

Testimony before the House Health and Government Operations Committee  
March 3, 2020  
In **SUPPORT** of H.B. 772: Food Procurement – GHG Emissions (Del. Gilchrist)  
Presented by Maryland Legislative Coalition



Dear Honorable Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Peña-Melnk and members of the committee

On behalf of Maryland Legislative Coalition and our 30,000+ members in every district across the state, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B 772 to establish a target of reducing Maryland’s GHG emissions from food purchases by 25% by 2030. This would be accomplished by reducing food waste and shifting to more climate-friendly menus in our public institutions.

The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an affiliation of activist groups across Maryland, including Indivisible, Our Revolution, Progressive Maryland, Women’s March Huddles and Together We Will as well as individuals not affiliated with any groups. We are your constituents and we are passionate about legislation in Maryland because we know that what passes in Annapolis directly affects our lives. We are also passionate about the environment and are working hard to ensure that Maryland becomes a better environmental steward. We feel that reducing food waste is an important aspect of environmental stewardship that needs to be addressed.

The agriculture sector accounts for at least one quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions, and research has shown that we cannot meet the Paris Accord targets without shifting our diets toward foods with a smaller greenhouse gas footprint. This legislation recognizes that the state’s own food procurement is the most direct point of leverage to reduce emissions associated with food consumption.

The state could meet this 25% reduction goal by reducing food waste and a moderate shift toward climate-friendly (plant-forward) menus. Reducing food waste and plant-rich diets were ranked the third and fourth, respectively, most effective climate solutions from Project Drawdown, a climate mitigation project led by Paul Hawken and worked on by a team of more than 200 scientists, policymakers, and other experts, in part because they are highly cost-effective climate solutions. For example, Oakland Unified School District saved \$42,000 as they cut their carbon footprint 14% by shifting their menus toward more plant-based foods, and they increased local purchasing and student meal satisfaction at the same time.

There is a precedent in Maryland for using procurement to support our environmental and social values. State agencies give preference to recycled paper, compost on public lands, locally grown foods, and American made goods, for example. This legislation builds on that framework by asking Department of General Services to track, using their e-Procurement system, the GHG emissions associated with food purchased by state agencies, namely Department of Health and Department of Public Safety and Corrections, as well as public universities. Similar to the state’s approach with the Renewable Portfolio Standard, this legislation sets a target of reducing GHG emissions from food procurement by 25% by 2030, in line with the science-based target from the Paris agreement. University of Maryland College Park is already tracking its food-related GHG emissions and has committed to a 25% reduction by 2030.

The recent IPCC report affirmed we have only a decade left to avoid irreversible climate damage. Maryland must do all it can to mitigate the emissions associated with our government's own operations, including our food purchasing.

As part of a comprehensive solution to the climate crisis, emissions from animals must be addressed. We recognize that we must reduce emissions from large scale animal feeding operations. We know they have become a serious problem. So, what is the next step? We have to become creative about procuring food that has less of a footprint and we have to change our default food choices to become more plant based.

People never change anything without an incentive. Decades, and lifetimes of eating the way we currently do will not change because we have a climate crisis. It's kind of like telling your child that they will become unhealthy later in life if they don't stop eating fattening foods. The consequence is too far in the future to imagine. So, we need to lead people to this. We need to pass legislation that helps us make the right choice.

In conclusion, H.B 772 is a critical step toward addressing Maryland's food-related emissions. Thank you for your consideration, and I respectfully urge a favorable report.