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Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 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
January 25, 2022

The Rural Maryland Council **supports** Senate Bill 121. The bill will provide more opportunities to those who do not know where their next meal will come from as it raises the amount of the Maryland Farms and Families Fund from \$100,000 to \$300,000 in FY2024. This significant increase will allow more families to buy fresh produce and healthy foods and double their spending power at farmers markets and farm stands. Additionally, it will encourage consumers to buy local products that will benefit local farmers and local small businesses. Lastly, it will strengthen the food distribution program and will ensure there are no empty shelves during an emergency, and it will incentivize local foods in school meals by awarding grants to eligible school districts.

The Maryland Farms and Families Fund was signed into law in 2017 and has been helping provide families with meals ever since. The program allows double the purchasing ability for families using the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Women Infants, and Children (WIC) at farmers markets. These are families that are often struggling financially and need assistance with purchasing food. According to USDA data, as of October 2021 there are 864,649 Marylanders participating in the SNAP program, a 24% increase from October 2020.

Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program and Fund (MD FARM) will award grants to food banks and charitable emergency food providers to alleviate food insecurity. These grants will be for the procurement of surplus, seasonal, or contractual agricultural food products; the processing and preparation of agricultural food products for distribution; and the transportation of agricultural food products. Additionally, the grant money may only be used for food products and services sourced from the State. This program would provide more opportunities for those who do not know where their next meal will come from. According to the *2019 Maryland Food System Map Data Summary*, in 2017, just under 11% of Maryland adults and just above 15% of children were food insecure.

Maryland Farm to School Meal Grant Pilot Program would incentivize local foods in school meals by awarding grants to eligible school. Allowing for the purchase, processing, procurement, staffing, or infrastructure investments. This program will incentivize the introduction of local foods into schools that will provide healthier foods for children and increase revenues for farmers.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 121.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”