

MARLON AMPREY  
Legislative District 40  
Baltimore City

Environment and Transportation  
Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates  
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**March 31, 2022**

**Testimony of Delegate Marlon Amprey in support of HB 179  
Workgroup on Food Environments**

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee,

Healthy food priority areas (formerly called “food deserts”) in low-income, predominantly Black and Brown communities contribute to malnutrition and perpetuate the cycle of chronic disease. These areas are defined as regions with the following characteristics: Distance to the supermarket is more than ¼ mile, median household income is at or below 185% federal poverty level, no vehicles in over 30% of households, and low average Healthy Food Accessibility Index (HFAI). In Maryland, 1 in 4 people face food insecurity. Approximately 216,000 out of 667,000 Marylanders facing hunger are children. These numbers are devastating, and serve as an urgent call for action for a multitude of reasons.

Citizens that live in healthy food priority areas suffer from higher rates of poverty and malnutrition. It is important to recognize that the term malnutrition does not just refer to undernutrition, but also refers to obesity. Populations that do not have access to healthy, nutritious food options can suffer the devastating health effects of both ends of the malnutrition spectrum. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, obesity is associated with a 50% increased chance of death. Meanwhile, undernourished people have weakened immune systems, which could make fighting off infection much harder. By failing to provide our communities with basic access to healthy food for themselves and for their families, we are failing their future health outcomes and effectively their ability to thrive as members of society. Food and nutrition is fundamental to our well-being, and we need to invest in policies that promote food equity.

According to the USDA, as policymakers consider interventions to increase food access, it is important to understand the characteristics associated with these areas, such as income, vehicle availability, and access to public transportation. Detailed food environment reports conducted in conjunction with the Baltimore City Department of

Planning and Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future have provided this kind of invaluable information so that policymakers can identify potential solutions to inequities in food access. As an example of the detail provided in these reports, the Baltimore City's 2018 Food Environment Report found about 23.5% of residents live in Healthy Food Priority Areas, children are the most likely of any age group to live in a Priority Area (28%), and black residents are the most likely of any racial or ethnic group to live in a Priority Area (31.5%). Since 2015, about 5,000 fewer residents live in Healthy Food Priority Areas, as a result of a new supermarket opening. The report also offers an updated and more comprehensive description of other elements of the food environment, including nutrition assistance programs and urban agriculture, to highlight additional points of access to healthy food. This information is critical in creating policy that may incentivize grocery stores or other community-based food vendors to establish locations in areas with the most need.

As we attempt to tackle the problem of inequity in terms of access to nutritious food, we must take a step back and remember that this is an immensely complex problem rooted in a variety of systemic issues. From structural racism to inequities in the transportation system, the food access issue in Maryland is multifaceted and requires deep investigation of the current issues at hand. This is impossible to do without a substantial investment in research. Data points are critical in informing effective policy, and if we truly want to make a difference in our communities, we must take an evidence-based approach. The reports offered by the Baltimore City Department of Planning and the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future offer invaluable insights into the ground-level needs of the community. This type of research must be replicated throughout all districts in Maryland so that we can begin the critical journey of improving access to nutritious food for all using a systems-based approach. It is important to consult the necessary stakeholders in order to make recommendations on cost-effective methods for creating similar food environment reports at the county level. Access to healthy food is a basic human right, and we must act now to advocate for our communities.

**I urge a favorable report on House Bill 179.**

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marlon Amprey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marlon" and last name "Amprey" clearly distinguishable.

Delegate Marlon Amprey  
40<sup>th</sup> Legislative District - MD



HB0179/433926/1

AMENDMENTS  
PREPARED  
BY THE  
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE  
SERVICES

29 MAR 22  
12:50:07

BY: Delegate Amprey

(To be offered in the Education, Health, and Environmental  
Affairs Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSE BILL 179

(Third Reading File Bill)

On page 3, in line 21, strike “Center for a Livable Future” and substitute “Bloomberg School of Public Health”; in line 22, strike “Director of the Center” and substitute “Dean of the School”; and in line 24, strike “appointed by the Governor” and substitute “designated by the members of the Workgroup identified in items (1) through (6) of this subsection”.

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C8  
HB 1325/21 - ENT

HOUSE BILL 179  
(PRE-FILED)

2lr0867

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By: Delegate Amprey  
Requested: October 20, 2021  
Introduced and read first time: January 12, 2022  
Assigned to: Environment and Transportation

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Committee Report: Favorable with amendments  
House action: Adopted  
Read second time: March 13, 2022

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CHAPTER \_\_\_\_\_

1 AN ACT concerning

2 ~~Counties and State Legislative Districts Food Environment Reports~~  
3 Workgroup on Food Environments

4 FOR the purpose of ~~requiring the Department of Housing and Community Development,~~  
5 ~~the Department of Planning, the Department of Human Services, and the~~  
6 ~~Department of Agriculture to jointly produce a report for each county and each State~~  
7 ~~legislative district on the food environment in the county and district on or before a~~  
8 ~~certain date and at a certain frequency thereafter, and submit the report to the~~  
9 ~~General Assembly; and generally relating to food environments in State legislative~~  
10 ~~districts~~ establishing the Workgroup on Food Environments to determine and make  
11 recommendations regarding the most cost-effective method for producing a report  
12 on the food environment in each county and State legislative district; and generally  
13 relating to the Workgroup on Food Environments.

