



February 1st, 2023

**2023 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY
HB0032: Maryland Food System Resiliency Council**

BILL: HB0032: Maryland Food System Resiliency Council
COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation
POSITION: Testimony in Support of House Bill 0032
BILL ANALYSIS: Establishing that the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council is housed in the Office of Resilience in the Maryland Department of Emergency Management; establishing the members of the Food System Resiliency Council and altering the process for electing a co-chair of the Council: and generally relating to the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.

Dear Chair Barve and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) urges you to **SUPPORT** this bill to establish the permanent location and structure of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought to light many of the issues that people face everyday in terms of food access, the affordability of food, and the ability to feed themselves and their families, healthy, nutritious, and culturally relevant food. The hunger crisis that developed resulted in record-setting SNAP enrollment rates throughout the state, an over 40% increase in demand amongst regional food assistance providers, and significant supply chain challenges that left grocery store and food bank shelves empty. Local Food Councils throughout the state mobilized immediately to respond to this crisis and to coordinate and implement food assistance efforts at the local, state, regional, and federal levels.

In response, the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) was convened via legislation passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2021 to provide state-wide expertise and recommendations for state-wide action. The work of the FSRC in its brief tenure has been impressive, including sixteen well-researched, actionable recommendations in its [2021 Interim Report](#) to the General Assembly, and an additional eleven in its [2022 Report](#). Additionally, the



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FSRC has identified and established action priorities that leverage existing expertise and contribute to government efficiency by sharing best practices and replicable models of essential service delivery.

In its 2-year existence, the FSRC has been a catalyst for coordinating food system work on the local and state level throughout Maryland. Partly because of the FSRC convenings and its recommendations to the General Assembly, the Montgomery County Food Council was able to secure a 2022 USDA Regional Food System Planning Grant to create a community of practice of local food councils across the state, compensate them for their participation, and provide seed funding to new councils in currently under-represented areas such as the Eastern Shore. MCFC's application would have been much less competitive if the FSRC had not already established a well-researched and published recommendation for additional local food councils and increased food council coordination across the state.

We strongly support this bill to continue convening the Food System Resiliency Council under the leadership of the Maryland Department of Emergency Management. The resilience of our food system was tested during the COVID-19 pandemic, and changes in business-as-usual supply chains and food assistance structures are occurring as a result of that test. For Maryland to be best-positioned to respond to and take advantage of the many opportunities being presented by the federal government, private businesses, academic institutions, farming advocates, and local residents, and community leaders, the FSRC should continue to convene with the diverse representation identified in this legislation. This bill establishes that the Food System Resiliency Council will have representatives from all 5 regions of Maryland, include experts on food system policy, racial equity within the food system, farmers, food business owners, representatives of the public school system, and food nutrition experts, to ensure that the Food System Resiliency Council best serves all residents of Maryland. The FSRC is vital to both short-term food access programs and long-term strategic planning for creating a more just, resilient, and sustainable local food system. **For these reasons, the Montgomery County Food Council supports HBoo32 and urges a FAVORABLE REPORT for this bill.**

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources

For more information, please contact Massa Cressall, Interim Executive Director, at the email and phone number below.



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