunteer

Our story suggests several important lessons for policy-making that aims to end hunger in America. Small, locally focused and volunteer-supported grassroots organizations can be extremely impactful with relatively modest investment. A key advantage of organizations like Up 2 Us is their ability to identify new or changing needs and adapt quickly to address them. Our experience also suggests it is possible to have more impact with fewer resources by *working with*, rather than separate from, other like-minded organizations. By building connections among non-profits and local government agencies, facilitating the sharing of expertise, and tapping into unused resources (such as empty mall space), we can build a more efficient and coordinated system of support that can serve the whole person and then the community, not

just a series of isolated needs. Food security fuels better health supporting educational success promoting economic security contributing to a thriving community and a stronger nation. Up 2 Us is committed to improving the quality of the life of our community and its members. We are proud to be included in this bipartisan effort to end hunger in America.

Respectfully submitted,  
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Thank you! Such beautiful groceries  
on such a lovely day! ❤️

