



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

February 9, 2021

Senate Bill 365 Neighborhood Business Development Program - Food Desert Projects - Business Retention

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, Senator McCray, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 365 Neighborhood Business Development Program - Food Desert Projects - Business Retention.

MRHA supports this legislation that would increase the maximum amount of a certain small loan that may be provided to an approved entity for assistance in providing or maintaining access to healthy food in certain food deserts.

Rural and underserved communities face a host of challenges related to providing accessible and affordable food due to disadvantages in infrastructure, transportation, and economic development. This legislation would provide the necessary financial boost in these communities to alleviate these challenges to consistently providing healthy and equitable food options for all rural residents.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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