



Maryland  
Hospital Association

March 31, 2022

To: The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair, Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 179 - Counties and State Legislative Districts - Food Environment Reports

Dear Chair Pinsky:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 179.

Access to nutritious food is essential to achieve optimal health and ensure health equity for all Marylanders. HB 179 will create a workgroup to identify a cost-effective way to produce food environment reports for jurisdictions around the state. These reports will improve our understanding and awareness of food security across the state, supporting efforts to advance population health and health equity initiatives in Maryland.

Almost one in three Marylanders are food insecure and the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased food insecurity statewide.<sup>1</sup> Widespread job losses, financial hardships, and school closures contributed to a surge of Marylanders seeking food assistance. From March to December 2020, 12.2% of the state's households received assistance—with every county impacted.<sup>2</sup> The Maryland Food Bank served 43 million meals between March and December—an 89% increase from the same period in 2019.<sup>3</sup> Black and Hispanic families were twice as likely as white families to be food insecure.<sup>4</sup> Combating food insecurity is crucial to achieve racial equity in social determinants of health.

Food insecurity prevents people from consuming a balanced diet and harms overall health. Unhealthy diets contribute to chronic diseases like diabetes and malnutrition if a person's healthy food intake is insufficient. Malnutrition can lead to diseases like hypertension and behavioral health issues like depression or anxiety.<sup>5</sup> For children, food insecurity may cause developmental problems. Gathering data and identifying areas as food insecurity zones will allow us to better meet the needs of individual communities and promote the health of all Marylanders.

For these reasons, we urge a *favorable* report on HB 179.

For more information, please contact:  
Brian Sims, Director, Quality & Health Improvement  
Bsims@mhaonline.org

<sup>1</sup> Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (2021). "[Interim Report to the Maryland General Assembly](#)"

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Hunger Solutions. (2021). "[2021 Maryland County Hunger Profiles.](#)"

<sup>3</sup> The Maryland Food Bank. (n.d.). "[The Maryland Food Bank's COVID-19 Response.](#)"

<sup>4</sup> Harvard School of Public Health. (2020). "[Nearly four in 10 Black, Hispanic Families Facing Food Insecurity During Pandemic.](#)"

<sup>5</sup> American Hospital Association. (June, 2017). "[Social Determinants of Health Series: Food Insecurity and the Role of Hospitals.](#)"