

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 23, 2025

Media Contact:

Lisa M. de Hernández
Director of Communications & Public
Information
410.313.6353
ldehernandez@howardcountymd.gov
hchdcommunications@howardcountymd.gov

Health Department and Local Health Improvement Coalition to Launch Food Council to Combat Food Insecurity

Columbia, MD - Howard County is facing a significant challenge with food insecurity. According to the 2021 Howard County Health Assessment Survey, nearly one in six residents experience food insecurity and almost one in four express concerns about affording essential expenses like rent, mortgage, or food. This alarming trend has worsened, with the proportion of individuals facing food insecurity increasing from 6.4% in 2017 to 9.7% in 2022.

To address this growing issue, the Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition (HCLHIC), under the Howard County Health Department, secured a \$225,000 grant from CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield in response to their Place-Based Strategies: Diabetes Request for Proposals to establish the Howard County Food Council. This initiative aims to tackle food insecurity holistically by enhancing the local food system through policy solutions and coordination of existing resources and providers to improve efficiency and ensure access.

"The establishment of the Howard County Food Council represents a crucial step in addressing the root causes of food insecurity," said Antigone Vickery, Deputy Health Officer of the Health Department. "By bringing together diverse partners, we can create sustainable solutions that ensure every resident has access to nutritious food."

The Food Council will focus on reducing food insecurity through various strategies and will build on the work of the HCLHIC's Food Security Committee and recommendations from the Howard County Food & Nutrition Security Roundtable Report. Additionally, the Council will work to enhance coordination among the numerous partner agencies within the County, leading to improvement in long-term health outcomes, specifically related to the occurrence of diabetes and other chronic health conditions.

"How we nourish our bodies plays a vital role in improving our long-term health and wellness. I remain dedicated to our residents having access to high quality, nutritious food," said Howard County Executive Calvin Ball. "We have many outstanding community partners who do meaningful work in the area of providing food. This Council will create a more efficient system to make sure those who are food insecure are able to meet their needs and the needs of their families."

Housed within the Howard County Office of the University of Maryland Extension (UME), the Food Council will benefit from UME's infrastructure and expertise in nutrition education, sustainable practices and food system improvement.

January 2025

Page two

Health Department and Local Health Improvement Coalition to Launch Food Council to Combat Food Insecurity

"The University of Maryland Extension in Howard County is thrilled to support the formation of a local Food Council and looks forward to working with the HCLHIC and the Health Department as lead subject matter expert and coordinator," said Lynn Rubin Traversa, Area Extension director for Maryland's Central Cluster. "Our expertise in nutrition education, agribusiness, gardening, environmental and natural resource preservation, and more will be invaluable assets to the council. We believe this partnership will be instrumental in driving transformative change to improve food security and strengthen our local food system for all."

The grant funding will support the hiring of a Food Council Coordinator responsible for establishing priorities, developing an organizational structure, and creating and implementing an action plan. Importantly, individuals experiencing food insecurity will actively contribute to shaping the action plan to ensure it addresses their needs.

Through this collaborative effort, Howard County aims to reverse the troubling trend of food insecurity and improve health outcomes for all residents.

To learn more about the Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/health/local-health-improvement-coalition or go to their website at www.hclhic.org.

###