14 ~~BY adding to~~  
15 ~~Article Housing and Community Development~~  
16 ~~Section 6-308.5~~  
17 ~~Annotated Code of Maryland~~  
18 ~~(2019 Replacement Volume and 2021 Supplement)~~

19 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
20 That ~~the Laws of Maryland read as follows:~~

21 Article Housing and Community Development

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1 ~~6-308.5.~~

2 ~~(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS-~~  
3 ~~INDICATED.~~

4 ~~(2) "SNAP" MEANS THE FEDERAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION-~~  
5 ~~ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.~~

6 ~~(3) "WIC" MEANS THE FEDERAL SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD-~~  
7 ~~PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN.~~

8 ~~(B) ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2022, AND ON OR BEFORE JULY 1 EVERY 2-~~  
9 ~~YEARS THEREAFTER, THE DEPARTMENT, THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, THE~~  
10 ~~DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, AND THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE-~~  
11 ~~SHALL JOINTLY PRODUCE A REPORT FOR EACH COUNTY AND EACH STATE-~~  
12 ~~LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT ON THE FOOD ENVIRONMENT IN THE COUNTY AND THE-~~  
13 ~~DISTRICT.~~

14 ~~(C) THE REPORTS REQUIRED UNDER THIS SECTION SHALL INCLUDE:~~

15 ~~(1) THE METRICS THAT DETERMINE FOOD INSECURITY ZONES;~~

16 ~~(2) DETAILED METRICS THAT IDENTIFY THE HEALTH FOOD-~~  
17 ~~AVAILABILITY INDEX FOR EACH COUNTY AND EACH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT, TAKING-~~  
18 ~~INTO ACCOUNT THE DENSITY, POPULATION, AND TRANSPORTATION METHODS USED-~~  
19 ~~IN EACH COUNTY AND DISTRICT;~~

20 ~~(3) THE NUMBER OF GROCERY STORES AND SUPERMARKETS-~~  
21 ~~OFFERING FRESH FOOD IN EACH COUNTY AND EACH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT;~~

22 ~~(4) THE NUMBER OF SNAP AND WIC RECIPIENTS IN EACH COUNTY-~~  
23 ~~AND EACH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT; AND~~

24 ~~(5) WHICH STORES ACCEPT PURCHASES MADE WITH SNAP AND WIC-~~  
25 ~~BENEFITS IN EACH COUNTY AND EACH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT.~~

26 ~~(D) IN PRODUCING THE REPORTS REQUIRED UNDER THIS SECTION, THE-~~  
27 ~~DEPARTMENT, THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN-~~  
28 ~~SERVICES, AND THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE MAY COLLABORATE WITH:~~

29 ~~(1) ANY UNIVERSITY IN THE STATE;~~

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1 ~~(2) ANY NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION OR ASSOCIATION THAT~~  
 2 ~~SPECIALIZES IN EQUITY FOR HEALTH AND FOOD PRIORITY AREAS; AND~~

3 ~~(3) ANY LOCAL DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING OR~~  
 4 ~~EQUIVALENT DEPARTMENT.~~

5 ~~(E) THE DEPARTMENT, THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, THE~~  
 6 ~~DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, AND THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE~~  
 7 ~~SHALL SUBMIT THE REPORTS REQUIRED UNDER THIS SECTION TO THE GENERAL~~  
 8 ~~ASSEMBLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2-1257 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE.~~

9 (a) There is a Workgroup on Food Environments.

10 (b) The Workgroup consists of the following members:

11 (1) two members of the Maryland Association of Counties, designated by  
 12 the Executive Director of the Association;

13 (2) the Secretary of the Department of Housing and Community  
 14 Development, or the Secretary's designee;

15 (3) the Secretary of the Department of Planning, or the Secretary's  
 16 designee;

17 (4) the Secretary of the Department of Human Services, or the Secretary's  
 18 designee;

19 (5) the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, or the Secretary's  
 20 designee;

21 (6) a representative of the Johns Hopkins ~~Center for a Livable Future~~ *Bloomberg*  
 22 *School of Public Health,*  
designated by the ~~Director of the Center~~ *Dean of the School*; and

23 (7) one representative each from four different grocery store brands with a  
 24 presence in the State, ~~appointed by the Governor~~ *designated by the members of the Workgroup*  
*identified in items (1) through (6) of this subsection.*

25 (c) The Workgroup shall elect a chair from among its members.

26 (d) A member of the Workgroup:

27 (1) may not receive compensation as a member of the Workgroup; but

28 (2) is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the Standard State  
 29 Travel Regulations, as provided in the State budget.

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1 (e) The Workgroup shall determine the most cost-effective way to produce a food  
2 environment report for each county and each State legislative district in the State.

3 (f) On or before November 30, 2022, the Workgroup shall report its findings and  
4 legislative recommendations to the General Assembly, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the  
5 State Government Article.

6 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect June  
7 1, 2022.