

February 26, 2020

**Testimony in Support of HB1532 - Protect Against Hunger Act
Janet Rumble, Crossroads Community Food Network**

State Delegate Maggie McIntosh, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building, Room 121
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for providing the opportunity for Crossroads Community Food Network to submit this testimony in strong support of legislation that will address food insecurity in Maryland.

The Protect Against Hunger Act ensures that eligible low-income Marylanders will continue to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) nutrition benefits — known in Maryland as Food Supplement Program (FSP) benefits — if federal funding is not available. SNAP generates business for food retailers of all types and sizes, and increasingly it's used at farmers markets like Crossroads Farmers Market in Takoma Park. We support this bill because not only will maintaining SNAP benefits help reduce food insecurity among vulnerable Marylanders, but also it will help support local farmers, create demand for locally produced goods, and generate local economic activity.

According to the USDA, SNAP redemption at farmers markets increased by 35% from 2012 to 2017, and during the same period the number of farmers markets accepting SNAP increased by 130 percent. This is largely due to the rise of nutrition incentive programs that match SNAP dollars spent at farmers markets on locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Such “double-dollar” programs, now found at hundreds of farmers markets throughout the US, started right here in Maryland at Crossroads Farmers Market. The market was founded in 2007 to bring fresh, healthy food to the Takoma/Langley Crossroads, a primarily immigrant, low-income community that straddles Montgomery and Prince George's counties. It was the first farmers market in Maryland to accept federal nutrition benefits like SNAP and the first in

the country to match these benefits dollar for dollar. Shoppers using SNAP receive up to \$20 in incentives, called Fresh Checks, each week to spend on more fresh fruits and vegetables.

Eligible shoppers can stretch their buying power to bring home twice as much healthy food and at the same time support local farmers — the majority of whom are also immigrants and/or socially disadvantaged producers.

The Fresh Checks program at Crossroads Farmers Market is founded on a simple idea: make fresh fruits and vegetables more affordable, and people will buy them. When the market first started, it was a radical experiment; nobody knew if it would work. But the program has been very successful, and has grown significantly over the years: at the outset in 2007, nearly \$7,000 in incentives was distributed to 100 families, seniors, and individuals; in 2019, over 4,000 residents received more than \$80,000 in Fresh Checks. This year, we anticipate serving even more low-income residents thanks to an enhanced outreach plan and community ambassador program.

At Crossroads, we see firsthand how programs that incentivize consumption of locally grown, fresh produce offer both health benefits to low-income communities and economic benefits to local farmers. Matching SNAP at Maryland farmers markets improves nutrition, keeps federal benefit dollars in the local economy, and supports local agricultural producers. But we can't match what isn't there. HB1532 will ensure there are no gaps in SNAP benefits disbursement to those in Maryland who need them most.

Thank you all for your time and consideration of this important bill, and for your efforts to ensure every Maryland resident is food secure. If you have any questions or would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janet Rumble', written in a cursive style.

Janet Rumble
Interim Executive Director