

MARYLAND STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HEALTH AND WELLNESS

February 17, 2021

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The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD, 21401

RE: HB 831 - Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Dear Chairman Barve and Committee Members:

The Maryland State Advisory Council on Health and Wellness (the Council) is submitting this letter of support for House Bill 831 (HB 831) titled, "Maryland Food System Resiliency Council."

The goals of HB 831 are: "establishing the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council; providing for the composition, co-chairs, co-vice chairs, and staffing of the Council; providing that a member of the Council may not receive compensation but may be reimbursed for certain expenses; authorizing the Council to establish certain subcommittees; specifying the duties of the Council; requiring the Council to submit certain reports to the General Assembly on or before certain dates; making this Act an emergency measure; defining certain terms; and generally relating to the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council."

The Council supports HB 831 as an inclusive, visionary way to build a healthier food system. Growing evidence suggests population-level dietary changes could improve both health and environmental sustainability.¹ The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of healthy, sustainable food systems. This legislation will help develop a comprehensive council to respond to the complexity of Maryland's food system.

Lower food security has been associated with worse dietary quality and a higher probability of major chronic diseases including hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, arthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and kidney disease.^{2,3}

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its economic effects underscore how food system challenges can impact Marylanders, particularly in minority, rural and lower-income communities. According to the American Public Health Association, problems with food systems and access to healthy food options are often entwined

s SA, Griffin TS (2016) Alignment of healthy dietary patterns and environmental sustainability: a
1 <https://doi.org/10.3945/an.116.012567>
2 security, Chronic Disease, and Health Among Working-Age Adults.. U.S. Department of Agriculture
3 [s://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84467/err-235.pdf?v=653.9](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84467/err-235.pdf?v=653.9)
[020/march/food-insecure-households-score-lower-on-diet-quality-compared-to-food-secure-households/](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84467/err-235.pdf?v=653.9)

with a range of social issues.⁴ In particular, a substantial body of research has documented the extent structural racism has on the U.S. food system.⁵

HB 831 ensures local food policy representatives from diverse Maryland communities can bring their expertise to the table to build a more sustainable food system.

A healthy sustainable food system demands attention to the many related factors needed to get nutrient-dense food from farm to consumer: food production, processing, distribution, preparation, and consumption. Producers, educators, nutrition professionals, scientists, researchers, businesses, and consumers each have a role to play in addressing these factors. The diverse membership of the Food Systems Resiliency Council, as established by this legislation, has the breadth of background and expertise needed to craft a comprehensive, systems approach.

The Council respectfully urges this Committee to approve HB 831 as a critical public health measure to help reduce food insecurity and provide all Marylanders with healthy foods from a sustainable food system. This is especially critical during the time of this COVID-19 pandemic and economic challenges.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Kiel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Jessica Kiel, M.S., R.D., Chair, State Advisory Council on Health and Wellness

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<https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2014/07/29/12/34/toward-a-healthy-sustainable-food-system>

⁵ Kelly, R., Carr, K., Pirog, R., Guel, A., Henderson, J., Wilcox, K., Wimberg, T., García Polanco, V., Babayode, D., Watson, K., & Nelson, E. (2021). *An annotated bibliography on structural racism present in the U.S. food system* (8th ed.). Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. https://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/structural_racism_in_us_food_system