

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF**  
**House Bill 1534 - Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Program**  
**Environment and Transportation Committee**  
**Kumar Barve; Chairperson**  
**March 6, 2020**

**Mr. CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE. THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TODAY. AS A PERSON WHO HAS BEEN GROWING FOOD IN URBAN SPACES FOR OVER 10 YEARS IT GIVES A PLEASURE TO TESTIFY ON BEHALF OF HOUSE BILL 1534. AS A PERSON WHO HAS SUPPORTS SOCIAL JUSTICE AND FIGHTS TO CORRECT THE IMPACT OF PAST SYSTEMIC PRACTICES THAT HAS CREATED A BROKEN SYSTEM I ALSO SUPPORT BILL.**

**BALTIMORE CITY IS GROUND ZERO FOR THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF REDLINING, BLOCK BUSTING OR WHATEVER PLANNING DESIGN THAT WAS PRACTICED TO EMPOWER THE WHITE MAINSTREAM AND DISEMPOWER A GROWING AFRICAN AMERICAN MAJORITY. THIS IS WELL DOCUMENTED AND THE NEGATIVE OUTCOMES ARE AS WELL. WE NOW THAT THESE PRACTICES WERE LAID OUT IN THE 1950 UNTIL TODAY. WHAT IS LEFT WERE VACANT BUILDING, NEGLECTED OPEN SPACES AND A DISPLACE TAX BASE. THIS MUCH IS APPARENT. AT THE SAME TIME THE FOOD SYSTEM WAS REPLACED WITH WHAT IS CONSIDERED A SYSTEM OF FOOD APARTIED THAT HAS DESTROYED LIVES BY BOLSTERING NEGATIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES AND CREATED COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE LEFT HOLES AND RESIDENTS WHO SURVIVE IN SYSTEMS OFTEN LABELED AS FOOD DESERTS. TO TOP IT OFF, IN THE LATE 1960 THE CITY BANNED GROWING GARDEN FOOD IN CITY BACKYARDS SO THAT PEOPLE COULD APPLY BASIC SURVIVAL SKILLS THUS DEFYING GENERAL SELF-DETERMINATION AND RESILIENCE TO GROW AND HARVEST FOOD.**

**WE ALSO KNOW, THIS SYSTEM OF NEGLECT WAS CONSISTENT WITH THE USDA'S EFFORT TO DENY AFRICAN AMERICANS TO LIVE AND TO GROW AS FARMERS. WELL, OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS A GROWING NUMBER OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND URBAN HOMESTEADERS HAVE CHANGED THAT SYSTEM TO AN DEGREE BY GROWING FOOD IN BACKYARDS AND OPEN SPACES IN BALTIMORE CITY. I HAVE WATCHED MAY CREATIVE DESIGNS THAT HAVE RESULTED IN THE INVALUABLE STATIONS THAT SUPPORT FOOD PRODUCTION IN BALTIMORE CITY. I AM HAPPY TO BE A PART OF THE MOVEMENT.**

**SADLY, MANY PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS CANNOT GET THEIR IDEAS OFF THE GROUND BECAUSE AND THE CHALLENGES WITH SOURCES AND FUND DELIVERY. EVEN THIS BILL SEEMS TO RELEASE FUNDING IN JULY WHEN THE GROWING SEEING BEGINS IN THE SPRING. THIS IS BUT A SMALL EXAMPLE OF HOW GREAT FOOD GROWING IDEAS CAN BE HAMSTRUNG BY THE LACK OF TECHNICAL SUPPORT SO THAT FARMERS CAN RECEIVE FUNDING AND TEND THEIR SPACE AND GROW FOOD. THIS BILL DOESN'T CORRECT ALL THE ILLS AND CHALLENGES BUT IT WILL BE A GOOD START IF GUIDED TO THE PROPER ORGANIZATION.**

**WILLIE FLOWERS**  
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