

MARYLAND STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HEALTH AND WELLNESS

March 4, 2021

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The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky
Chair, Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD, 21401

RE: SB 723 - Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Committee Members:

The Maryland State Advisory Council on Health and Wellness (the Council) is submitting this letter of support for Senate Bill 723 (SB 723) titled, “Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.”

The goals of SB 723 are: “establishing the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council; providing for the composition, co–chairs, co–vice chairs, and staffing of the Council; providing that a member of the Council may not receive compensation but may be reimbursed for certain expenses; authorizing the Council to establish certain subcommittees; specifying the duties of the Council; requiring the Council to submit certain reports to the General Assembly on or before certain dates; making this Act an emergency measure; defining certain terms; and generally relating to the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.”

The Council supports SB 723 as an inclusive, visionary way to build a healthier food system. Growing evidence suggests population-level dietary changes could improve both health and environmental sustainability.¹ The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of healthy, sustainable food systems. This legislation will help develop a comprehensive council to respond to the complexity of Maryland’s food system. Lower food security has been associated with worse dietary quality and a higher probability of major chronic diseases including hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, arthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and kidney disease.^{2, 3} The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its economic effects underscore how food system challenges can impact Marylanders, particularly in minority, rural and lower-income communities. According to the American Public Health Association, problems with food systems and access to healthy food options are often entwined with a range of social issues.⁴ In particular, a substantial body of research has documented the impact structural racism has on the U.S. food system.⁵

¹ Nelson ME, Hamm MW, Hu FB, Abrams SA, Griffin TS (2016) Alignment of healthy dietary patterns and environmental sustainability: a systematic review. *Adv Nutr* 7:1005–1025 <https://doi.org/10.3945/an.116.012567>

² Gregory CA, Coleman-Jensen A (2017) Food Insecurity, Chronic Disease, and Health Among Working-Age Adults. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84467/err-235.pdf?v=653.9>

³ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2020/march/food-insecure-households-score-lower-on-diet-quality-compared-to-food-secure-households/>

⁴ <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2014/07/29/12/34/toward-a-healthy-sustainable-food-system>

⁵ Kelly, R, et al (2021). An annotated bibliography on structural racism present in the U.S. food system (8th ed.). Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems https://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/structural_racism_in_us_food_system

SB 723 ensures local food policy representatives from diverse Maryland communities can bring their expertise to the table to build a more sustainable food system.

A healthy sustainable food system demands attention to the many related factors needed to get nutrient-dense food from farm to consumer: food production, processing, distribution, preparation, and consumption. Producers, educators, nutrition professionals, scientists, researchers, businesses, and consumers each have a role to play in addressing these factors. The diverse membership of the Food Systems Resiliency Council, as established by this legislation, has the breadth of background and expertise needed to craft a comprehensive, systems approach.

The Council respectfully urges this Committee to approve SB 723 as a critical public health measure to help reduce food insecurity and provide all Marylanders with healthy foods from a sustainable food system. This is especially critical during the time of this COVID-19 pandemic and economic challenges.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jessica Kiel". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of a long, thin horizontal line that extends from the left margin towards the signature.

Jessica Kiel, M.S., R.D., Chair, State Advisory Council on Health and Wellness