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Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Vice Chair, Capital Budget

Pensions

Chair, Public Safety, Transportation,
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 9, 2022

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 437
Agriculture – University of Maryland Extension – Urban Farmer Assistance**

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and members of the committee:

As sponsor of Senate Bill 437, I urge the Committee's support. This bill will ensure that the University of Maryland Extension includes two statewide extension agents dedicated to providing technical assistance and training for urban farmers. The agents will specialize in production methods and crop management, and urban farm and agribusiness management.

The University of Maryland Extension is a premier source of research and education for Maryland farmers; additional specialized Extension agents will support a growing number of urban farmers.

The University of Maryland Extension supports research and education needs for Maryland farmers through local agents and several statewide posts. These statewide posts include staff who specialize in various areas, but not urban farming. One agent with particular expertise in urban farming is the Baltimore City local agent. As a result, this agent's time can sometimes be divided between serving Baltimore City urban farmers and seeking to assist farmers and farm service providers in other areas of the State. This legislation will dedicate two new statewide Extension agents to urban agriculture, serving as a force multiplier for Baltimore's local Extension agent and supporting urban farmers statewide.

The University Extension reports that at least 40 urban farms that sell at least part of what they produce currently exist in Maryland, representing a wide variety of for-profit and not-for-profit business models, missions, and income levels. A 2020 survey of urban growers found that urban farms across the Northeast US have a wide range of staffing numbers, with most respondents reporting between 1 and 12 full-time staff, 1 to 12 part-time staff, 1 to 6 volunteers, and 1 to 6 interns or apprentices.¹ In both the 2019 survey of MD urban growers and the 2020 survey of Northeast urban growers, the majority of urban farmers produce diversified vegetables, fruits, and specialty crops, and the majority earned a gross income of less than \$10,000. Specialty crop production and business management were cited among the top educational needs of urban farmers in both surveys.

Urban farming may help preserve green space in developed areas, filter water, and improve air quality.

The agriculture sector accounts for nearly one third of global greenhouse gas emissions and is the largest source of non-point source pollution entering the Chesapeake Bay. The use of property within developed areas for agriculture may help

¹ Richardson, M., Thompson, M.J., Carson, A.D., Taylor, J.R., Rangarajan, A. VanVranken, R., Hanumappa, M. Little, N.G. (unpublished data) *A profile of urban agricultural growers, organizations, their needs, and differences based on profit status in the northeastern United States.*

improve local water quality and local air quality. If successful, the continued growth of urban farms may help grow a network of green spaces within developed areas of Maryland.

Urban farming may help reverse historic inequities that persist in various ways.

Redlining and a history of segregation and oppression have created inequities that continue today in many ways. Urban farming can increase access for low-income and communities of color to healthy, fresh, local food sources. It can also promote business start-ups and property ownership.

The Centers for a Livable Future's *Baltimore City's Food Environment Report: 2018 Report* includes findings that in Baltimore, about 23.5 percent of residents live in Healthy Food Priority Areas, and black residents are the most likely of any racial or ethnic group to live in a Priority Area (31.5 percent).² The report also features urban agriculture along with nutritional assistance programs to highlight additional points of access to healthy food. This legislation will further the State's interest in providing equitable access to healthy food by supporting the growth of food in urban census blocks that may be sold locally through community-supported agriculture networks and farmers markets or provided to food banks.

The 2017 report *Business Disparities in the Maryland Market Area*, prepared for the State of Maryland and the Maryland Department of Transportation, states that "For African Americans, business formation rates are 4.5 percentage points lower than what would be expected in a race- and gender-neutral market area."³ The bill will help promote business ownership by people of color by targeting support for beginning farmers interested in working in urban areas and teaching about land acquisition.

The University of Maryland Extension should provide needed training and technical assistance for urban farmers as they provide for other farmers.

Farm service providers and farmers throughout Maryland name training and technical assistance as critical hurdles for beginning urban farmers and impediments to growing the urban farming industry. This legislation will directly address the needs noted by urban farmers through the responsibilities of new Extension agents – one focused on production methods and crop management and the other focused on urban farm and agribusiness management.

The Agent focused on production methods and crop management will provide education on areas including:

1. Planning and scheduling crop planting and harvesting in urban areas, including outdoors, indoors, in greenhouses, and in high tunnel production systems;
2. Production management practices for controlled environment agriculture systems;
3. Growing trials and production methods for crops grown in urban areas, including specialty crops such as heritage vegetables, ethnic vegetables, herbs, microgreens, and cut flowers;
4. Propagation and transplant production;
5. Training on and certifications for good agricultural practices; and
6. Training on organic certification.

The Agent dedicated to urban farm agribusiness management will provide education on areas including:

1. Accounting and financial management;
2. Identifying potential customers and business development;
3. Marketing;
4. Human resource management;
5. Different business types and structures;
6. Land acquisition;
7. Insurance; and
8. Licensing and permitting;

² [Report: 'Food Desert' Gets a Name Change in Response to Baltimore Community Feedback](#), Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, January 17, 2018.

³ [Business Disparities in the Maryland Market Area: Prepared for the State of Maryland and the Maryland Department of Transportation](#), NERA Economic Consulting, Section 2. Findings: Race and Gender Disparities in Business Formation, page 150, February 8, 2017.

Both agents will perform applied research while spending a majority of their time providing education directly to urban farmers. In future years, the agents may change their offerings to adapt to the needs of Maryland's farmers. According to the legislation, they will provide additional training and technical assistance according to the interests and needs identified through consultation with urban farmers. Urban farmers throughout Maryland will be the drivers of new offerings and assistance from the University Extension Agents.

For these reasons, I respectfully request the Committee submit a FAVORABLE report on SB 437.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cory V. McCray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a long horizontal stroke.

Cory V. McCray

State Senator, 45th District