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## HB 831/ SB 723 – Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

### **Position: Support**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments in support of House Bill 831 / Senate Bill 723. This bill establishes the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council to address food insecurity by coordinating state and local level food insecurity services; tracking and analyzing data to create a food insecurity map; leveraging federal and private sector grants; and advising the state to allocate resources to address needs. The Council is also charged with developing equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system and a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food, before November 1, 2021.

As part of our mission, CareFirst is committed to driving transformation of the healthcare experience with and for all our members and communities, with a focus on quality, equity, affordability, and access to care. According to the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement, health care only accounts for 20% of the overall external influence on a person's health, but socioeconomic factors, physical environment, and healthy behaviors such as diet (i.e. social determinants of health) contribute to 70% of that influence. House Bill 831 / Senate Bill 723 establishes a statewide cross functional Council that will review data, identify the root causes and scope of food insecurity in Maryland, and develop meaningful recommendations to address one of the most impactful social determinants of health—access to healthy food. We believe the work produced by the Council would lead to concrete policies and programs that mitigate the impact of food insecurity, promote access to nutritious food, improve health outcomes, and reduce existing health disparities in traditionally underserved communities.

CareFirst has committed \$10 million in regional funding to address diabetes and its upstream social determinants of health, in six targeted communities, including West Baltimore and Prince George's County, where many Maryland residents experience issues with food insecurity. We are also deploying place-based strategies to guide our community investment in social determinants of health and improve community health outcomes.

CareFirst strongly supports the policy goals advanced by House Bill 831 / Senate Bill 723. We look forward to partnering with legislators, state and local agencies, food organizations, and other stakeholders to advance health equity, as we continue to focus on targeted strategies outside and within our own organization to ensure the health and wellbeing of our members, employees, and communities.

### **We urge a favorable report.**

#### **About CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield**

*In its 83rd year of service, CareFirst, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is a not-for-profit healthcare company which, through its affiliates and subsidiaries, offers a comprehensive portfolio of health insurance products and administrative services to 3.4 million individuals and employers in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia. In 2019, CareFirst invested \$43 million to improve overall health, and increase the accessibility, affordability, safety, and quality of healthcare throughout its market areas. To learn more about CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, visit our website at [www.carefirst.com](http://www.carefirst.com) and our transforming healthcare page at [www.carefirst.com/transformation](http://www.carefirst.com/transformation), or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#).*