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Testimony in Support of SB0226
Maryland Farms and Families Fund - Purpose and Use - Alterations
Senate Finance Committee
January 28, 2025

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice-Chair Hayes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Heather Hulse. I am the Program Manager for Food Access Programs of the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) and of the Maryland Market Money (MMM) program, a statewide food access program of SMADC and the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) that feeds Marylanders and supports farmers. MMM removes economic barriers for Marylanders experiencing food insecurity, providing a dollar-for-dollar match for purchases made using federal nutrition benefits at participating Maryland farmers markets, farm stands, and CSAs while providing technical assistance, training, marketing, and additional services to stakeholders. Maryland Market Money and SMADC strongly support Senate Bill 0226: Maryland Farms and Families Fund - Purpose and Use - Alterations.

Allowing MDA to administer the Farms and Families Fund as part of their budget instead of administering the fund as a competitive grant is a crucial timesaver for the stakeholders who have been involved with this effort. For years, the Maryland Market Money program has been the only party who has applied and/or qualified for the grant. The Farms and Families Fund legislation was originally written for MMM support. At conferences and in meetings, I have heard Maryland Senators and Delegates even refer to past adjustments to legislation as “the Fund for Maryland Market Money.” No other Maryland program or organization meets all the qualifications to receive an award from the Fund. Over the years, as written, the competitive grant format has cost MDA and MMM considerable staff time and effort going through the grant process from RFP preparation to proposal writing, MDA adjourning a selection committee, grant reporting and reporting review, etc. as a result. In order to increase efficiency for all parties involved, it would be wise to make this shift out of a grant format. Those Fund dollars

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will be able to be used more efficiently and better serve the populations experiencing food insecurity that the Maryland Market Money program serves statewide.

In conclusion, we urge for your vote in favor of SB0226. Thank you for your time.

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