



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 56 - PROCUREMENT - STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION - LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING PROGRAM

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN

MARCH 26, 2025

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

Farm to School programs help students, small farmers, and the community. Students get to eat fresh, healthy local foods. Small farmers gain access to bigger and more stable financial opportunities by selling to schools. The community benefits by having healthier children, more job opportunities, and a stronger local economy.¹

Complicated procurement processes make it difficult for many small farmers to get their products purchased by schools. Currently they must engage separately with multiple, individual school systems.

This bill will:

- Require the Maryland State Department of Education, in coordination with the Department of General Services and the Department of Agriculture, to establish a program, when funding is available, to procure certain local food for local school systems from certain providers under certain circumstances. This program would include a centralized platform to encourage the participation of farmers and distributors in procurement opportunities.
- Require the Department to report to the General Assembly on or before December 1 each year on the total number and dollar value of procurement contracts for local food at local schools, including the number of these contracts that are with certified local farms or certified Chesapeake invasive species providers.
- Alter certain percentage price preferences adopted by the Board of Public Works by regulation; requiring the Board to adopt certain regulations relating to limiting responses for certain procurements.
- The program will procure products that are:
 - Foods grown at a certified local farm, as defined in § 14-701 of the State Finance and Procurement article.

- Certified Chesapeake invasive species provided by a certified Chesapeake invasive species provider, with the goal of increasing Blue Catfish in school meals, and decreasing the presence of this invasive (but nutritious) species from the Chesapeake Bay.
- Foods grown within a 250 miles radius from an elementary or secondary school.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 56.

¹<https://www.farmtoschool.org/>