

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 Lauren Brown

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

On behalf of myself and the University of Maryland, College Park, 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.

My name is Lauren Brown, and I study International Relations and World Religions at the University of Maryland, College Park. I believe cultures around the world are as beautiful as they are unique and must be preserved at all costs. Unfortunately, climate change is threatening many peoples' way of life; global disasters like hurricanes, forest fires, the rise in global sea levels, decrease in annual rainfall, and other extreme weather is most affecting the poorest countries in the world. While these countries contribute almost nothing to climate change, they are the most adversely affected by it. These tragedies aren't just happening in foreign countries either; in our own nation, we've witnessed how the forest fires in California and the very recent tornado outbreaks in the south and southeast US have devastated residents and businesses. How can we secure the safety of not only those in our country, but across the world as well? This bill is a small step towards that goal.

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 a young person, I believe addressing climate change should be a priority for the state and especially for our universities. University of Maryland College Park is already set up to begin reporting on the GHG emissions from its food purchases and we have committed to the 25% reduction this bill asks for. This bill would ensure that this critical tracking continues over time and that other universities follow suit by baselining their carbon emissions from food purchasing. My student body cares deeply about our school upholding its responsibility to my and future generations by being a leader on climate change. This bill is a moderate step toward including a major part of public universities' carbon footprints that has not yet been addressed.

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.