



HB156 - Local Governments – Urban Agricultural Incentive Zones – Authorization

Testimony before

House Environment and Transportation Committee

January 19, 2022

Position: Favorable

Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and members of the committee, my name is Elizabeth Fixsen, and I represent the 750+ members of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today in **support of HB156**, to provide for establishment of urban agricultural incentive zones.

Under this bill, a qualifying farmer or partner organization can apply to the local government for designation of an urban agricultural incentive zone (UAIZ). The bill will authorize the local government to establish an advisory committee to designate a UAIZ. When such a zone is established, the local government may establish a fund to receive USDA grants for conservation innovation and other funds. This fund may be used to support local economic development associated with UAIZ activities, to create educational programs focused on nutrition and local urban farms, and to improve community access to healthy food. UAIZ farmers will receive a reduction of property tax on the UAIZ land and reduction in cost of utilities associated with the UAIZ land.

The effect of this bill will be to promote locally grown produce, which offers a range of benefits. Small urban farms improve the aesthetics of the urban landscape and helps to create local jobs. Locally produced food is healthier because it is fresher, and small farms are less likely to use harmful pesticides and chemicals in growing their produce. Because it is produced for a local market, such locally-grown produce saves the monetary and environmental costs of long-distance transportation.. Many other benefits are listed here: <https://arrowquip.com/blog/animal-science/top-benefits-buying-locally-grown-food>. A model of an Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone is one implemented in Los Angeles, California. <https://www.nycfoodpolicy.org/urban-agriculture-incentive-zones-act-los-angeles-urban-food-policy-snapshot/>

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

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