

January 25, 2022

SB 121

Maryland Farms and Families Fund, Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program, and Maryland Farm-to-School Meal Grant Pilot Program – Alterations and Establishment

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Position: Support

Senate Bill 121 increases funding for the Maryland Market Money program, establishes the MD FARM Grant program for food assistance organizations to purchase, process, and transport Maryland crops to food insecure communities, and pilots the Farm-to-School grant program to reimburse schools and school districts for the meals served containing local Maryland produce.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that two million Marylanders may face food insecurity this year. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations who are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, including people of color, older adults, families with children, and those who are disabled. The causes of food insecurity are complex and often include other underlying factors such as unstable housing, inadequate healthcare, and un- or under-employment.

Since 1979, the Maryland Food Bank has relied on a strong and dedicated network of partners to address the food insecurity crisis in Maryland. The importance of partnerships and collaboration at all levels of the food system cannot be overstated, and stability of this food assistance network is imperative for our work to continue. The ability of food assistance organizations such as the Maryland Food Bank to continue to provide nutritious food and produce from local Maryland farms to food insecure communities depends on the strength of these connections.

SB 121 will be doubly impactful for Maryland's food system and the food assistance network. It will further sustain local farms and farmers, including opening up opportunities for partnership between food assistance organizations, schools, and communities with smaller farms, farms operated by minority and BIPOC farmers, and farmers who grow culturally appropriate crops. Additionally, it will benefit local communities by providing fresh, nutritious produce to food insecure populations for whom it might not currently be easily accessible or regularly available.

The Maryland Food Bank appreciates your consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 121.