

**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
SB 723 - Maryland Food System Resiliency Council**

**Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 4, 2021**



Health Care for the Homeless supports SB 723, which would establish a Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and widened the existing disparities in our state's food system and many of those already struggling pre-pandemic were hit the hardest. The creation of a state-wide food council to address Maryland's food insecurity crisis is essential for not only helping Marylanders recover from the effects of the pandemic but also towards building an equitable and just food environment.

At Health Care for the Homeless, we realize the ability of our clients to access affordable and nutritious food has a direct impact on their health. Many of our clients are at risk for or currently have a diet-related chronic illness. In addition, many of our clients face significant barriers when it comes to accessing food they want and need to eat. Providers can give clients the educational tools to eat healthier or maintain a diet that can manage their illness, but this means nothing if people cannot afford or get to the food prescribed to them by their provider. Food access is a vital component of healthcare and it will take systematic change in our food systems to provide equitable access for all.¹

Although COVID-19 did not create food insecurity in Maryland, it certainly exasperated an already pervasive crisis. It is essential that our food system is reimagined for times of emergency as well as normalcy. The creation of a Maryland Food System Resiliency Council will foster systematic change, guidance, and research. Its emphasis on developing policy recommendations to address racial inequities and diet-related health disparities will impact not just the clients served at Health Care for the Homeless but Marylanders across the state. For these reasons, we support SB 723 and urge a favorable report.

For more information, please contact Lauren Talley, Engagement and Policy Assistant, ltalley@hchmd.org. Ms. Talley focuses her work on food justice issues.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We work to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy, and community engagement. We deliver integrated medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.

¹ See <https://community-wealth.org/content/building-case-racial-equity-food-system>