

Support of SB 942 - Agriculture - Urban Agricultur

Uploaded by: Colby Ferguson

Position: FAV



Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

3358 Davidsonville Road • Davidsonville, MD 21035 • (410) 922-3426

March 15, 2022

To: Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: Support of SB 942 – Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund - Establishment

On behalf of our member families, I submit this written testimony in support of SB 942. This bill establishes the Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program in the Department of Agriculture to increase the viability of urban farming and community gardens and improve access to urban-grown foods. The Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Fund as a special, nonlapsing fund that is funded through the Program Open Space payback money. The program is to be funded for four years starting in FY24 at \$500,000 per year.

Over the years, several urban farmers have found that trying to farm vacant lots in urban areas have had issues with getting water and power to the property. This statewide bill would offer grant funds to assist with the cost of purchasing and installing water and power infrastructure needed to farm the property. In addition to equipment, the fund can be used to cover local/county permits needed to install the water or power infrastructure.

Maryland Farm Bureau Policy: We support and encourage urban farming/agriculture. We support grant programs to provide infrastructure for urban farms.

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS SB 942 AND ENCOURAGES A FAVORABLE REPORT.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colby Ferguson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Colby Ferguson
Director of Government Relations

For more information contact Colby Ferguson at (240) 578-0396

Michaelides.SB942.Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Geena Michaelides

Position: FAV

March 15, 2022

The Honorable Senator Paul G. Pinsky
Chair, Senate Education, Health &
Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West Senate Miller Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**SB 942 Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program
and Fund- Establishment**

Dear Chair Pinsky:

I writing to ask you to vote in favor of SB942 Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund- Establishment

I ask for your support for this bill for three reasons. The first reason being that the purpose of this bill is to increase the viability of urban farming and community gardens to improve access to urban-grown foods. This is important because food deserts disproportionately impact urban cities in Maryland. The bill would establish the grant program within the Maryland Department of Agriculture and the grant itself would cover equipment costs associated with water supply and irrigation, as well as electric power access.

The second reason is because agriculture has been declining over the years, and the costs associated with farming is a large reason why. The grant established in the bill will cover 87.5% of the costs associated with the installation of the farming equipment. This includes water meters, water pipes, irrigation hoses, electric meters, and electrical lines. In doing so, farmers would be incentivized to farm in urban areas, decreasing the amount of food deserts in Maryland.

The last reason I ask you to vote favorably for this bill is because grants similar to this one have been provided in the past and are proven to work. In 2014, MARBIDCO established the Maryland Urban Agriculture Commercial Lending Incentive Grant. SB942 will give urban agricultural producers the tools they need to succeed in urban farm settings. An “urban agricultural producer” is someone who annually sells or would have sold at least \$1,000 worth of farm products in an urban area of Maryland. Some of the farm products include fresh vegetables and fruits, livestock, nuts, honey, and wool. Just about anything grown or raised on a farm or garden in an urban area Maryland counts.

Once again, I ask you to vote in support of SB942.

Sincerely,

Geena Michaelides

Geena Michaelides

Heidarian_Fair_Farms_SB_942_Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Humon Heidarian

Position: FAV



March 14, 2021
The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
91 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1904

**SB 942- Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program
and Fund - Establishment**
Senator Melony Ghee Griffith
Position: Favorable

Dear Chairman Pinsky,

The Fair Farms Campaign asks for a favorable report of this bill. Fair Farms is a program of Waterkeepers Chesapeake which works with local farmers that grow sustainably to create policies that would benefit them. We are a campaign with over 150 partners, including farmers, urban and rural, advocates, and business owners.

Water and electric power are two important resources for urban farmers. Unfortunately, there are high barriers to accessing these resources like expensive permit fees and installation costs. This bill will ease the financial burden for many farmers who may not have access to the capital they need. Without water and power, urban farms can not grow healthy food. Without healthy food, urban areas impacted by food apartheid, such as communities in Baltimore City will continue to exist. This bill will help promote urban farming as a viable business model and safeguard the livelihoods of urban farmers.

