

# **WKC HB0152 Urban Agriculture Grant Fund Testimony.**

Uploaded by: Alexander Villazon

Position: FAV



P.O. Box 11075  
Takoma Park, MD 20913-1075  
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March 22, 2023

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in strong support of **HB0152** on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake, a coalition of seventeen Waterkeepers working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable, and on behalf of our Fair Farms Initiative. We support this bill because it seeks to make healthy food more affordable and accessible for disadvantaged communities within our Watershed who consequently suffer from health problems due to lack of accessibility. Urban farms are an effective means of providing access to healthier food options, including fresh produce, to areas of unmet need. Food deserts, areas that lack consistent access to healthy and nutritious food, are a serious problem for disadvantaged Maryland families. The food produced through the funding provided by this bill can serve needs throughout a local community and depending on size of the farm and volume, even a region, satisfying the goal of enhancing access to locally grown healthy food. The food produced through the funding provided by this bill can serve needs throughout a local community and depending on size of the farm and volume, even a region, satisfying the goal of enhancing access to locally grown healthy food.

**HB0152** will include \$250,000 for the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund in the annual budget from 2025 through 2029, as well as provide a larger percentage of funds to urban food producers. This bill also addresses climate change, because urban farms can sequester carbon, improve soil quality through composting, and reduce the distance food must be transported. We believe the Fund created through **HB0152** will be a positive step towards tackling food insecurity and health issues throughout Maryland.

For these reasons stated above, we urge the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **HB0152**.

Sincerely,

**Waterkeepers Chesapeake and partnering farmers signed below:**

Liz Whitehurst  
Owl's Nest Farm  
Upper Marlboro, MD

Doug Adams  
New Brooklyn Farms  
Mt. Rainer, MD

Ibrafall (Bryan) Wright  
Strength to Love 2 Farm  
Baltimore, MD

# **HB152\_MDSierraClub\_fav 23March2023.pdf**

Uploaded by: Carolyn Parsa

Position: FAV



P.O. Box 278  
Riverdale, MD 20738

**Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment**

**Testimony on: HB152 “Department of Agriculture-Urban Agricultural Grant Fund”**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing Date: March 23, 2023**

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB152, as amended by the House, which would expand the Urban Agricultural Grant Program of Baltimore City in Maryland’s Department of Agriculture into a state-wide program. The bill would also direct that the program receive funding of \$100,000 annually in fiscal years 2025 through 2029.

HB152 could bring many benefits to the urban environment. Urban farms promote creation of a marketplace where fresh produce is available and affordable. Additionally, urban farms offer new jobs close to where people live, agricultural education, and other events that promote a shared gardening experience and interactions among neighbors for a strengthened community.

Farming in urban areas brings crucial green spaces that can benefit pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. The reintroduction of plant life to patches of impermeable asphalt and decaying buildings can result in less stormwater runoff and help mitigate heat islands. Expanding agriculture near food markets and restaurants where locally produced food is utilized reduces the need for long food transit routes and the associated fossil fuel consumption and emissions.

Through the Urban Agricultural Grant Fund, HB152 will encourage farming and farm ownership in historically underserved and marginalized communities. HB152 allows for a portion of the funding to be invested into technical assistance, capital improvement, and securing real property for generational wealth and financial security. HB 152 will place a portion of the grant into agricultural education for both farmers and the farmers’ community.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

Rev. Melina Frame  
Natural Places Committee  
[mellframe@yahoo.com](mailto:mellframe@yahoo.com)

Josh Tulkin  
Chapter Director  
[Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org](mailto:Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org)

## **Support of HB 152 - Department of Agriculture - Ur**

Uploaded by: Colby Ferguson

Position: FAV



# Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

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

March 23, 2023

To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: **Support of HB 152 - Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Fund**

On behalf of our Farm Bureau member families in Maryland, I submit this written testimony in support of HB 152. As amended in the House, this legislation expands the purpose and scope of the Urban Agriculture Grant Program and the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund, which are administered by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). First, the bill expands the scope of the program to apply to agricultural producers in an urban area, rather than just Baltimore City. Second, the bill expands the purpose and authorized uses of the fund to provide grants to qualified applicants, rather than just nonprofit organizations in Baltimore City. From fiscal 2025 through 2029, the Governor must include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of at least \$100,000 to the fund. The bill also makes various changes to provisions governing regulations that MDA must adopt relating to the grant program.

**MDFB Policy:** We support and encourage urban farming/agriculture.

We support ongoing skills development training in urban agriculture for all ages.

We support the expansion of urban farming and the creation of a clear pathway to land ownership for urban farmers.

We support grant programs to provide infrastructure for urban farms.

We support the use of Program Open Space funds to purchase easements on vacant lots and green spaces within planned urban developments and city limits to be used for urban agriculture.

**MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS HB 152 & REQUESTS A FAVORABLE REPORT**

Colby Ferguson

Director of Government Relations

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

# **HB152\_IndivisibleHoCoMd\_FAV\_E.Fixsen.pdf**

Uploaded by: Elizabeth Fixsen

Position: FAV





**HB 152**  
**Department of Agriculture –**  
**Urban Agriculture Grant Programs – Alterations**  
**Testimony before Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**  
**Hearing March 23, 2023**  
**Position: FAVORABLE**

Mr. Chairman, Mdm. Vice Chair, and members of the committee, my name is Elizabeth Fixsen, and I represent the 700+ members of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today in support of HB152, requiring the Governor to include at least \$100,000 funding under the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund, for fiscal years 2025 through 2029. The bill will also establish the Urban Agriculture Advisory Committee to recommend guidelines, policies, and practices for the implementation of the Grant Program.

Urban agriculture includes the cultivation, processing, and distribution of agricultural products in urban and suburban areas. Community gardens, rooftop farms, hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic facilities, and vertical production are all examples of urban agriculture.

There are numerous benefits to urban agriculture:

- It reduces costs of transporting food from grower to market, thus reducing carbon dioxide emissions that are causing climate change.
- It reduces heat island effects in the urban environment
- It creates resilient food systems and promotes biodiversity
- It enhances property value, where rooftops, terraces, and ground spaces become green oases.
- It provides urban dwellers with some hands-on proximity to nature, enhancing physical and mental well-being
- It provides learning platforms that raise awareness of the importance of a healthy diet
- It provides access to fresh produce in “food desert” neighborhoods.

Because of all these important environmental and health benefits, urban agriculture in Maryland deserves the support that this bill will provide. Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

**We respectfully urge a favorable report.**

Elizabeth Fixsen  
Savage, MD

Sources Cited: <https://microhabitat.ca/7-benefits-of-urban-agriculture/>,  
<https://www.nal.usda.gov/farms-and-agricultural-production-systems/urban-agriculture>

# **HB152 Urban Agriculture Grant Fund\_Educ Energy Env**

Uploaded by: Laurie McGilvray

Position: FAV



**Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment**

**Testimony on: HB0152 - Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Fund**

**Organization: Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing**

**Submitting: Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair**

**Position: Favorable**

**Hearing Date: March 23, 2023**

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today. The Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of over 50 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on HB152.

HB152 will make changes to the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund (Fund) to increase the capacity of food producers in urban areas. The bill will include \$250,000 for the Fund in the annual budget for 2025 through 2029, and provide a larger percentage of funds to urban food producers. In addition, HB152 will alter the membership of the Review Board established to implement the grant process and prioritize applications that benefit socially disadvantaged urban farmers.

Food deserts in urban areas are a serious problem, especially for disadvantaged communities. Expanding food production closer to home in urban areas, will help Maryland begin to tackle the food desert problem. This bill also addresses climate change, because urban farms can sequester carbon, improve soil quality through composting, and reduce the distance food must be transported (using less fossil fuel for transportation). Finally, the bill will benefit urban communities by enhancing the food production capacity of grant recipients (i.e., agricultural producers, nonprofit organizations, and institutions of higher education) and provide training for future urban farmers.

We ask that you vote FAVORABLE for HB152.

# **HB-0152-EEE-FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: FAV



BRANDON M. SCOTT  
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations  
88 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

**HB0152**

March 23, 2023

**TO:** Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

**FROM:** Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

**RE:** House Bill-0152– Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grants

**POSITION:** **Support**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the Environment & Transportation Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill 0152– Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grants.

House Bill 0152 will provide urban agriculture grants across Maryland, reserving 25% of those grants for Baltimore City. This bill expands the number of jurisdictions and qualified applicants who can receive these grant funds, adjusts the requirements for a grant review board and dedicates \$250,000 for these grants for fiscal years 2025-2029.

The bill supports more inclusive urban agriculture planning across the state and has no negative impact on Baltimore City's urban agriculture work. While most of the review board membership language was changed to not be Baltimore City specific, a representative from the Baltimore City Department of Planning is still on the list as a required appointee. Thus, the bill appears to acknowledge the critical role Baltimore City plays in Maryland's urban agriculture sector. HB-0152 also opens funding to non-profits and institutions of higher education that are providing training programs to urban farmers, linking grants for farmers to a training program or continuing education program. Additionally, the bill restricts the portion of any grant that can be used for purchasing real property to 20% of the overall grant funds.

Enhancing urban agriculture activity across the state of Maryland fosters a more robust statewide network of urban growers who collectively infuse resiliency in local food systems, including Baltimore's. For these reasons, the BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report on House Bill-0152.

# **HB 152 Testimony MARBIDCO Senate.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

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

## TESTIMONY STATEMENT

**BILL:** House Bill 152 (Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grant Programs – Alterations)

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Energy and Environment

**DATE:** March 23, 2023

**POSITION:** Support

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The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) supports House Bill 152 which expands the existing Urban Agriculture Grant Fund from only being available in Baltimore City into a statewide program, as well as altering some of the other program requirements. The bill proposes the grant program be funded at \$100,000, at a minimum, for a five-year period beginning in FY 2025. House Bill 152 also effectively clarifies that all the State's urban agriculture grant programs will serve the same geographic territory, including with the boundaries of all incorporated cities and towns.

