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MAYOR

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HB 8

January 24, 2023

TO: Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Government Relations

RE: HOUSE BILL 8 – COUNTIES AND STATE LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS – FOOD ENVIRONMENT REPORTS

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 8.

HB 8 requires the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, the Maryland Department of Planning, the Maryland Department of Human Services, and the Maryland Department of Agriculture to produce a food environment report for each county and each State legislative district. These reports are to be modeled off of the 2018 Food Environment Briefs created for each State legislative district by the Food Policy and Planning Division of Baltimore City's Department of Planning in partnership with the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF). The legislative briefs were part of the larger effort around *Baltimore City's Food Environment: 2018 Report*.

Food Policy and Planning has collaborated with CLF since 2012 on food environment mapping. This mapping venture has identified areas with concentrated barriers to accessing healthy food. These areas are now referred to as Healthy Food Priority Areas in Baltimore City, and colloquially known as "food deserts." In 2018, Food Policy and Planning used the information built into the citywide map to create legislative district-level maps and briefs. These briefs: provide a demographic breakdown of who lives in Healthy Food Priority Areas; detail the numbers and specifics of food retail, food assistance, and urban agriculture sites; and identify challenges and opportunities for each district throughout the document.

The maps and briefs can be a starting place for conversations around the food environment and have helped policymakers better understand the food systems in their districts. The suite of Food Environment Maps has helped to inform policy such as the Baltimore City Grocery Store Personal Property Tax Credit, and other efforts like targeted placement of emergency food distribution sites during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This project is likely to be a major undertaking by the State, especially in considering the nuances between urban and rural food environments, the extent of data collection, and the baseline knowledge of each geography needed to identify challenges and opportunities. Food Policy and Planning can provide guidance and lessons learned to the State agencies on methodology and processes to build from for new food environment mapping efforts.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on House Bill 8.

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