We respectfully ask for a favorable report on SB 942. Thank you to Senator Griffith, her office, and the other stakeholders who drafted this legislation. We hope to work with the Senator on issues related to agriculture and food equity in the future.

Sincerely,

Humon Heidarian
humon@fairfarmsnow.org
Campaign Manager, Fair Farms
Waterkeepers Chesapeake



SB 942 - Farm Credit - Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Kurt Fuchs

Position: FAV



March 15, 2022

To: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

From: MidAtlantic Farm Credit

Bill: SB 942 – Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund - Establishment

Position: **SUPPORT**

MidAtlantic Farm Credit is a member-owned cooperative supporting rural communities and agriculture with reliable, consistent credit and financial services in good times and bad. Headquartered in Westminster, MD, we are one of the largest agricultural lenders on the East Coast with over \$3.1 billion dollars in loans outstanding to over 12,000 member-owners representing the full range of agriculture throughout our five-state territory.

This bill would create the Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program within the Maryland Department of Agriculture to help support for-profit and non-profit urban ag operations across the State. The program will provide up to 87.5% cost-share funding to qualified applicants for the installation of equipment associated with irrigation, water supply, and electric power access.

The bill calls for the program to be funded at \$500,000 per year in a non-lapsing fund beginning in FY2024 and continuing through FY2027 with the ultimate intent of the program to increase the viability of urban farming and community gardens and improve access to urban-grown foods.

Whether a for-profit venture or a non-profit organization seeking to supplement the local church food pantry, urban agricultural producers require much of the same infrastructure needs as their rural brethren – perhaps on a different scale and scope – but nevertheless critical to the operation’s success. This cost-share program will help defray some of the unique infrastructure costs faced by this dynamic and growing sector of Maryland agriculture.

Whether it’s irrigation lines in a hoop house growing vegetables and leafy greens, the running of electric lines to power cold storage, or installing electric or water meters at new access points on vacant lots, each project means the potential for a more viable operation and a better chance at a plentiful harvest. And of course, investments in these operations often means long-lasting improvements that can increase access to fresh food, strengthen the community, and enhance quality of life for its residents.

MidAtlantic Farm Credit SUPPORTS SB 942.

For more information, please contact Kurt Fuchs at 443-786-0855 or kfuchs@mafc.com.

SB942FABfavorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Mariya Strauss

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 0942: Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund - Establishment

DATE: March 15, 2022

POSITION: Favorable

The Farm Alliance of Baltimore SUPPORTS Senate Bill 0942, which establishes and sets forth funding and structural requirements for an Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund.

The Farm Alliance of Baltimore is a membership organization of urban farms, neighborhood growers, and friends. We use connection, resource sharing, and collective advocacy with respect to food, land and water to expand communities' self-determination and power.

The Farm Alliance of Baltimore represents 18 urban farms and 12 community gardens throughout the city, comprising over 90 people who are actively engaged in urban agriculture. These are small but mighty farms, growing food, cut flowers, and fibers for their communities and farmers markets and achieving economic viability despite their small size.

Of the many financial barriers to our member farms' ability to sustain and grow their businesses, access to affordable water and power infrastructure is one of the biggest. The state of Maryland has an opportunity to become a nationwide leader in supporting the growth of the ecosystem of sustainable urban agricultural operations by removing this barrier. Water for irrigation and electricity for on-site cooling for cold-chain preservation of crops are key to any farm's sustainability, and urban farms are no exception to this. Our member farms have shown incredible resilience and innovation in pooling their resources to form the Farm Alliance of Baltimore, which provides some assistance with infrastructure costs. In 2021, through fundraising from private philanthropy, we were able to provide direct cost share assistance to farms needing water and power installations, and the federal government provided additional cost sharing. No such aid was available from the state of Maryland. With this bill, that will change. Therefore, we are in support of this Senate Bill 0942 from Senators Griffith and Hayes, and we urge the committee to take a FAVORABLE position and advance this legislation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mariya Strauss".

