



**Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment**

**Testimony on: HB0152 - Department of Agriculture - Urban Agriculture Grant Fund**

**Organization: Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing**

**Submitting: Laurie McGilvray, Co-Chair**

**Position: Favorable**

**Hearing Date: March 23, 2023**

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing our testimony today. The Maryland Legislative Coalition Climate Justice Wing, a statewide coalition of over 50 grassroots and professional organizations, urges you to vote favorably on HB152.

HB152 will make changes to the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund (Fund) to increase the capacity of food producers in urban areas. The bill will include \$250,000 for the Fund in the annual budget for 2025 through 2029, and provide a larger percentage of funds to urban food producers. In addition, HB152 will alter the membership of the Review Board established to implement the grant process and prioritize applications that benefit socially disadvantaged urban farmers.

Food deserts in urban areas are a serious problem, especially for disadvantaged communities. Expanding food production closer to home in urban areas, will help Maryland begin to tackle the food desert problem. This bill also addresses climate change, because urban farms can sequester carbon, improve soil quality through composting, and reduce the distance food must be transported (using less fossil fuel for transportation). Finally, the bill will benefit urban communities by enhancing the food production capacity of grant recipients (i.e., agricultural producers, nonprofit organizations, and institutions of higher education) and provide training for future urban farmers.

We ask that you vote FAVORABLE for HB152.