

# HOUSE BILL 1626

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By: **Delegate Metzgar**

Introduced and read first time: February 23, 2026

Assigned to: Rules and Executive Nominations

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## A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Agriculture – Access to Food**  
3 **(Maryland Food Security, Access, and Equity Act)**

4 FOR the purpose of establishing the Food Security Coordination Office within the  
5 Department of Agriculture; requiring the Office to administer a certain program and  
6 perform certain duties; requiring the Department to establish a rural-to-urban  
7 produce distribution program to connect local farmers with certain communities;  
8 requiring the Department to establish the Maryland Rural-to-Urban Produce  
9 Financing Program to provide financial assistance to certain individuals and entities  
10 to fund certain projects; requiring the Department to establish a certain grant  
11 program with certain purposes; requiring the Department to support partnerships  
12 between health care providers and certain organizations; authorizing the  
13 Department to enter into certain contracts to develop, implement, and administer  
14 certain programs; requiring the Department to publish annually a certain statewide  
15 food security report; requiring the Department to adopt certain regulations on or  
16 before a certain date; altering the Jane Lawton Farm-to-School Program to include  
17 certain schools for eligibility under the Program; expanding the purpose of the  
18 Program to include the support of school gardens and nutrition education; and  
19 generally relating to food security, access, and equity.

20 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,  
21 Article – Agriculture  
22 Section 2–106 and 10–1601  
23 Annotated Code of Maryland  
24 (2016 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

25 BY adding to  
26 Article – Agriculture  
27 Section 2–2501 through 2–2511 to be under the new subtitle “Subtitle 25. Maryland  
28 Food Security, Access, and Equity Act”  
29 Annotated Code of Maryland

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EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



(2016 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

**Article – Agriculture**

2–106.

(a) The following positions and units are included within the Department:

- (1) The Maryland Agricultural Fair Board;
- (2) The Chief of Weights and Measures;
- (3) The State Chemist;
- (4) The State Veterinarian;
- (5) The State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners;
- (6) The State Soil Conservation Committee;
- (7) The Maryland Agricultural Commission;
- (8) The Maryland Horse Industry Board;
- (9) The Maryland Winery and Grape Growers' Advisory Board;
- (10) The Seafood Marketing Advisory Commission; [and]
- (11) The State Specialist for Value-Added Agriculture; **AND**
- (12) THE FOOD SECURITY COORDINATION OFFICE.**

(b) The Secretary shall appoint the State Chemist, State Veterinarian, State Specialist for Value-Added Agriculture, and Chief of Weights and Measures.

(c) The Department also includes any other position or unit which is declared within the Department pursuant to law.

**SUBTITLE 25. MARYLAND FOOD SECURITY, ACCESS, AND EQUITY ACT.**

**2–2501.**

1           IN THIS SUBTITLE, “FOOD INSECURITY” MEANS LIMITED OR UNCERTAIN  
2 ACCESS TO ADEQUATE OR NUTRITIOUS FOOD.

3 **2-2502.**

4           THE PURPOSE OF THIS SUBTITLE IS TO STRENGTHEN THE STATE FOOD  
5 SYSTEM BY EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS, SUPPORTING LOCAL FARMERS  
6 BY IMPROVING FOOD DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS, AND COORDINATING STATEWIDE  
7 EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE FOOD INSECURITY.

8 **2-2503.**

9           THE FOOD SECURITY COORDINATING OFFICE SHALL ADMINISTER THIS  
10 SUBTITLE AND:

11           (1) COORDINATE STATEWIDE FOOD ACCESS INITIATIVES;

12           (2) SUPPORT PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN LOCAL FARMERS, FOOD  
13 DISTRIBUTORS, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS;

14           (3) MAINTAIN A STATEWIDE DATA DASHBOARD ON FOOD ACCESS AND  
15 FOOD INSECURITY; AND

16           (4) PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL JURISDICTIONS TO  
17 ELIMINATE FOOD INSECURITY.

18 **2-2504.**

19           THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ESTABLISH A RURAL-TO-URBAN PRODUCE  
20 DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM TO CONNECT LOCAL FARMERS WITH URBAN AND  
21 SUBURBAN COMMUNITIES EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY BY:

22           (1) CREATING FOOD AGGREGATION AND DISTRIBUTION HUBS;

23           (2) SUPPORTING THE TRANSPORTATION OF FOOD FROM LOCAL  
24 FARMERS TO URBAN AND SUBURBAN COMMUNITIES;

25           (3) IMPROVING THE INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE STATE FOR THE FOOD  
26 COLD CHAIN; AND

27           (4) ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN LOCAL FARMERS, FOOD  
28 BANKS, SCHOOLS, AND COMMUNITY MARKETS.

1 **2-2505.**

2 (A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS  
3 INDICATED.

4 (2) "FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE" INCLUDES GRANTS, LOW- OR  
5 NO-INTEREST LOANS, OR OTHER ASSISTANCE THE DEPARTMENT DETERMINES TO  
6 BE NECESSARY TO CARRY OUT THIS SECTION.

