

**KATIE FRY HESTER**  
*Legislative District 9*  
Carroll and Howard Counties

Education, Health, and  
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on  
Cybersecurity, Information Technology  
and Biotechnology



*Annapolis Office*  
James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street, Room 304  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3671 · 301-858-3671  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3671  
KatieFry.Hester@senate.state.md.us

**THE SENATE OF MARYLAND**  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of SB121 - Farm to Food Security Act**

January 25th, 2021

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of SB121- The Farm to Food Security Act, which invests in three programs to enhance resiliency and reduce food insecurity in the state of Maryland. As you may recall, last year this committee voted unanimously to establish the The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council, which has been hard at work over the interim. This bill builds on 3 of the recommendations found in the report, which was sent to your office earlier this week.

As the wealthiest state in our country, you may not expect nutrition to be an issue in Maryland; however, nearly one-third of Marylanders are considered food insecure. There is no single cause of food insecurity, but economic shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the structural challenges present in our food system. Since March of 2020, as an example, the Maryland Food Bank has reported an 88% increase in food distribution. Simultaneously, farmers and food-related businesses saw significant drops in demand and increased difficulty in distribution.

The Farm to Food Security Act, invests in three programs to enhance resiliency and reduce food insecurity: increasing Maryland Market Money (MMM), creating the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resilience Mechanism (MD FARM), and piloting the Farm to School Grant Program.

First, Maryland Market Money simply matches SNAP and WIC benefits that are used at Maryland farmers markets. This program reduces barriers to healthy foods, improves economic viability of Maryland farmers, and diversifies the customer base of farmers markets; since its inception in 2013, over \$1M of funding has been utilized to alleviate food insecurity. This bill would increase the annual funding from \$100,000 to \$300,000 to increase its scope and impact.

Secondly, this bill would create the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resilience Mechanism (MD FARM). This program is modeled after successful initiatives in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, New York, and Virginia, and would mitigate the economic hardships and supply chain issues of COVID-19 and future shocks. Specifically, it would create a new fund in MDA that would award up to \$1.25M of grants annually to food banks or charitable emergency food providers to assist in the procurement, processing, transportation, and distribution of surplus, seasonal, or contractual food products to vulnerable Marylanders, while simultaneously supporting our local farmer's revenue streams.

Third, it would establish the Farm to School Pilot Grant program, which is based on similar programs in Michigan, New York, and California. This would allow Maryland school districts to apply for grants equal to 20 cents for every meal served that includes Maryland-grown food. Current farm-to-school initiatives at the county level receive no state funding or staffing for this purpose. This pilot would allocate \$500,000 to expand access to local and healthy food for Maryland students. In your floor system you will find an amendment to page 8 which enables schools to apply for this grant at the start of the year by predicting their meal servings as opposed to waiting until the end of the year; this amendment was also offered during the House hearing.

The combined impact of the Farm to Food Security Act, will increase the purchasing power of food insecure marylaners, increase revenue for farmers at farmers markets, and ensure our students' meals have a local Maryland food component. By voting for this bill we can build a more sustainable and local food system that fortifies supply chains, empowers local farmers, and brings equity to food access and consumption.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable with amendment report on Senate Bill 121.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Fry Hester". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Senator Katie Fry Hester  
Carroll and Howard Counties