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MAYOR

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HB 179

March 31st, 2022

TO: Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director, Office of Government Relations
RE: House Bill 179 – Workgroup on Food Environments
POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 179.

HB 179 would establish a workgroup to determine and make recommendations regarding the most cost-effective method for producing reports on food environments in each county and state legislative district. The impetus behind the desired workgroup stems from the 2018 Food Environment Briefs, created for each legislative district by the Food Policy and Planning Division of Baltimore City’s Department of Planning in partnership with the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF). The legislative briefs were part of the larger effort around *Baltimore City’s Food Environment: 2018 Report*.

Food Policy and Planning has collaborated with CLF since 2012 on food environment mapping. This mapping venture has identified areas with concentrated barriers to accessing healthy food. These areas are now referred to as Healthy Food Priority Areas in Baltimore, and colloquially known as “food deserts.” In 2018, Food Policy and Planning used the information built into the Citywide map to create legislative district-level maps and briefs. These briefs: provide a demographic breakdown of who lives in Healthy Food Priority Areas; detail the numbers and specifics of food retail, food assistance, and urban agriculture sites; and identify challenges, and opportunities for each district throughout the document.

The maps and briefs can be a starting place for conversations around the food environment and have helped policymakers better understand the food systems in their districts. The suite of Food Environment Maps has helped to inform policy such as the Baltimore City Grocery Store Personal Property Tax Credit, and other efforts like the targeted placement of emergency food distribution sites during the Coronavirus pandemic.

This project is likely to be a major undertaking by the state, especially in considering the nuances between urban and rural food environments, the extent of data collection, and the baseline knowledge of each geography needed to identify challenges and opportunities. Therefore, it is important to study the methodology and resources necessary for the creation of food environment reporting to ensure that the project is executed in the most efficient way possible. Food Policy and Planning can provide guidance and lessons learned to the state agencies on methodology and processes to build from for new food environment mapping efforts.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on House Bill 179.