Mariya Strauss, Co-Executive Director
Farm Alliance of Baltimore
mariya@farmalliancebaltimore.org

SB 942 - MoCo_Wenger_FAV (GA 22).pdf

Uploaded by: Melanie Wenger

Position: FAV



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

ROCKVILLE: 240-777-6550

ANNAPOLIS: 240-777-8270

SB 942

DATE: March 15, 2022

SPONSOR: Senators Griffith and Hayes

ASSIGNED TO: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

CONTACT PERSON: Melanie Wenger (melanie.wenger@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: Support

Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund – Establishment

Senate Bill 942, *Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund – Establishment*, creates a program in the Department of Agriculture to provide grants to urban agricultural producers and nonprofit organizations for the purpose of purchasing and installing water supply and irrigation equipment. The bill also requires the submission of a report that assesses the program's effectiveness and mandates an annual State appropriation of \$500,000 from fiscal 2024 through 2027.

The purpose of the bill is to increase the viability of urban farming and community gardens, which, in turn should improve access to fresh food. This is a goal well worth pursuing, for a number of reasons. From small vacant lots to rooftops, alleyways, and parks to urban open spaces, opportunities exist in almost every community to create gardens that feed people, teach the importance of agriculture, improve nutrition, and enhance community life. Along with providing a much-needed source of healthy, locally-grown food, urban gardens provide a wide range of benefits, including soil, air, and water quality improvements, stormwater management, increased property values and aesthetics, and education and recreational opportunities for communities and schools.

The Montgomery County Office of Agriculture supports this legislation. In order to farm, you must have access to water and access to electricity, whether it be in a rural or urban setting. However, urban settings can present some unique obstacles which this bill could help address. Overall, the additional urban farming support that would be enabled by the enactment of Senate Bill 942 would be welcome and could help counties like Montgomery meet their goals to increase urban farming activity and to reduce food insecurity. Accordingly, the Office requests the Committee to act favorably on this legislation.

SenGriffith_SB942_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Melony Griffith

Position: FAV

MELONY G. GRIFFITH
Legislative District 25
Prince George's County

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

Budget and Taxation Committee



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 220
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
301-858-3127 · 410-841-3127
800-492-7122 Ext. 3127
Melony.Griffith@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Melony G. Griffith in Support of Senate Bill 942
Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and
Fund - Establishment
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Tuesday, March 15, 2022

Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagen, and members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

I am pleased to introduce Senate Bill 942. Providing the tools to encourage and empower Marylanders to produce and choose nutritional foods is a priority. SB 942 addresses this challenge through the creation and implementation of the urban agriculture water and power infrastructure grant fund for urban agricultural producers and qualified nonprofit organizations for the purchase and installation of equipment associated with water supply and irrigation, in addition to electric power access. In turn, this will provide our urban communities with the resources needed to eliminate barriers to accessing urban-grown foods.

Senate Bill 942 will:

- **Increase** the viability of urban farming and community gardens to improve access to urban-grown foods.
- **Establish** a grant that provides 87.5% of matching funds to urban agricultural producers and qualified nonprofits.
- **Provide** grants to commercial urban agricultural producers and qualified nonprofit organizations to help purchase and install water meters, water pipes and irrigation hoses, electric meters, and electric lines.
- **Require** annual reporting beginning October 15, 2024 to the Governor, the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, and the House Appropriations Committee on the effectiveness of the funding provided under the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to present Senate Bill 942, I respectfully request a favorable report.

SB0942f Neith Little written testimony on letterhe

Uploaded by: Neith Little

Position: FAV

Testimony before the Maryland Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Committee
SB 942 Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant 2
Program and Fund – Establishment
Favorable

Dear Mister Chairman and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

Thank you for considering the important issue of expanding support for urban agriculture. I am writing to share my experiences providing technical assistance to urban farmers, on the topic of accessing water and energy. Farmers in urban areas face unique challenges and expenses related to accessing the water and energy they need to successfully grow and market food and other agricultural products.

Water access challenges and expenses:

Many urban farms are located on vacant lots where buildings have been torn down. In many cases, during the building demolition process the water meter was also demolished and the pipe capped and re-buried. This results in many farmers either snaking hoses long distances from the nearest water access point, or if no water access is available, hauling water in heavy totes or relying entirely on rainwater. None of these are sustainable options in the long-term, because fresh vegetables and other specialty crops requires reliable access to potable water for irrigation and post-harvest washing.

