

February 22, 2022

**2022 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
S.B. 630 Establishing Office of Resilience**

BILL: SB630: Health – Maryland Department of Emergency Management - Office of Resilience.

COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

POSITION: Testimony in support of Senate Bill 630

Honorable Chair, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record in support of S.B. 630. This letter is submitted by Anne Palmer, a food systems researcher at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future and member of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (MD FSRC), and Heather Bruskin, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC), Co-Chair of the MD FSRC. These comments are submitted on behalf of the Council and do not necessarily represent the views of Johns Hopkins University, MCFC, or the State of Maryland.

The Maryland General Assembly established the Maryland FSRC during the 2021 legislative session bringing together 33 experts from across the state to work toward a more resilient food system and address the food insecurity crisis due to COVID-19. In the Council's report to the legislature submitted on November 1, 2021, we recommended that the Office of Resilience be established and fully funded.

S.B. 630 would benefit Maryland's ongoing efforts to mitigate the next crisis by establishing an Office of Resilience. It requires the Director of the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) to appoint a Chief Resilience Officer to direct the Office of Resilience, which in turn coordinates the state's efforts to ensure measures are in place to address future disruptions, as identified in the Maryland Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Notably, S.B. 630 also specifies that several state agencies will be required to identify a liaison to participate in the planning. We see this as a critical step to ensure that the state's response to the next crisis is coordinated across agencies. Breaking down the siloes of food-based issues into social services, economy, and environmental sustainability in order to pursue systems-based strategies that go beyond meeting immediate critical needs, and focus on addressing the root causes of issues and inequities, is critical to build resilience for the long-term. We also recommend that non-governmental organizations, such as food policy councils, and community-based groups be officially integrated into the Office of Resilience's work, both local and state.

Equity is also a vital part of creating resilient communities. We witnessed the pandemic's disproportionate effect on lower-income and communities of color. As the MD FSRC report

noted, addressing inequities “will take time and thoughtful dialogue with stakeholders to identify concrete, sustainable” actions. Given the cross-sectoral nature of resilience, the Office of Resilience will be an important resource in the state to advance equity efforts and we urge the office to ensure it remains a top priority.

Like every other State in the nation, Maryland reacted to, rather than planned for, the COVID-19 pandemic. We can take what we have learned these past two years and create a space to design, plan, and implement actions needed to make Maryland and **all** its residents more resilient to any disruption, both human-caused and natural disasters.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of S.B. 630.

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Associate Scientist, Health, Behavior, and Society
Bloomberg School of Public Health
Director of Practice
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Heather Bruskin' in a cursive script.

Heather Bruskin
Co-Chair, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council