



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

**Senate Bill 124 - Maryland Food System Resiliency Council
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee – January 25, 2023
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club** (WDC) for the 2023 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic clubs in our county with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of SB0124. This bill will make the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council a permanent entity within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management. The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council addresses emergency food security issues in the context of the wider objective of building an equitable and sustainable food system.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) identifies food insecurity as “a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle”.¹ In simple terms, the result of food-insecurity is that families often don't know where their next meal is coming from. According to the Maryland Food Bank, approximately 2 million Marylanders faced hunger in 2021, which can result in serious consequences for families across the state.²

Many studies suggest that there is a direct correlation between food insecurity and health disparities. Adults and children who are food insecure may be at an increased risk for a variety of negative health outcomes and health disparities. One study found that food insecure adults may be at increased risk for obesity.³ Lower food security has also been associated with worse dietary quality and a higher probability of major chronic diseases including hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, arthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and kidney disease.⁴

Children who are hungry are less able to focus which results in poor academic performance. For example, food insecure children show smaller gains in math and reading achievement between kindergarten and third grade, and, from ages six to eleven, face a higher likelihood of repeating a grade, according to a report by the Governor's Office for Children.⁵ There is also strong research tying school meal participation to several positive outcomes for children, including: improved proficiency on standardized tests, reduced chronic absenteeism, and fewer disciplinary concerns.⁶

¹ <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20Department%20of%20Agriculture,related%2C%20they%20are%20distinct%20concepts.>

² Maryland Food Bank. “What's at Stake.” <https://mdfoodbank.org/hunger-in-maryland/whats-at-stake/>

³ Holben DH, Shelley AM. Diabetes risk and obesity in food-insecure households in rural Appalachian Ohio [Internet]. *Prev Chronic Dis*. 2006[cited 2017 Nov 27];3(3). Available from: http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2006/jul/05_0127.htm

⁴ The Journal of Nutrition. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2806885/>

⁵ https://goc.maryland.gov/childhood-hunger/#_ftnref1

⁶ Ending Childhood Hunger: A Social Impact Analysis, bestpractices.nokidhungry.org



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Pregnant women who are food insecure are at risk for birth complications and their children may be at risk of being born underweight. During the first few years of life, a well-balanced diet is crucial to a child's development.⁷

There is much work to be done to address the growing crisis of food insecurity in Maryland and part of that work requires a sustained coordinated response at the state level to build a more equitable food system. One way to do this is to support the initiative started in 2021 that created a Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) and make it a permanent entity within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management. The FSRC was established to address the issues around food insecurity and the underlying causes and long-term effects. The FSRC was tasked with developing equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase long-term resiliency of the food system, expand the impact of existing food council organizations, and to develop a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food.

In November 2022, [FSRC issued an interim report](#) and a key recommendation in the report was for the work of the FSRC to continue so Maryland is ready to prepare for, respond to, and recover from food system interruptions large and small, while ensuring inclusion of diverse voices across the food system landscape.

Passing this bill will make the FSRC a permanent entity within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management, and enable the work to build an equitable and sustainable food system for Maryland. This is an important aspect of a long-term plan to address food insecurity in our communities.

We ask for your support for SB0124 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Diana E. Conway
WDC President

Tazeen Ahmad
WDC Advocacy Committee

⁷ <https://moveforhunger.org/just-hunger-lasting-impact-food-insecurity-children>