One Baltimore City farm, The Greener Garden, belonging to Mr. Warren Blue and Mrs. Lavette Blue, received a cost-share grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to install efficient drip irrigation in eight high tunnels (temporary greenhouses). However, installing a water meter to feed the drip irrigation required tearing up the street to lay pipe to the city water main, which cost an additional \$9,000, and which was a category of cost which was not eligible to be covered by the USDA-NRCS grant. This held up completion of the drip irrigation grant for over a year, and almost resulted in the grant being rescinded. In the end, the farmers were only able to pay to have the water main installed due to a crowd-funding campaign organized by Atiya Wells, the leader of BLISS Meadows urban farm.

The Farm Alliance of Baltimore is in the process of developing a teaching farm on city parkland. They are in the beginning stages of hiring a contractor to install a water meter for the farm, and have been quoted \$40,000 as the cost.

Energy access challenges:

A third Baltimore City Farm, Real Food Farm, is located on the grounds of a vacant high school building. Last month the high school building lost electricity, which cut off electricity access for the farm. Because the building through which they access electricity is vacant, this has complicated solving the issue. In the meantime, they are paying for a

generator to keep their vegetable walk-in cooler running. Baltimore Gas and Electric's SEED program is likely to provide some financial help with reconnecting the electricity, but Real Food Farm still needs to pay an electrician \$5,500 and is spending roughly 10 hours of staff time per week on the problem.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge a favorable report on SB0942

Sincerely,



Neith Little
Urban Agriculture Extension Educator
University of Maryland Extension, Baltimore City Office

References

Little, N. G., McCoy, T., Wang, C., & Dill, S. P. (2019). Results of a needs assessment of urban farmers in Maryland. *Journal of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents*, 12(1), 1–8. <https://www.nacaa.com/journal/452eeb58-36c3-44ac-978d-f2999c49ddb9>

Little, N. (2021). What is urban agriculture? University of Maryland Extension Factsheet 1169 <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/what-urban-agriculture>

Richardson, M., Thompson, M.J., Carson, A.D., Taylor, J.R., Rangarajan, A. VanVranken, R., Hanumappa, M. Little, N.G. (unpublished data) A profile of urban agricultural growers, organizations, their needs, and differences based on profit status in the northeastern United States.

SB 942 CBF SUPPORT.pdf

Uploaded by: Robin Jessica Clark

Position: FAV



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

Senate Bill 942

Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund – Establishment

Date: March 15, 2022

Position: Support

To: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs and
Budget and Taxation

From: Robin Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SB 942, which establishes the Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program in the Department of Agriculture to increase the viability of urban farming and community gardens and improve access to urban-grown foods; through grants to urban agricultural producers and qualified nonprofit organizations for the purchase and installation of agricultural equipment associated with water supply and irrigation and electric power access.

SB 942 recognizes the potential of urban agriculture and the needs of the movement at this moment.

Small, urban and suburban farms can strengthen communities, create business opportunities, and address gaps in access to healthy foods throughout Maryland, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with food transport, and creating green spaces that can filter polluted air and water. In speaking with urban farmers and urban farm service providers, one challenge in start-up is the economic hurdle of establishing water irrigation and metering at a potential farm site. This bill seeks to address that hurdle through grants to farmers and farm service providers.

Urban agriculture may improve equity and access to healthy food.

This bill may increase equity and access for low income and communities of color, especially for those communities with a lack of access to healthy, fresh, local food sources. Supporting locally grown food from sustainable farms is integral to CBF's mission to Save the Bay. CBF supports local food purchases through its [Buy Fresh Buy Local Chesapeake](#) program which helps consumers, sustainable farms, and businesses find each other and support efforts to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay. CBF's Clagett Farm supports access to food for vulnerable populations in Maryland through *From the Ground Up*, a program that for more than 40 years has provided fresh produce to people living in poverty and near-poverty in the Washington, D.C. area.¹ The proposed grant program can increase access to fresh food among those who need it most.