7 (3) "PROJECT" MEANS:

8 (I) COLD CHAIN FACILITIES;

9 (II) TRANSPORTATION FLEETS AND LOGISTICS SYSTEMS;

10 (III) RURAL AGGREGATION HUBS;

11 (IV) URBAN AND SUBURBAN DISTRIBUTION CENTERS; AND

12 (V) TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS FOR ROUTING, TRACKING, AND  
13 INVENTORY CONTROL.

14 (B) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ESTABLISH THE MARYLAND  
15 RURAL-TO-URBAN PRODUCE FINANCING PROGRAM TO FUND PROJECTS THAT  
16 STABILIZE AND EXPAND THE MOVEMENT OF MARYLAND-GROWN PRODUCE TO  
17 URBAN AND SUBURBAN COMMUNITIES WITH FOOD INSECURITY.

18 (C) THE MARYLAND RURAL-TO-URBAN PRODUCE FINANCING PROGRAM  
19 SHALL:

20 (1) PROVIDE LOW- OR NO-INTEREST, PERFORMANCE-BASED  
21 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO SUPPORT PROJECTS THAT IMPACT THE AGGREGATION,  
22 TRANSPORTATION, AND DISTRIBUTION OF PRODUCE GROWN IN THE STATE;

23 (2) REDUCE FINANCIAL BARRIERS THAT MAY LIMIT THE ABILITY OF  
24 SMALL AND MID-SIZED FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RURAL-TO-URBAN AND  
25 SUBURBAN FOOD DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS;

26 (3) STRENGTHEN THE STATE'S LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY BY  
27 IMPROVING ACCESS TO FRESH, NUTRITIOUS FOOD IN COMMUNITIES THAT ARE FOOD  
28 INSECURE; AND

1           **(4) PROVIDE LONG-TERM AND SELF-SUSTAINING INFRASTRUCTURE**  
2 **THAT SUPPORTS ACCESS TO MARYLAND-GROWN PRODUCE.**

3           **(D) (1) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ESTABLISH FINANCIAL MECHANISMS,**  
4 **INCLUDING BOND ISSUANCE, TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO:**

5                   **(I) LOCAL FARMERS AND FARMING COOPERATIVES;**

6                   **(II) NONPROFIT AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS;**

7                   **(III) FOOD HUBS AND OTHER FOOD DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS;**

8                   **(IV) LOCAL GOVERNMENTS; AND**

9                   **(V) SOCIAL-ENTERPRISE ENTITIES THAT ARE ENGAGED IN**  
10 **INCREASING ACCESS TO FOOD.**

11           **(2) TO RECEIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, AN ENTITY LISTED UNDER**  
12 **PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION SHALL:**

13                   **(I) DEMONSTRATE A PLAN TO DELIVER MARYLAND-GROWN**  
14 **PRODUCE TO COMMUNITIES THAT ARE FOOD INSECURE; AND**

15                   **(II) HAVE THE CAPACITY TO MEET PERFORMANCE METRICS**  
16 **ESTABLISHED BY THE DEPARTMENT.**

17           **(E) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL:**

18                   **(1) ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS, INCLUDING THOSE**  
19 **RELATED TO INCREASING ACCESS TO FOOD; AND**

20                   **(2) PRIORITIZE THE PROVISION OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO**  
21 **PROJECTS THAT WILL DIRECTLY INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF PRODUCE TO**  
22 **COMMUNITIES THAT ARE FOOD INSECURE.**

23           **(F) THE DEPARTMENT MAY ENTER INTO CONTRACTS WITH LOCAL**  
24 **FARMERS, FARMING COOPERATIVES, FOOD DISTRIBUTORS, AND OTHER**  
25 **ORGANIZATIONS AS NECESSARY TO CARRY OUT THIS SECTION.**

26 **2-2506.**

27           **(A) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ESTABLISH A GRANT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE**  
28 **GRANTS TO ORGANIZATIONS TO:**

- 1           (1)    EXPAND COMMUNITY AND MOBILE MARKETS;
- 2           (2)    SUPPORT URBAN AGRICULTURE AND COMMUNITY GARDENS; AND
- 3           (3)    INCREASE ACCESS TO CULTURALLY RELEVANT FOODS.

4           **(B)    THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ESTABLISH:**

- 5           (1)    GRANT APPLICATION PROCEDURES;
- 6           (2)    GRANT AWARD CRITERIA; AND
- 7           (3)    GRANT AMOUNTS.

