



"Cultivating a collaborative, sustainable, and equitable food system for all Maryland communities."

February 28, 2024

2024 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY

HB 1318: Solid Waste Disposal Surcharge and Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Funds

HB 1318: Solid Waste Disposal Surcharge and Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Fund and Grant Programs - Established

COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation

POSITION: Testimony in Support of House Bill 1318

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 1318**.

This letter is submitted on behalf of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council. 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. In the November 2023 Food System Resiliency Council Report to the Maryland Legislature, we recommended increasing the capacity for diverted organic materials. Currently, minimal facilities are available for food scrap diversion. Increasing food diversion and education on food waste reduction will help increase our food system resiliency and strengthen the food waste recovery infrastructure, building on emerging practices already established in the State. Food waste occurs across the supply chain. It is important that legislation addresses problems throughout the process, with resources allocated to organic diversion, composting, food rescue, education, source separation, upcycling, and exploring linkage between food waste and hunger.

Increased food resiliency can be achieved by **passing HB 1318**, which will establish funds to provide infrastructure, programming, and education resources for on-farm food waste composting as well as preventing food waste and increasing food rescue efforts. The passing of HB 1318 would create an On-Farm Organics Diversion and Recycling Grant Program in the Department of Agriculture to award grants to eligible entities to develop and implement on-farm organics recycling and compost use, wasted food prevention, and food rescue. The program will also create the Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Fund to establish the Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Grant Program in the Department of the Environment to award grants for infrastructure, programs, and education that reduce, rescue, and divert wasted food. These two funds would be created through a surcharge on the final disposal of solid waste.



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Over one-third of the food produced in the United States is never eaten, wasting the calories and production resources used to grow food that could have fed more than 150 million people each year. The wasted food comprises 1/4 of our landfill content. It is stated by USEPA that reducing 50% of the food waste going to US landfills would be the equivalent of eliminating the greenhouse gas emissions from 21 coal-fired power plants or 15 million homes' energy use for a year.

Passing HB 1318 will benefit Maryland's Food System, create resources for important food system resiliency initiatives throughout the supply chain, and increase our circular bioeconomy. Each year, 119 billion lbs. of food is wasted in the US, equivalent to 1 lb./person/day, 130 billion meals, and at an economic value is \$408 billion per year. With 13.5 million US households being food-insecure at some time, there is a need to reduce this food waste impact. The HB 1318 legislation will create the resources needed to execute these important initiatives.

While the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council supports the passage of HB 1318, we do have two items of consideration for the committee. 1) If a county already has a surcharge on the final disposal of solid waste, would this legislation require that all collected revenue from this surcharge be only used for these two funds? How would this mandate impact locally-funded programs that rely on the existing surcharge revenue? 2) It is important to acknowledge that 'Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion' is not a holistic solution to reducing food insecurity. The dignity of food insecure individuals should always be at the forefront. Food diversion efforts alone cannot solve the food system crisis nor do these efforts always align with uplifting the humanity of individuals experiencing food insecurity. There should be assurances that administrators for the Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion Grant Program uphold these principles and align with the goals of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council to increase equity in the food system and their acknowledgement that the root causes of food system vulnerability and food insecurity are complex.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of HB 1318.

Michael J. Wilson
Co-Chair, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council