

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2022 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 179

(Delegate Amprey)

Environment and Transportation

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Workgroup on Food Environments

This bill establishes the Workgroup on Food Environments to determine the most cost-effective way to produce a food environment report for each county and legislative district in the State. Workgroup members may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses, as specified. By November 30, 2022, the workgroup must report its findings and legislative recommendations to the General Assembly. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2022.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for workgroup members are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources. It is assumed that State agencies represented on the workgroup can support the work of the workgroup with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Several programs in the State address food insecurity issues. Examples of such programs are described below.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS), assists low-income households to purchase food. A State supplemental benefit is provided to certain households with seniors, as specified. Chapters 635 and 636 of 2019 created a supplemental SNAP benefit for households with school-aged children called Summer SNAP. Traditional SNAP benefits are 100% federally funded; the supplemental benefit for seniors is 100% State funded; and the Summer SNAP benefit is provided through State funds and local funds. Chapters 362 and 363 of 2021 established a Heat and Eat Program to expand food access to households that are receiving or eligible for SNAP. The program requires DHS to apply a standard utility allowance to the shelter deduction used to determine countable gross income for SNAP eligibility, thereby increasing access to SNAP benefits.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), administered through the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), is a discretionary public health nutrition program designed to ensure the healthy growth and development of young children. Services include providing nutrition, breastfeeding assessments and education, supplemental foods, and health care and social service referrals to pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, as well as infants and children up to five years of age. Funding for WIC is split between federal, State, and manufacturer rebates and varies each year.

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), which is funded with federal funds provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is administered by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) in conjunction with MDH and the Maryland Department of Aging. USDA gives grants to state agencies to provide checks to those participating in WIC or the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). Checks can be used to buy fresh fruits, vegetables, cut herbs, and honey (for seniors only) at Maryland farmers' markets. Participants in WIC and SFMNP receive nutrition information and a participant brochure that includes details on the program and information to assist in the purchase of local, in-season produce.

Maryland Farms and Families Program

The stated purpose of the Maryland Farms and Families Program within MDA is to double the purchasing power of food-insecure Maryland residents with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables and to increase revenue for farmers through redemption of federal

nutrition benefits at Maryland farmers' markets. Under the program, the Maryland Farms and Families Fund provides grants to (1) nonprofit organizations that match purchases made with FMNP, SNAP, and WIC benefits at participating farmers' markets; (2) nonprofit farmers' markets to implement the program at the farmers markets; and (3) local nonprofit organizations to implement the program in partnership with one or more participating local farmers markets.

Interagency Food Desert Advisory Committee

The Interagency Food Desert Advisory Committee within the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) must (1) advise and make recommendations to DHCD on the development and adoption of regulations related to food desert projects; (2) make recommendations to the Secretary of Housing and Community Development on applications for designating an area as a food desert; and (3) make recommendations for interagency coordination to reduce the number of food deserts and promote healthy food access for Maryland neighborhoods. The Secretary of Housing and Community Development, on the recommendation of the committee, is authorized to designate an area as a food desert.

Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

The council must meet regularly for a period of at least two years to address food insecurity in the State. The council must pursue specified goals, including addressing the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis; developing, by November 1, 2021, specified equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system; expanding the impact of existing food council organizations by providing coordination and facilitation of knowledge exchange at the State level and supporting identification and application of grants to operating funds to support existing and new food council organizations; and developing, by November 1, 2021, a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food. The council's first interim report can be found [here](#).

Additional Comments: The Department of Legislative Services advises that the bill does not define what constitutes a "food environment report."

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City; Harford and Montgomery counties; University System of Maryland; Maryland Department of Agriculture; Department of Housing and Community Development; Department of Human Services; Morgan State University; The Johns Hopkins University; Maryland Department of Planning; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 23, 2022
fnu2/mcr Third Reader - March 28, 2022
Revised - Amendment(s) - March 28, 2022

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