

March 31, 2021

Senate Health Education and Environmental Affairs Committee
Testimony in **support** of **H.B. 317** – Climate-friendly Foods

Dear Honorable Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Friends of the Earth and our more than 26,000 Maryland members, I urge you to support H.B. 317 to reduce Maryland's GHG emissions from the food we purchase for public facilities by 25% by 2030. Thank you to Delegate Gilchrist for introducing this important legislation.

Maryland has taken ambitious action on climate, but the state has not yet begun to address emissions associated with our food consumption. Maryland-specific data is not available, but globally, food and agriculture account for around a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions, according to the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organization. The most direct point of leverage for Maryland to mitigate emissions from our food system is through its own procurement. Maryland purchases a significant amount of food, namely for correctional facilities (25 million meals), 11 healthcare facilities, and 29 public universities. These food purchases should align with our state's values, including mitigating climate change. **This bill will have no impact on the food purchasing decisions of Marylanders at grocery stores, restaurants, or privately run institutional dining facilities – only on Marylanders whose meals are already provided by the state, namely state healthcare patients, people who are incarcerated, and students on meal plans.**

At the same time, Maryland has a legacy of environmentally preferable purchasing. We prioritize purchasing green cleaning products, environmentally friendly food service ware, composting on state lands, and recycled paper. Including food in our green purchasing policies is a natural and necessary extension. Department of General Services is tracking other categories of environmentally preferable products across agencies already. Adding food will enable the state to establish a baseline for this important category of emissions without creating an undue burden on state resources.

University of Maryland College Park has already established a baseline for its food-related GHG emissions and committed to a 25% reduction by 2030. This is a modest and achievable goal for the state.

Friends of the Earth conducted a pilot analysis in Oakland Unified School District as they reduced a handful of carbon-intensive foods over a period of two years and realized a 14% reduction in their carbon footprint and a 6% reduction in their water footprint. To achieve these same carbon reductions by installing solar panels, they would have spent \$2.1 million. Instead, they actually saved \$42,000 and increased student meal satisfaction.

Friends of the Earth hired a Life Cycle Analysis consultant to analyze two weeks' worth of menus provided by DPSCS and the results are attached to our testimony. **Reducing emissions by 25% in our correctional facilities alone would save over 12,000 metric tons of CO₂-eq per year, or the equivalent of taking 2,600 cars off the road.** We also found that Corrections is currently spending 28% less on vegetarian meals than meat-based meals and that people receiving meat-based meals are receiving twice the maximum recommended amount of meat, poultry, and eggs per week. **The state should realize both cost savings and health benefits, in addition to carbon savings.**

This is a moderate bill to address the pressing threat of climate change and includes ample opportunity for stakeholder input, especially after the compromise struck between the bill's advocates and the Farm Bureau last session. **We urge a favorable report of H.B. 317.** Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

About Friends of the Earth U.S.: Founded by David Brower in 1969, Friends of the Earth U.S. is the United States' voice of the world's largest federation of grassroots environmental groups, with a presence in 74 countries. Friends of the Earth works to defend the environment and champion a more healthy and just world. Our current campaigns focus on promoting clean energy and solutions to climate change, ensuring the food we eat and products we use are safe and sustainable and protecting marine ecosystems and the people who live and work near them.