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**HB 1534**

March 6, 2020

**TO:** Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee  
**FROM:** Matthew Stegman, Deputy Director of Government Relations  
**RE:** HOUSE BILL 1534 – Urban Agriculture Grant Program

**POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT**

Chair Barve, Vice-Chair Stein, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration **supports** House Bill (HB) 1534 **with amendments**.

HB 1534 creates an Urban Agriculture Grant Program within the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and a companion Urban Agriculture Grant Fund to support the program. The Fund is capitalized through mandated \$400,000 appropriations in FY 2022 and FY 2025.

Innovative urban agriculture models are thriving in Baltimore on many scales. There are more than 100 community and school gardens, as well as more than 20 urban farms. Through urban agriculture, Baltimoreans are taking charge of local food production, increasing their connection to the source of their food and creating jobs – especially for those returning from incarceration, with limited language proficiency, or otherwise facing barriers in the traditional workforce. Urban farming and gardening create holistic benefits for the community through nutrition education, natural ecosystem enhancement, and increased neighborhood vitality. Strong progressive organizations like the Farm Alliance of Baltimore, Strength to Love II, Real Food Farm, and others work to support these urban producers.

Baltimore City has been a national leader in urban agriculture policy, creating one of the country’s first city-level Urban Agriculture Plans in 2013. The 2019 Baltimore City Sustainability Plan builds on the initial strategies in its Urban Agriculture chapter, with a focus on long-term access to land, especially for historically disinvested communities. The proposed

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Urban Agriculture Grant Program would make significant impacts in implementing these strategies.

The funding for this grant program would provide much needed resources to a well-established, but underfunded, movement and is critical to build equitable urban agriculture in Baltimore City.

The BCA requests the committee's favorable consideration of amendments that would accomplish the following:

- Define "urban agricultural producer" as an 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.
- Establish a review board to adopt regulations and administer the fund, of which at least 51% must be comprised of Baltimore City agency staff and other Baltimore City stakeholders, including farmers and resident representation
- Prioritize grants for the purposes of implementing the City's 2019 Urban Agriculture Section of the Sustainability Plan
- Require a that a nonprofit organization receiving grant funds distribute at least 70% of the funds to urban agricultural producers for securing land, maintaining safe, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible practices, or supporting viable urban agriculture enterprises
- Ensure equitable distribution of grant funds by requiring that the nonprofit distribute funds only to urban agricultural producers who demonstrate a measurable beneficial impact on improving local food access and/or other community benefits; and that a minimum of 70% of funds distributed go to minority owned or operated urban agricultural producers in historically disinvested communities.
- Require that nonprofit organizations receiving grant funds may not use more than 30% of the grant money for program development, promotion and outreach, program data collection, evaluation, administration, and reporting.
- Require the non-profit organization receiving grant funds to be incorporated in or maintain its principal place of business in Baltimore City and has been an established nonprofit located in Baltimore City for at least 2 years
- Amend funding years to 2022 THROUGH 2025

We respectfully request a report of **favorable with amendment** on House Bill 1534.