



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: **HB0540 – University of Maryland Extension - Urban Farmer Assistance**

SPONSOR: **Delegate Henson/ Senator McCray**

HEARING DATE: **In the House - Hearing 2/22 at 1:00 p.m.**

COMMITTEE: **Appropriations**

CONTACT: **Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive supports **HB0540** – University of Maryland Extension - Urban Farmer Assistance, which will fund two additional University of Maryland Extension agents solely dedicated to assisting urban farmers in the state, especially in the content areas of farm business management and crop production.

Since our Prince George's County Council passed several pieces of key urban farming legislation between 2015 and 2019, our County has worked with UMD Extension's Urban Agriculture Educator (agent) through our local Extension office and our Soil Conservation District to support urban farmers in Prince George's County. Almost 80% of Prince George's County is zoned for urban farming, and for a myriad of potential benefits related to food security, economic development, and environmental and community health, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive and stakeholders are striving to incentivize this growing industry in the County. Two recent county reports – the Food Security Task Force Recommendations and Climate Action Plan – reference the importance of expanding urban agriculture as a strategy to support the county's resilience to climate change and food insecurity. Prince George's County has the highest food insecurity rate in the region, and food insecurity disproportionately impacted low-income, Black, and Latinx residents and increased from 14.3 percent to over 17 percent during the pandemic.

In 2018, the County funded an Urban Agricultural Conservation Planner to support urban farmers with Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans and the Urban Agricultural Property Tax Credit. Currently, in addition to conservation planning, our Urban Ag Conservation Planner is triaging non-soil and water conservation related questions from urban farmers that are better suited to the expertise of an

Extension agent. It would be more efficient and effective for the Planner to connect farmers with an Extension agent conducting specialized research and programming in a content area that aligns with the farmers' needs and interests. While we are appreciative of the support that we have received from the UMD Extension Urban Agriculture Educator, primarily her time and responsibilities are devoted to urban farming efforts in Baltimore City. This bill has the potential to expand UMD Extension's Urban Ag Program to reach more urban farmers and better serve urban farmers in Prince George's County.

Currently, our Soil Conservation District is working with 33 cooperators to develop Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans. In addition, the District has engaged an additional 40 urban farmers interested in launching enterprises in the County, providing them with resources related to navigating regulations, business planning, crop management practices, the County's Urban Ag Property Tax Credit, and monthly training and networking opportunities. Our Soil Conservation District is partnering with Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, ECO City Farms, and the Prince George's Food Equity Council to launch an 11-acre urban farm incubator at Watkins Regional Park. This project has received funding from both federal and non-profit partners and stands to be a national model and flagship program for the County. To best serve urban farmers participating in the incubator project, technical assistance from UMD Extension agents with cutting-edge expertise in urban agriculture business development and crop management and planning is crucial. Our County would welcome any opportunity to work with additional Extension agents and looks forward to providing input on what research and programming efforts would best suit our Prince George's County constituents engaged in urban agriculture.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive supports **HB0540** – University of Maryland Extension - Urban Farmer Assistance and asks for a favorable report.