



**Senate Bill 539 (Senator Guzzone)
Income Tax Credit – Food Donation Pilot Program – Extension**

Position: Support

February 1, 2021

Dear Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

I am writing on behalf of Community FARE in support of Senate Bill 539, sponsored by Senator Guzzone, which extends the Food Donation Pilot Program that was signed into law by Governor Hogan in 2017 in Montgomery County and Southern Maryland. This program was expanded statewide in 2019, seeing 127,795 pounds of donations reported. Continuing this tax credit program would help to sustain access to locally-sourced, fresh, and nutritious food for low-income Marylanders, at the same time generating economic support to Maryland farm businesses.

Community FARE was established to help safeguard a diverse and healthy local food economy that will preserve farmland integrity and biodiversity and ensure that food grown here is accessible to residents of Frederick County and its regional neighbors. In 2018 Community FARE, along with community partners from Fox Haven Organic Farm, and experienced food system professionals from Center for a Livable Future met to launch the Frederick County Food Council and advance Frederick County's local food access, economy, and sustainability. Frederick MD Farm to School is a detailed project supported by Community FARE working toward those objectives in the specific context of Frederick County's public school institution. Due to Covid-19, Farm to School is working alongside Frederick's Blessings in a Backpack program to distribute fresh food from local farms to food insecure families at school lunch distribution sites, including educational information about nutrition and preparation of the food.

Procurement of local foods benefits public health by providing clients, staff, and other consumers using Maryland institutions fresh nutrient-rich food. Reducing the distance that food is transported also conserves energy, and generates more economic activity within the State of Maryland. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen an increase in food insecurity. According to the [Maryland Food Bank](#) there was an 89% increase in food distribution during the period from March through December of 2020. This increase in need for food assistance arises at the same time that those frequenting food banks are in even greater need for access to the kind of healthful, nutritious food that supports a strong immune system and improves health outcomes. The continuation of this credit supports the Maryland farming community and acknowledging the essential role they play in maintaining the health of our citizens and their role in the Maryland economy.

It is for the reasons stated above that we urge the Committee to adopt a favorable report of Senate Bill 539.

Respectfully,

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