Local, regenerative food production may reduce pollution into the Chesapeake Bay.

The agriculture sector accounts for nearly one third of global greenhouse gas emissions and is the largest source of non-point pollution entering the Chesapeake Bay. This legislation is a complement to other stateside and local efforts to support a growing trend of small, regenerative, urban and suburban farms that provide fresh fruit and produce to Marylanders. The use of property within City centers, town and suburban

¹ [Social Justice Grows on Clagett Farm](#), Chesapeake Bay Foundation, last visited 1.14.2022.

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403
Phone (410) 268-8816 • Fax (410) 280-3513

developments for sustainable agriculture may help improve local water quality and reduce runoff into the Chesapeake Bay. If successful, the continued investments of residents in local food providers may help grow a greenprint of sustainable agriculture plots throughout Maryland's developed areas.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 942. For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753.

SB 942 Testimony MARBIDCO.pdf

Uploaded by: Steve McHenry

Position: FAV



MARBIDCO
growing rural ventures™

MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL AND RESOURCE-BASED
INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
1410 Forest Drive, Suite 21 ~ Annapolis, MD 21403
Office: 410-267-6807 ~ Fax: 410-267-6809
www.marbidco.org

Mary Shank Creek, *Chair* / Stephen R. McHenry, *Executive Director*

TESTIMONY STATEMENT

BILL: Senate Bill 942 (Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund - Establishment)

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

DATE: March 14, 2022

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) supports House Bill 855, which establishes the Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program in the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). The purpose of the grant program is to increase the viability of urban farming and local community food production. Senate Bill 942 requires that the Governor include an appropriation of \$500,000 for four years (starting in FY 2024) to the Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Fund.

MARBIDCO has been co-leading in recent months efforts to develop supportive urban agriculture policy recommendations and has helped to facilitate several meetings with a variety of stakeholders from across Maryland including the participation of urban farmers and agricultural service providers from State and local government agencies, University of Maryland Extension, Farm Credit, and county soil conservation districts. Creating an Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Fund was one of the recommendations that came out of these efforts.

Bill Summary

A significant barrier for urban farms and community gardens is obtaining access to electrical power and water for irrigation and the costs associated with accessing them. To address this issue, SB 942 establishes the Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Grant Fund. The purpose in the bill is to increase the viability of urban farming and community gardens and to improve access to urban-grown foods. The Fund may be used to provide matching grants of up to 87.5% to urban agricultural producers and qualified non-profit organizations for the purchase and installation of: water meters, water pipes, irrigation hoses, electric meters, electrical lines or any other equipment associated with water supply and irrigation or electric power access, as determined by MDA. The bill requires a \$500,000 appropriation to MDA in fiscal years 2024, 2025, 2026 and 2027. MDA may retain some of the funding the costs of administering the program.

Additional Background Information

MARBIDCO supports the growth of commercial urban farming in Maryland because it helps to create employment and preserve green space within developed areas, and it can provide access to fresh food to residents that live in Healthy Food Priority Areas (formally called food deserts). According to a recent study, 146,000 Baltimore City residents (23.5%) live in Healthy Food Priority Areas. Children and black

residents are also disproportionately affected. According to the report, children are the most likely of any age group to live in a Healthy Food Priority Area (28.3%) and black residents are the most likely of any racial or ethnic group to live in a Healthy Food Priority Area (31.5%).¹ Urban farming can provide another access point for healthy fresh food, as urban farmers often sell their products in the local community. Urban farms may also provide other community benefits such as education and job training opportunities. And these farms can sometimes become the community focal point of a neighborhood.

Related to the issue of farm water access in urban areas, MARBIDCO provided a \$10,000 grant last year to Baltimore City (matching grants from MidAtlantic Farm Credit and the Maryland Farm Bureau) to be used in City's "urban agricultural irrigation fund" to facilitate water access for food-producing community gardens and farms in Baltimore City, via the installation of new water meters and water lines.

