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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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HB 1488 CERTIFIED LOCAL FARM ENTERPRISE PROGRAM AND CERTIFIED LOCAL
FARM ENTERPRISE FOOD AGGREGATION GRANT FUND - ESTABLISHMENT

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN

MARCH 10, 2020

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, Members of the Health and Government
Operations Committee:

A strong local food system is important for Maryland's economy, farmland preservation, residents' health, environmental sustainability, and emergency preparedness. Purchases made with locally owned Maryland businesses and farms have a much greater impact on the local economy than purchases made where the profit accrues out of state. Shortening the miles travelled by food (purchasing in state rather than from across the country) can decrease the carbon impact associated with transportation in the current food distribution system. The health of millions of individuals who eat at State institutions will be supported through local food procurement.

The Maryland Food for Maryland Institutions Study Group was established following the 2019 legislative session. The Study Group identified strategies for increasing the procurement of locally grown food under state contracts. HB 1488 incorporates recommendations of the Study Group and includes steps that are essential to build a comprehensive relationship between local farms and state institutions.

HB1488 sets a 20% procurement goal of locally sourced food in the state. This bill is designed to increase the amount of locally grown and produced food served in Maryland institutions. Currently, most institutional procurement is done through large contracts with food service distributors, who rarely engage locally produced sources. State institutions interested in local food procurement have expressed their challenges in contracting with multiple small farmers, and Maryland farmers interested in growing for state institutions face challenges related to predictability, aggregation, processing, and distribution.

HB1488 defines a "Certified Local Farm Enterprise" as a business that meets Maryland Nutrient Management Standards and creates the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program in the Maryland

Department of Agriculture. The Program will ensure that local farms have the opportunity to participate in contracts for Maryland State institutions.

Of particular relevance today, building a more economically sustainable local food supply and shorter supply chain systems for distribution is an important emergency preparedness step and makes Maryland more resilient to temporary or long term system shocks.

I urge a favorable report on HB 1488.