American Heart Association.

February 2, 2025

Testimony of Laura Hale
American Heart Association
Favorable HB 104- Maryland Farms and Families Fund

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Honorable Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. The American Heart Association extends its support for the updates to HB 104 Maryland Farms and Families Fund. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association.

Access to nutritious healthy food is essential for long term heart health. Unfortunately, too many Marylanders do not have access to healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables, living in food deserts. In these food deserts many Marylanders rely on convenience stores which primarily sell high salt food with low nutritional value. It is difficult, if not an impossible for these Marylanders to regularly get to a supermarket and have healthy foods. As such, Marylanders living in these areas suffer from higher rates of obesity and cardiovascular disease.

For those who are food insecure, this issue of access is often compounded by the fact that these individuals only have limited funds for food and transportation and do not have access or money for healthier options. Farmers Markets are able to serve areas that do not have healthy food options. Farmers Markets have the flexibility to go into these food deserts and create options. Pairing this programing with funding for those on WIC and other government programs assist those with food insecurities to extend their dollars and provide more healthy options for their families.

This legislation is an important step towards creating access and availability to healthy foods for those who are food insecure and living in food deserts. Implementation of the legislation is paramount and we believe this updates will aid in moving this needed program forward.

The American Heart Association urges a favorable report on HB 104 to support the health of all Marylanders.