

Testimony before the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Committee

March 4, 2021

In SUPPORT of **Senate Bill 723**: Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Presented by Anne Palmer

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University.

Dear Chair Pinsky and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Anne Palmer and I am an associate scientist at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, and a program director at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, an academic center focused on food systems and public health. In my role at the Center, I direct a project called Food Policy Networks, which builds the capacity of food policy councils throughout the US through technical assistance, resource development, and networking. The views expressed here are my own.

If there was ever a time for food policy councils to prove their value, it has been during the pandemic. Our research found that states and local jurisdictions with active food councils have responded quickly and steadfastly to meet their communities' needs. Eleven months into the pandemic, they continue to play a key role.

In our region, the Montgomery County Food Council serves as the lead nonprofit guiding the County's food security efforts, ensuring a coordinated response to the increased food needs that also leverages local food producers. Frederick County Food Council launched an online market with 103 members and 9 producers. Baltimore Food Policy Initiative implemented a large scale grocery and meal distribution city wide, implemented online SNAP, and secured state and federal funding for food. Prince George's County Food Equity Council connected regional food hubs, restaurants, farmers markets, and growers to market opportunities that address both their needs and the needs of food-insecure residents.

At the state level, the Delaware Food and Farm Council coordinated with state and local food providers, cooperative extension, and other agencies to collect and assess data related to food distribution to improve sustainability. They also amended their existing statewide food resources map to identify COVID-specific food resources at the community level.

In Pennsylvania, the Governor's Food Security Partnership advocated for waivers from USDA that were important for inclusive school meals programs and SNAP access. The MD Food System Resiliency Council could play a similar role in our state - leveraging relationships, expertise and resources to meet urgent and longer term needs that lead to healthier, more resilient food systems.

I applaud Senate Bill 732 for proposing the establishment of a food system resiliency council. The pandemic has exposed what we have known all along. Food system issues are best understood by bringing together a variety of stakeholders, all of whom have knowledge and expertise that is needed to solve so many of our problems. Let's not wait until the next pandemic or natural disaster to take action on what we know is an important investment. I would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you.