

TO: Senate Committee on Budget and Taxation

BILL: House Bill 0056- Procurement - State Department of Education - Local Food Purchasing Program

DATE: March 26, 2025

POSITION: Support

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the State Board of Education support HB0056 - **Procurement - State Department of Education - Local Food Purchasing Program**, which requires the State Department of Education to engage, in coordination with the Department of General Services (DGS) and the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), in the establishment of a program to procure certain local food for local school systems from certain providers under certain circumstances. This includes the procurement of food grown at a certified local farm, provided by a certified Chesapeake invasive species provider, or grown within a 250-mile radius from a Maryland elementary or secondary school.

The MSDE Office of School and Community Nutrition Programs (OSCNP) administers the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) child nutrition programs (e.g., school breakfast and lunch, etc.) including, [USDA's Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program](#). **HB0056** empowers the facilitation of intergovernmental agreements with local education agencies (LEAs) participating in the Farm to School Program (F2S), for the procurement of local foods. The interagency collaboration enhances MSDE's efforts to streamline and increase the procurement of local foods for inclusion in school meals and grows the local agricultural supply chain by creating new market opportunities for producers.

Although LEAs have participated in F2S programs since its inception in 2010, the 2023 Farm to School Census conducted by the USDA ([2023 Farm to School National and State Data Workbook](#)) documents that local food procurement is only a small percentage of food expenditures made by participants in the various child nutrition programs. To illustrate, the procurement of local produce, meat, and poultry only accounts for 3.8% of total food purchases by LEAs in Maryland (a decline from the last Census in 2019, when it was 8%). While 11% of their food expenditures go for local milk. Though the respondents include a mix of Maryland public and private schools, residential care institutions and child and adult care institutions participating across the nutrition programs, the county school districts are by far the largest purchasers.

The Census and a 2023 [Farm to School sustainability study](#) conducted by OSCNP provide some insight as to the reasons local food procurement is not yet optimized in Maryland. Among the challenges is the perception that the availability of local food is limited, and that there is even less availability of minimally processed (e.g., raw, cut, frozen) local foods. Also noted was the difficulty of sourcing local producers, suppliers, and distributors, among other things.

Currently, OSCNP is developing an automated system, funded by the USDA, to source, order, and fulfill local food deliveries to schools. Known as the Local Food Exchange (LFE), the system was envisioned to address some of the barriers identified by LEAs and local producers for procuring local food in the quantities needed for school meals. LFE is expected to ease some of these barriers by hosting an extensive database of producers. Those included in the database will be procured under the intergovernmental agreement legislated by **HB0056**. This will facilitate simultaneous procurement of local food for several LEAs in a single "state" bid, easing the burden for producers of responding to multiple, individual LEA solicitations. It also provides producers with access to larger contracts, and clients they might not have otherwise had the opportunity to engage. Local aggregation will also be easier to facilitate when multiple producers are

included in a single agreement. As will the alignment of more effective menu and crop planning.

MSDE is dedicated to the increased procurement of local foods in school meals. MSDE OSCNP will continue to promote and devise strategies towards this goal, including support for more local distribution chains that can provide raw produce and processed local foods (e.g., salsa made with Maryland tomatoes, fish patties made with Maryland blue catfish). The proposed legislation also supports these goals and enables a permanent pathway for MSDE to ensure and manage the cornerstone of federal F2S programming. Moreover, **HB0056** complements the State mandate for 20% local procurement among state agencies, aligns with USDA requirements to “buy American”, and the USDA’s expanded provisions for local geographic preference in contracting.

MSDE respectfully requests that you consider this information as you deliberate **HB0056**. Please contact Akilah Alleyne, Ph.D. akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov for any additional information.