In addition, MARBIDCO has supported commercial urban farming through some of its existing loan and grant programs. MARBIDCO offers the Maryland Urban Agriculture Commercial Lending Incentive Grant Program, which provides a grant incentive up to \$10,000 to encourage urban farmers to seek commercial lender financing for the development or expansion of their agricultural enterprises. The grant can provide the equity capital needed to qualify for the loan through the commercial lender.

MARBIDCO also offers grants of \$1,000 to any small farmer that completes Level 2 or Level 3 of Future Harvest's Beginner Farmer Training Program (this includes urban farmers). This summer MARBIDCO will be providing matching grants of up to \$1,000 for cold storage equipment purchases, with 30% of the available funding set aside specifically for urban farmers. MARBIDCO has also financed a farm real estate purchase in Baltimore City (with a secured loan partnering with a commercial lender) and is currently working on the development of an urban ag land assess program working with local land trusts.

In conclusion

MARBIDCO strongly supports the growth of commercial urban farming in Maryland and is tailoring existing and new programs to help facilitate this. Urban agriculture offers increased access to fresh and culturally appropriate food while also creating job (and sometimes educational) opportunities and helping to support local economies. Urban agriculture also helps to preserve greenspaces in urban areas which is good for the quality of life and reduces the distance food must travel. Senate Bill 942 supports the growth of urban agriculture by providing grant funds to urban farmers and nonprofit organizations to lower the costs of installing water and power infrastructure needed to operate urban farms and community gardens.

As such, MARBIDCO respectfully requests a Favorable Report for Senate Bill 942.

MARBIDCO Contact: Steve McHenry, 410.267.6807

MARBIDCO was established by the Maryland General Assembly 15 years ago to help enhance the sustainability and profitability of the State's agricultural and resource-based industries to help bolster rural economies, support locally produced food and fiber products, and preserve working farm and forest land. MARBIDCO is a nimble, quasi-public financial intermediary organization which has a mission to serve exclusively the commercial farming, forestry, and seafood industries of Maryland. Assisting young and beginning farmers are a special focus for MARBIDCO, as is farm operation diversification (through value added processing activities). Commercial urban farming has also become a focus of MARBIDCO's efforts.

In delivering its financing programs, MARBIDCO works cooperatively with commercial banks and farm credit associations, as well as a host of federal, State, regional and local government agencies, and universities. Since 2007, MARBIDCO has approved 1064 financings totaling \$80.2 million for food and fiber business projects located in of all Maryland's counties (including Baltimore City) – and in the process has leveraged \$170 million in commercial lender financing. For more information about MARBIDCO's programs, please visit: www.marbidco.org.

¹ [*Report: 'Food Desert' Gets a Name Change in Response to Baltimore Community Feedback*](#), Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, January 17, 2018.

SB0942_FAV_MD Food System Resiliency Council.pdf

Uploaded by: Steve McHenry

Position: FAV

March 14, 2022

**2022 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
SB 942: Agriculture-Urban Agriculture
Water and Power Infrastructure Grant
Program and Fund-Establishment**

COMMITTEE: **SB 942: Agriculture-Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund-Establishment**
POSITION: **Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs**
Testimony of Support of Senate Bill 942

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record in support of Senate Bill 942.

This letter is submitted by Stephen R. McHenry, Executive Director of the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) and member of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (MD FSRC) and Heather Bruskin, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC), Co-Chair of the MD FSRC. These comments are submitted on behalf of the Council, and do not necessarily represent the views of MARBIDCO, MCFC, or the State of Maryland. The Food System Resiliency Council was established by the Maryland General Assembly during the 2021 legislative session to bring together 33 appointed council members from across the state, all with different points of entry and expertise to work toward a more resilient food system and address the food insecurity crisis due to COVID-19.

One of the key mandates of this Council was to develop, by Nov. 1st, 2021, equity, and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of Maryland's food system.

