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Are you submitting a story or a solution: Story

Do we have permission to share your story: yes

Story:

My name is Camila Pinares, and I am currently a student at Montgomery College pursuing a degree in Nursing. I am also a single mom of a one-year-old. Since 2020, I have been on the Montgomery County Food Council's Food Security Community Advisory Board, where I lend my perspectives and lived experience with food insecurity to help develop policies and action items that guide the implementation of the County's Food Security Plan. My community engagement focuses on increasing access to federal benefits such as SNAP and Temporary Cash Assistance. During the 2021 Legislative session, I testified in support of Maryland's Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program. I've volunteered for Maryland Hunger Solutions and the Montgomery County Food Access Call Center, where I helped Montgomery County residents apply for SNAP and rental assistance. My Facebook page, @camilaayuda, helps connect residents with resources in the community. I have helped over 1,000 Montgomery County residents in accessing food assistance resources. I have seen first-hand the challenges that residents face in applying for SNAP benefits, including the application itself, which can take over 30 minutes to complete and requires them to answer many questions that do not apply to most residents. Simplifying the application process for SNAP for most residents would greatly help them in accessing this benefit. Many residents are confused about the type of documents needed for the SNAP application, so clearer and more specific information about the type of documentation needed for SNAP applications is needed. Many Montgomery County residents seeking assistance with SNAP applications are Spanish-speaking, and therefore there needs to be more Spanish-speaking SNAP assistance providers to help them. For SNAP and other food assistance resources, there needs to be more community outreach in low-income zones, such

as Takoma Park, Aspen Hill and Wheaton. Montgomery County should work closely with its non-profit organizations to provide resources to these communities.