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**House Environment and Transportation Committee**  
**Bill #: HB 0831/SB 0723, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council**  
**Hearing Date February 17, 2021**  
**\*\*SUPPORT \*\***

Dear Chair Barve and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Heather Hulse, and I am the Maryland Market Money (MMM) Program Coordinator and work for the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) which is a Division of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland. My program is a statewide food access program that matches federal nutrition benefits spent at Maryland's farmers markets, and also offers technical assistance to Maryland's farmers market stakeholders. MMM is a partnership between SMADC and the Maryland Agricultural Resource-based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO).

My team supports the bills regarding the creation of a Maryland Food System Resiliency Council at the state level to coordinate efforts and eliminate duplication of efforts by regional food councils around the state. Food council support has been invaluable to our programmatic work in Maryland, especially since the arrival of the pandemic, where we've seen approximately a 60% increase in Marylanders receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/EBT) benefits from March to December of 2020. Food councils help us find funding, they advocate for us in terms of public policy, and they make strategic connections where we are otherwise unable. With food insecurity sharply increasing in Maryland in such a short span, we couldn't do what we do without them. The thought of having a statewide food council to support us and the regional food councils in our efforts in seeking and navigating the challenging landscape of State and Federal support would be a dream come true.

Programs like mine are run on a very tight budget with a skeleton crew to manage all the moving parts. We often lack the capacity to be able to take on wider-scale initiatives and projects that we'd like to tackle. We also often become the support system for stakeholders who are smaller-scale than us, like farmers markets, farmers, and food access and food insecurity nonprofits. Having a statewide food council to support us in return would be so incredibly helpful and effective to enable us to better support food-insecure Marylanders, Maryland farmers markets, and Maryland farmers more effectively. Food councils do such important work that runs the gamut from addressing food insecurity and food access to the increasingly important role of value chain coordination and ensuring that our food systems are stable, secure, and resilient with local sourcing from Maryland producers being made a priority. A vote of support for this bill would be a step toward helping Maryland's food systems and residents to safely come out on the other side of this unprecedented public health crisis.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Heather Hulse

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