



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 6, 2020

HB 1534- Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grant Program

Environment and Transportation Committee

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Delegate Melissa Wells and I want to thank you for allowing me to appear before the committee today to testify in support of HB1534.

In a 2019 publication, twenty-nine urban farmers, which represents a large portion of the urban farming population in the region, were asked what they saw as the biggest barrier to their goals. The most selected choice was access to credit and financing. 20 of these farms reside in Baltimore City.

House Bill 1534 aims to establish an Urban Agriculture Grant Program, which is administered by the Secretary of Agriculture, to provide grants to nonprofit organizations in Baltimore City in order to increase the viability of Urban Farming, and improve access to urban-grown foods.

HB1534, as amended, would require forward funding of this grant program and that in fiscal years 2022 through 2025, that at least \$400,000 of the States Unclaimed Property Fund be appropriated in the State budget to the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund. Additionally, the fund must be used to provide grants to **qualified**¹ nonprofit organizations that distribute the grant money to **Urban Agriculture Producers**².

A key component of this bill is that it requires equity in distribution. Meaning, that a minimum of 70% of funds distributed by the nonprofit organization go to minority owned or operated urban agricultural producers in historically disinvested communities.

To ensure transparency and accountability, within 90 days after the end of a grant cycle, the receiving organization must submit a report to the department that includes:

¹ **As AMENDED:** *Is incorporated in or maintains its principal place of business in Baltimore City;*

Is a membership organization of urban farms and neighborhood growers; and

Uses connection, resource sharing, and collective advocacy with respect to food, land and water to expand communities' self-determination and power.

The number of farms located in historically disinvested communities having received funds under the Program; and

The impact of the Program in increasing access to locally produced foods and/or other community benefits.

² **As AMENDED:** "Urban agricultural producer" means any establishment operating within Baltimore City limits from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were sold or would normally be sold during the year. (definition adapted from National Agriculture Statistics Survey (NASS))

- 1) The names and locations of Urban Agricultural producers that received funds under the program
- 2) The amount of funds awarded to each Urban Agricultural Producer
- 3) And the impact of the program on increasing the viability of Urban Farming and improving access to urban-grown foods.

With urban agriculture on the rise, and the need for healthy food in food deserts, it is imperative that we support locally grown food and local business and farmers in Baltimore City.

With this I urge a favorable report on HB1534. Thank you.

Delegate Melissa Wells

Legislative District 40