



Senate Bill 723
Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Position: Support

March 2, 2021

Dear Chair Pinsky and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

We are writing on behalf of Community FARE in support of Senate Bill 723 to establish the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council within the Maryland Emergency Management Agency in response to the challenges created by COVID-19. SB 723 would facilitate collaboration among nonprofit organizations such as ours, along with government agencies, and local farm and food businesses, to assist in strategic planning for a more sustainable local food economy and provide food security and equitable access to nutritious food for all Marylanders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in supply chain challenges, while SNAP enrollment rates have risen to record levels in the state of Maryland. Demand has increased for those providing assistance to the food insecure, with the Maryland Food Bank citing an 89% increase in food distribution between March and December of last year.

Community FARE was established to help safeguard a diverse and healthy local food economy that will preserve farmland integrity and biodiversity and ensure that food grown here is accessible to residents of Frederick County and its regional neighbors. To date we support:

- The Frederick County Food Council, which was launched along with community partners from Fox Haven Organic Farm and food system professionals from Center for a Livable Future with three working groups focusing on equity and access, education and outreach, and the agricultural economy.

- Frederick MD Farm to School, a Community FARE program in partnership with Frederick County Public Schools, works to implement the objectives of the Frederick County Food Council in the specific context of the public school institution. Due to Covid-19, Farm to School is working alongside Frederick's Blessings in a Backpack program to distribute fresh food from local farms to food insecure families at school lunch distribution sites, including educational information about nutrition and preparation of the food.
- Frederick Fresh Online is a web-based market launched by our Frederick County Food Council's Ag Economy Working Group in order to provide opportunity for our farmers and other food businesses to be able to scale up to produce local food for local markets with minimal risk.

Expansion of opportunities for organizations like Community FARE to collaborate with other agencies and businesses in order to better serve the residents of Maryland can strengthen these beneficial projects and facilitate new ones that will assist individuals in need, as well as support the economic interests of our small and mid-sized farm and food businesses.

It is for the reasons stated above that we urge the Committee to support Senate Bill 723.

Respectfully,

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