



Maryland
Hospital Association

March 2, 2021

To: The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair, House Environment & Transportation Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 1325 – Food Insecurity Zones – State Legislative Districts – Reports

Dear Chair Barve:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 1325.

Access to nutritious food is essential to achieve optimal health and ensure health equity for all Marylanders. HB 1325 offers a key tool to improve our understanding and awareness of food security across the state by requiring the Department of Housing & Community Development and the Department of Planning to produce reports by legislative district, every two years.

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased food insecurity statewide. Widespread job losses, financial hardships, and school closures contributed to a surge of Marylanders seeking food assistance. In June, three months after the start of the pandemic, a record-setting 14% of the state's population received assistance—with every county impacted.¹ The Maryland Food Bank served 43 million meals between March and December—an 89% increase from the same period in 2019.² Black and Hispanic families were twice as likely as white families to be food insecure.³ These statistics are alarming, but even more concerning is the potential impact on the health of these Marylanders.

Food insecurity prevents people from consuming a balanced diet and harms overall health. Unhealthy diets contribute to chronic diseases like diabetes and malnutrition if a person's food intake is insufficient. Malnutrition can lead to diseases like hypertension and behavioral health issues like depression or anxiety.⁴ For children, food insecurity may cause developmental problems. Gathering data and identifying areas as food insecurity zones will allow us to better meet the needs of individual communities and promote the health of all Marylanders.

For these reasons, we urge a *favorable* report on HB 1325.

For more information, please contact:

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¹ Maryland Hunger Solutions. (n.d.). ["2020 Maryland County Hunger Profiles."](#)

² The Maryland Food Bank. (n.d.). ["The Maryland Food Bank's COVID-19 Response."](#)

³ Harvard School of Public Health. (2020). ["Nearly four in 10 Black, Hispanic Families Facing Food Insecurity During Pandemic."](#)

⁴ American Hospital Association. (June, 2017). ["Social Determinants of Health Series: Food Insecurity and the Role of Hospitals."](#)