



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 723

Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

March 4, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
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Health Care for the Homeless
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Representation Project
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Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
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Public Justice Center
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Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports SB 723, which would establish the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council within the Maryland Emergency Management Agency.

Among the many devastating impacts of COVID-19, the rise of food insecurity has forced hundreds of thousands of Marylanders to turn to community resources and safety net programs for the first time. In September 2020, over 844,000 individuals were registered to receive SNAP benefits, which was the highest participation rate in the history of the state. As our state continues to struggle with this elevated need, we must work to create a more cohesive system to assist those struggling with food insecurity.

Many localities have formed food councils across the state, such as the Montgomery County Food Council, Prince George's County Food Equity Council, Baltimore City Food Policy Action Coalition, Howard County Food Task Force, and many others. These groups have clearly demonstrated within the past year that providing a space for members of the food system to partner together is one of the most efficient and effective ways to mobilize efforts to assist those struggling with food insecurity. By including not only just advocates and the charitable sector (such as food banks and pantries), but also the retail sector, farms and farmworkers, food production teams, and government agencies, these local groups have been both successful and resilient in the face of incredible challenges.

However, these groups are also limited by the boundaries of their localities. Moving forward, it is critical for Maryland to learn from the state's experiences and failures of addressing food insecurity across the state during COVID-19. HB 831 works to ensure that the state will have the strong network foundation needed to respond to our current crisis and also better prepare for future ones.

The formation of a Food System Resiliency Council will help create a space for all food system stakeholders to come together to share best practices, promote successful policies and work towards a more long-term solutions to food insecurity in our state, ultimately forming a more equitable and sustainable food system in Maryland.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 723.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.