



March 26, 2025

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

**BILL:** HB 56 – Procurement – State Department of Education – Local Food Purchasing Program

**POSITION:** Support

The Horizon Foundation is the largest independent health philanthropy in Maryland. We are committed to a Howard County free from systemic inequities, where all people can live abundant and healthy lives.

**The Foundation is pleased to support HB 56 – Procurement – State Department of Education – Local Food Purchasing Program.** This bill would enable the Department of Education to procure locally grown food for schools and encourage farmers to engage with local school systems to sell their products.

The Foundation is a lead member of the Healthier Choices Coalition, a group of Howard County civic, faith and health organizations and individuals working to create policy change that will make healthier food and drinks more widely available, accessible and affordable for everyone in Howard County. Members have been working with the Howard County Public School System for the last year to improve school meals. One of these ongoing initiatives is to implement a farm-to-table program that would incorporate more locally grown produce into school menus. This bill would help facilitate that effort and make it easier for the school system to engage with local farmers and provide fresh, healthy produce for students during the school day.

Like many communities across the state, food insecurity has increased in recent years in Howard County, particularly for lower- and middle-income families. For many students, school meals are their primary source of daily calories and nutrition. Ensuring that school meals are healthy and include fresh, locally grown produce will better enable these students to thrive inside and outside of the classroom.

Healthy food should be accessible to everyone in our community. For this reason, the Horizon Foundation **SUPPORTS HB 56** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.

Thank you for your consideration.

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