One way this can be achieved is by supporting and promoting urban agriculture. A significant barrier for urban farms and gardens is access to electrical power and water for irrigation and the costs associated with accessing them. To address this issue, SB 942 establishes the Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Grant Fund. The stated purpose in the bill is to increase the viability of urban farming and community gardens and to improve access to urban-grown foods. The fund may be used to provide matching grants of up to 87.5% to urban agricultural producers and qualified non-profit organizations for the purchase and installation of: water meters, water pipes, irrigation hoses, electric meters, electrical lines or any other equipment associated with water supply and irrigation or electric power access, as determined by MDA. The bill requires a \$500,000 appropriation in fiscal years 2024, 2025, 2026 and 2027.

Supporting the growth of urban farming in Maryland by reducing some of the cost barriers offers residents increased access to healthy, fresh, culturally appropriate food while also creating job opportunities and helping to support local economies. According to a recent study, 146,000 Baltimore City residents (23.5%) live in Healthy Food Priority Areas. Children and black residents are also disproportionately affected. According to the report, children are the most likely of any age group to live in a Healthy Food Priority Area (28.3%) and black residents are the most likely of any racial or ethnic

group to live in a Healthy Food Priority Area (31.5%).¹ Urban farming can provide another access point for healthy fresh food, as urban farmers often sell their product in the local community.

Urban farms also may provide community benefits such as education and job training opportunities. And they can be the community focal point of a neighborhood. Urban agriculture also helps to preserve greenspaces in urban areas which is good for the quality of life and reduces the distance food must travel. House Bill 855 supports the growth of urban agriculture by providing grant funds to urban farmers and non-profits to lower the costs of water and power infrastructure needed to operate urban farms and community gardens. It supports the MD FSRC's goal to increase the quality and quantity of production of local food in urban settings.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of SB 942. This bill would benefit urban farmers by reducing their costs to produce local food.

Stephen R. McHenry
Executive Director
MARBIDCO

Heather Bruskin
Co-Chair, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

¹ [*Report: 'Food Desert' Gets a Name Change in Response to Baltimore Community Feedback*](#), Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, January 17, 2018.

SB 942 Urban Ag Water and Power Infrastructure (Gr

Uploaded by: Barbara Wilkins

Position: INFO



Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET
AND MANAGEMENT

LARRY HOGAN
Governor

BOYD K. RUTHERFORD
Lieutenant Governor

DAVID R. BRINKLEY
Secretary

MARC L. NICOLE
Deputy Secretary

SENATE BILL 942 Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund – Establishment (Griffith)

STATEMENT OF INFORMATION

DATE: March 15, 2022

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs

SUMMARY OF BILL: SB 942 creates an Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund in the Department of Agriculture, the purpose of which is to provide grants to urban agricultural producers and qualified nonprofit organizations for the purchase and installation of: (i) agricultural equipment associated with water supply and irrigation; and (ii) electric power access; and mandates an annual General Fund appropriation in the amount of \$500,000 in FY 2024 - FY 2027.

EXPLANATION: The Department of Budget and Management's focus is not on the underlying policy proposal being advanced by the legislation, but rather on the \$500,000 mandated appropriation provision, which impacts the FY 2024 - FY 2027 budgets.

DBM has the responsibility of submitting a balanced budget to the General Assembly annually, which will require spending allocations for FY 2024 to be within the official revenues estimates approved by the Board of Revenue Estimates in December 2022.

Changes to the Maryland Constitution in 2020 provide the General Assembly with additional budgetary authority, beginning in the 2023 Session, to realign total spending by increasing and adding items to appropriations in the budget submitted by the Governor. The legislature's new budgetary power diminishes, if not negates, the need for mandated appropriation bills.

Fully funding the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future (Kirwan) will require fiscal discipline in the years ahead, if the State is to maintain the current projected structural budget surpluses. Mandated spending increases need to be reevaluated within the context of this education funding priority and the Governor's tax relief proposals.

Economic conditions remain precarious as a result of COVID-19. High rates of inflation and workforce shortages may be short lived or persist, thereby impacting the Maryland economy. While current budget forecasts project structural surpluses, the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to present a significant budgetary vulnerability. The Department continues to urge the General Assembly to focus on maintaining the structural budget surplus.

**For additional information, contact Barbara Wilkins at (410) 260-6371
or barbara.wilkins1@maryland.gov**