



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 831 – MARYLAND FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCY COUNCIL

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN

FEBRUARY 17, 2021

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

Food insecurity is defined as “the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food,” or, simply, not knowing where your next meal will come from. According to Census data, Maryland ranks second highest in the nation for median household income¹, yet food insecurity continues to grow in prevalence. This bill addresses emergency food insecurity issues in the context of the larger imperative of building a just and sustainable food system.

According to the Maryland Food Bank, nearly 1.5 million Marylanders are prone to food insecurity.² The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened food insecurity, as unemployment rises and working class individuals and families lose their income. According to Feeding America, in 2018 Maryland had 667,110 people living with food insecurity. As of October 2020, they projected the number of food insecure people to increase by 29%, likely influenced by the pandemic. Based on that projection, that means somewhere around 860,050 Marylanders do not know where their next meal is coming from.

HB 831 will address the growing crisis of food insecurity in Maryland by establishing a Food System Resiliency Council, which will better coordinate Maryland’s response to food insecurity while building a more equitable food system. The council will work to:

- Develop recommendations to increase long-term resilience of the food system;
- Address the food insecurity crisis that has intensified as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Eliminate racial inequities in the food system;

¹<https://www.census.gov/search-results.html?q=average+per+capita+income&search.x=0&search.y=0&search=submit&page=1&stateGeo=none&searchtype=web&cssp=SERP>

² Maryland Food Bank. “What’s at Stake.” <https://mdfoodbank.org/hunger-in-maryland/whats-at-stake/>

³ Feeding America. “The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity” <https://www.feedingamericaaction.org/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity/>
https://public.tableau.com/vizql/w/FoodInsecurityCOVID19/v/CountyDashboard/viewData/sessions/4579CEF18A4849C8B9BD30F47DBFA99C-0:0/views/32872469097277179_9832570857737760123?maxrows=200&viz=%7B%22worksheet%22%3A%22State%202020%20Overall%20FI%22%2C%22dashboard%22%3A%22State%20Dashboard%22%7D

- Address food deserts (areas with little or no access to affordable and nutritious food)
- Reduce food waste, increase recycling, and encourage other beneficial environmental impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a state level food resiliency council. A crisis of this magnitude compounds already existing issues of food insecurity, racial inequity, and waste. By creating a food resiliency council, we can find equitable and collaborative long-term solutions to address food insecurity.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 831.