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**HB 269**

January 15, 2021

**TO:** Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

**FROM:** Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations

**RE:** HOUSE BILL 269 – Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grant Program

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 269.

HB 269 creates an Urban Agriculture Grant Program within the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and a companion Urban Agriculture Grant Fund to support the program. The Fund is capitalized through mandated \$400,000 appropriations for each fiscal year from FY-2023 through FY-2026.

Innovative urban agriculture models are thriving in Baltimore City on many scales. There are more than 100 community and school gardens, as well as more than 20 urban farms. Through urban agriculture, Baltimoreans are taking charge of local food production, increasing their connection to the source of their food and creating jobs—especially for those returning from incarceration, with limited language proficiency, or otherwise facing barriers in the traditional workforce. Urban farming and gardening create holistic benefits for the community through nutrition education, natural ecosystem enhancement, and increased neighborhood vitality. Strong progressive organizations like the Farm Alliance of Baltimore, Strength to Love II, Real Food Farm, and others work to support these urban producers.

Baltimore City has been a national leader in urban agriculture policy, creating one of the country's first city-level Urban Agriculture Plans in 2013. The 2019 Baltimore City Sustainability Plan builds on the initial strategies in its Urban Agriculture chapter, with a focus on long-term access to land, especially for historically disinvested communities. The proposed Urban Agriculture Grant Program would make significant impacts in implementing these strategies.

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The funding for this grant program would provide much needed resources to a well established, but underfunded, movement and is critical to build equitable urban agriculture in Baltimore City.

Accordingly, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on House Bill 269.