Beginning in late 2021, and extending well into 2022, MARBIDCO contributed to efforts to help develop supportive State urban agriculture policy recommendations, MARBIDCO was involved in several meetings with a variety of stakeholders around the State including the participation of urban farmers and agricultural service providers from State and local government agencies, University of Maryland Extension, Maryland Farm Bureau, Horizon Farm Credit, and county soil conservation districts. These discussions helped to lead to significant legislation being passed during the 2022 Legislative Session that created a new Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program (at MDA), as well as two new urban agriculture-focused extension educators at the University of Maryland Extension. Funding for both new efforts is included in the FY 2024 State Budget.

### **Brief Bill Background**

During the 2021 session of the General Assembly, House Bill 286 was enacted which created an Urban Agriculture Grant Fund Program for Baltimore City. The program has not yet received any funding. House Bill 152 expands the reach of the Baltimore City grant program to become a statewide program and makes available grants to agricultural producers, non-profits, or institutions of higher education. The purpose of the grant program is to increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban-grown foods. Similar legislation (HB 1216) passed the House last session, but died on the Senate floor with time expiring on the last night of the session.

### **Additional Background Information**

MARBIDCO supports the growth of commercial urban farming in Maryland because it helps preserve green space within developed areas and can provide access to healthy 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%).

<sup>1</sup> Urban farming can provide another access point for healthy fresh food, as urban farmers often sell their products in the local community. Urban farms also may provide community benefits such as education and job training opportunities, and they can also be the community focal point of a neighborhood.

MARBIDCO has also been supporting commercial urban farming through some of its existing loan and grant programs. MARBDIDCO currently offers the Maryland Urban Agriculture Commercial Lending Incentive Grant Program (partnering with Farm Credit), 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 needed equity capital (down-payment money) to qualify for a 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 (including small and urban farmers). MARBIDCO has also financed a farm real estate purchase in Baltimore City (with a secured real estate loan partnering with a commercial lender).

### **In Conclusion**

MARBIDCO very much supports the growth of commercial urban farming in Maryland. Urban agriculture offers increased access to healthy, fresh, culturally appropriate food while also creating job 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. House Bill 152, if passed, will significantly assist with the growth of urban agriculture across the State by making financial support available to both the urban farmers directly and the nonprofit organizations that provide training and technical assistance to them.

The House adopted amendments suggested by both MDA and MARBIDCO to improve the administration of the urban agriculture programs. **As such, MARBIDCO respectfully requests a Favorable Report for HB 152.**

*MARBIDCO Contact: Steve McHenry, 410.267.6807*

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*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 1191 financings totaling \$96.2 million for food and fiber business projects located in all Maryland's counties – and in the process has leveraged more than \$210 million in commercial lender financing. For more information about MARBIDCO's programs, please visit: [www.marbidco.org](http://www.marbidco.org).*

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



# **HB152\_FAV\_MD Food System Resiliency Council Senate**

Uploaded by: Steve McHenry

Position: FAV

March 23, 2023

**2023 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY  
HB 152: Department of Agriculture -  
Urban Agriculture Grant Programs -  
Alterations**

**BILL:** HB 152: Department of Agriculture-Urban Agriculture Grant Programs-  
Alterations  
**COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Energy and Environment  
**POSITION:** Testimony of Support of House Bill 152

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record in support of House Bill 152.

This letter is submitted by Stephen 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 Michael J. Wilson, Executive Director of Maryland Hunger Solutions and Co-Chair of the MD FSRC's Communications and Coordination Committee. These comments are submitted on behalf of the Council, and do not necessarily represent the views of MARBIDCO, Maryland Hunger Solutions, 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 is to develop 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. Urban agriculture offers increased access to healthy, fresh, culturally appropriate food while also creating job opportunities and helping to support local economies.

During the 2021 session of the General Assembly, House Bill 286 was enacted which created an Urban Agriculture Grant Fund Program for Baltimore City. House Bill 152 expands the existing Baltimore City Urban Agriculture Grant Fund Program, which is currently unfunded, into a statewide program and provides the program be funded at \$250,000 annually in FY 2025 through FY 2029.

The bill establishes a review committee to implement a competitive grant application process that prioritizes applications that benefit socially disadvantaged farmers in urban areas. Furthermore, non-profit organizations that receive grant funds through this program to distribute to agricultural producers must distribute a certain percentage to agricultural producers in low-income census tracts or designated food deserts.

Supporting the growth of commercial urban farming in Maryland will help preserve green space within developed areas and can provide access to healthy 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%).<sup>1</sup> 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of HB 152. House Bill 152, if passed, will significantly assist with the growth of urban agriculture across the State by making financial support available to both the urban farmers directly and the nonprofit organizations that provide training and technical assistance to them.

Stephen R. McHenry  
Executive Director, MARBIDCO

Michael J. Wilson  
Co-Chair, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council's Communications and Coordination Committee

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

# **Urban Agiculture Grants Legislation (HB152).pdf**

Uploaded by: Tom Taylor

Position: FAV

This bill could support needed composting infrastructure on urban farms, could help increase diversion of food waste from landfills, and could help decrease methane emissions.