8           **(C)    ON OR BEFORE SEPTEMBER 1 EACH YEAR, RECIPIENTS OF GRANTS IN**  
9 **THE PREVIOUS FISCAL YEAR SHALL REPORT TO THE DEPARTMENT ON THE**  
10 **OUTCOMES OF THE GRANTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE RECIPIENTS' COMMUNITIES.**

11 **2-2507.**

12           **(A)    THE DEPARTMENT SHALL SUPPORT PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN HEALTH**  
13 **CARE PROVIDERS AND ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROMOTE ACCESS TO FOOD THROUGH**  
14 **PRODUCE PRESCRIPTION PROGRAMS, MEDICALLY TAILORED GROCERIES, AND**  
15 **NUTRITION EDUCATION.**

16           **(B)    HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS THAT PARTICIPATE IN A PARTNERSHIP**  
17 **SHALL TRACK PATIENT HEALTH OUTCOMES AND REPORT THE OUTCOMES TO THE**  
18 **DEPARTMENT.**

19 **2-2508.**

20           **(A)    THE DEPARTMENT MAY ENTER INTO CONTRACTS WITH THIRD PARTIES**  
21 **TO DEVELOP, IMPLEMENT, AND ADMINISTER THE PROVISIONS OF THIS SUBTITLE,**  
22 **INCLUDING:**

- 23           (1)    PROGRAM DESIGN AND OPERATIONAL PLANNING;
- 24           (2)    TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT AND DATA SYSTEMS;
- 25           (3)    DISTRIBUTION AND COORDINATION LOGISTICS; AND
- 26           (4)    EVALUATION AND REPORTING FUNCTIONS.

1 (B) A THIRD PARTY CONTRACTED UNDER THIS SECTION SHALL:

2 (1) HAVE DEMONSTRATED EXPERTISE IN FOOD SYSTEMS, LOGISTICS,  
3 AGRICULTURE, OR PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION;

4 (2) COMPLY WITH STATE PROCUREMENT LAWS UNDER DIVISION II  
5 OF THE STATE FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT ARTICLE; AND

6 (3) HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO MEET PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS  
7 AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS ESTABLISHED BY THE DEPARTMENT.

8 (C) THE DEPARTMENT MAY AUDIT A THIRD PARTY AWARDED A CONTRACT  
9 UNDER THIS SECTION.

10 2-2509.

11 THE DEPARTMENT SHALL PUBLISH ANNUALLY ON ITS WEBSITE A STATEWIDE  
12 FOOD SECURITY REPORT THAT INCLUDES:

13 (1) RATES OF FOOD INSECURITY IN EACH COUNTY;

14 (2) PARTICIPATION RATES FOR PROGRAMS ESTABLISHED UNDER  
15 THIS SUBTITLE;

16 (3) METRICS FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD AND OTHER  
17 RESOURCES UNDER THIS SUBTITLE; AND

18 (4) THE IMPACT OF THIS SUBTITLE ON LOCAL FARMERS.

19 2-2510.

20 ON OR BEFORE JANUARY 1, 2027, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ADOPT  
21 REGULATIONS NECESSARY TO CARRY OUT THIS SUBTITLE.

22 2-2511.

23 THIS SUBTITLE SHALL BE REFERRED TO AS THE MARYLAND FOOD SECURITY,  
24 ACCESS, AND EQUITY ACT.

25 10-1601.

26 (a) (1) In this section the following words have the meanings indicated.

1           (2) “Farm product” means any agricultural, horticultural, vegetable, fruit  
2 product, whether raw, canned, frozen, dried, pickled, or otherwise processed, livestock,  
3 meats, marine food products, poultry, eggs, dairy products, nuts, honey, and every edible  
4 product of farm, orchard, garden, or water.

5           (3) “Program” means the Jane Lawton Farm-to-School Program.

6           **(4) “SCHOOL” INCLUDES PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PREKINDERGARTEN**  
7 **PROGRAMS, CHILD CARE FACILITIES, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**  
8 **PROGRAMS.**

9           (b) There is a Jane Lawton Farm-to-School Program in the Department.

10          (c) The Program is established for the purpose of:

11           (1) Promoting the sale of farm products grown in the State to Maryland  
12 schools in consultation with the State Department of Education;

13           (2) Soliciting farmers to sell their farm products to Maryland schools;

14           (3) Developing and regularly updating a database of farmers interested in  
15 selling their farm products to Maryland schools, including the types and amounts of farm  
16 products the farmers want to sell and the time periods in which the farmers want to sell;

17           (4) Facilitating purchases from farmers by interested Maryland schools in  
18 consultation with the State Department of Education and in compliance with applicable  
19 procurement requirements; [and]

20           (5) Providing outreach and guidance to farmers concerning the value of and  
21 procedure for selling their farm products to interested Maryland schools; AND

22          **(6) SUPPORTING SCHOOL GARDENS AND NUTRITION EDUCATION.**

23           (d) (1) The Program, in partnership with the State Department of Education  
24 and in consultation with school food service directors and interested farming organizations,  
25 shall establish promotional events that promote State agriculture and farm products to  
26 children through school meal and classroom programs.

27           (2) At least one promotional event shall:

28           (i) Last for a period of 1 week;

29           (ii) Be known as “Maryland Homegrown School Lunch Week”;

30           (iii) Promote State agriculture and farm products to children through  
31 school meal and classroom programs; and

1 (iv) Arrange for interaction between students and farmers through  
2 promotional activities that may include field trips to farms and in-school presentations by  
3 farmers.

4 (e) On or before January 1 of each year, each local educational agency **AND**  
5 **SCHOOL** participating in the Program shall report to the Department the types and  
6 amounts of farm products purchased from farms in the State.

7 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July  
8 1, 2026.