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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

April 30, 2021

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The Honorable David E. Price
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Price and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) Transportation-Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations bill, I write to respectfully request Community Project Funding for **Seeds for Service**, a faith-based community outreach center which provides food, clothing and other humanitarian assistance to thousands of households across three counties in central New Jersey.

Prior to the pandemic, Seeds of Service (SOS) assisted approximately 1,000 households through multiple aid programs including open choice free food selection, a thrift shop of household items and clothing, mental health and addiction case management services, and resume and financial advising. In the last 13 months during COVID, the need has expanded dramatically with SOS now serving nearly four times as many households (4,000) in 2020. Ironically, in order to comply with the pandemic's social distancing restrictions, the SOS programs have been curtailed to just five. Thankfully the food program continues because without it, families across Ocean, Monmouth, and Burlington counties in New Jersey would NOT have been able to put food on their tables.

To meet the expanding demand and healthy stream of donations from local grocers and restaurants, SOS is looking to make minor structural and electrical upgrades to enhance access and use of their limited space. The total amount of funding needed for this life-changing Community Project from the Economic Development Initiatives account is relatively modest: \$60,580. Upon receiving this funding, Seeds of Service could immediately upgrade an inferior electrical system (\$25,580) and begin work with a general contractor to reconfigure their space (\$35,000) to accommodate more clients, especially in a socially distant manner.

One program they are anxious to restore is the open-choice food pantry that allowed families to go through the aisle and select their own foods, which not only reduces food waste but helps sustain the families' sense of independence and dignity. Due to social distancing

requirements, SOS had to close their open-choice pantry and transition to pre-packed bags that are carried outside and loaded into the family's vehicle.

In order to reopen their open-choice pantry, SOS must remove non-load-bearing walls to reconfigure the layout of their space to create additional shelving for non-perishable food items, designate a staging area for bagging and ultimately open the space up enough to allow four families into the pantry to choose their food. To accommodate daily donations of perishable foods from local grocers, SOS added additional commercial size refrigerators and freezers which requires an upgrade of their electrical system. A new electrical system, plus the reconfiguration of their space, will also permit SOS to restart other essential programs they offer including addiction and emergency counseling, a warming center for the homeless during cold weather, and their partnership with two local high schools that buses disabled and at-risk students to SOS for academic credit.

SOS is widely supported by local elected and government officials including the Mayor of Brick Township, the Ocean County Board of Commissioners, and the Ocean County Office of Senior Services. In 2020, SOS' Executive Director Christie Winters was awarded a Brick Hero Award, and their work during the pandemic has been recognized by the state-wide magazine New Jersey Monthly.

Thank you in advance for your full and fair consideration of my request for Community Project Funding for Seeds of Service. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with me or my staff should you have any questions regarding this request.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress