

TO: House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Atiya Wells, BLISS Meadows

RE: House Bill 540 Agriculture – University of Maryland Extension – Urban Farmer Assistance

DATE: February 22, 2022

POSITION: SUPPORT

I support House Bill 540, which 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.

Urban farming in Maryland is a growing, valuable, and important element of Maryland's economy.

As an urban farmer based in Baltimore City for the past two years we have had to work extremely hard to find resources that are relevant to our small scale and scope of farming.

The University of Maryland Extension should provide needed training and technical assistance for urban 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 production methods and crop management Agent will provide education on areas including: planning and scheduling crop planting and harvesting in urban areas; production management practices for controlled environment agriculture systems; 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; propagation and transplant production; training on good agricultural practices and organics certifications. The Agent dedicated to Urban Farm and Agribusiness Management will provide education on areas including accounting and financial management; identifying potential customers and business development; marketing; human resource management; different business types and structures; land acquisition; insurance; and licensing and permitting.

Both agents will perform applied research while spending most 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 urge the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 540.