



HB 147 SUPPORT

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 Environment and Transportation Committee

January 19th, 2022

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Prince George's County Food Equity Council (FEC) to express our support for HB 147 and encourage a stronger focus on culturally relevant and climate friendly food across the bill. The Maryland Farm to Food Security Act leverages effective existing programs and innovative pilot programs to enhance resiliency and reduce food insecurity.

The FEC was established to provide a democratic platform for residents, farmers, health and anti-hunger advocates, educators, and food retailers to transform the food system into one that improves public health, ensures environmental sustainability, and spurs sound economic development. Our council uses an equity lens to focus on policies that increase opportunities for all residents to access healthy, affordable, safe, sustainably produced, and culturally relevant foods while also supporting small producers and food entrepreneurs. We support HB-147 and believe this bill has the potential to increase access to healthy foods for residents in our county's under resourced communities and support the local farm economy.

Our council has led advocacy efforts to fund Maryland Market Money for markets across Prince George's. Maryland Market Money has increased access to healthy foods for our families while helping farmers and other producers that sell at markets increase their bottom line. State funding for this program will allow us to consider increasing the allowable match amount at our markets, making the program even more impactful.

The MD FARM program could provide access to high-quality locally produced products that are often out of reach for our food assistance providers. Though the federal Farms to Families box program had significant issues, it was very successful in helping producers increase the amount of produce they provided to their clients. Our providers were devastated with the food box program ended; the elevated level of need was still there in our communities. Providers have continued to struggle to fill the gap as supply chains have been disrupted and food prices

continue to rise. We encourage you to consider addressing some of the weaknesses of the federal program in this grant program by prioritizing sustainably produced and culturally relevant foods from small to medium-sized farms. This will help minimize waste and negative environmental impacts from the program. Now is the ideal time to invest in this program to build the infrastructure needed to be more crisis ready in the future while addressing the needs food assistance providers have today.

We strongly support the increased reimbursement rate for school meals that the MD Farm to School Meal Grant Program could provide. While we understand that many of the details of the program will be developed by the Maryland State Department of Education, we do encourage prioritizing culturally relevant and climate-friendly foods in the grant program. Again, this will help minimize tray waste and potential negative environmental impacts. To ensure the program meets its goals, we also encourage the creation of a multi-sectoral steering committee to guide the regulatory development of the program.

We urge a favorable report on HB 147 and encourage a stronger focus on culturally relevant climate friendly and sustainably produced food across the bill.

Sincerely,



Sydney Daigle, Director
Prince George's County Food Equity Council