

SB311Fav.pdf

Uploaded by: Christopher West

Position: FAV

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Judicial Proceedings Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 23rd, 2024

The Maryland State Senate Education, Energy, and The Environment & Budget and Taxation Committees

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman & Guy Guzzone.

2 & 3 West Miller Senate Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 311: *Agriculture - Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program - Expansion*

Dear Chairs Feldman and Guzzone, and members of the Committees,

In my legislative district, there is an organization known as First Fruits Farm. It was established in 1998 by Rick Bernstein and his wife, Carol. First Fruits Farm is a non-profit, Christian ministry dedicated to providing fresh, nutritious food for the hungry through volunteer service and community partnerships. 100% of everything that First Fruits Farm grows is DONATED to feed children and adults who are struggling with hunger. During the past 25 years, First Fruits Farm has harvested and distributed just under 25 million pounds of fresh produce to feed low income families in central Maryland.

The main partner of First Fruits Farm is the Maryland Food Bank, but other beneficiaries of the food grown by the Bernsteins include shelters, schools, churches and community food distribution centers. The incredible generosity of the Bernsteins has truly and dramatically transformed the lives of thousands of food-insecure families in central Maryland.

Stephen Mather was the founder of the National Park System. Following his death, plaques were mounted in our national parks stating, “There will never come an end to the good he has done”.

I truly believe that the same can be said about the Bernsteins – There will never come an end to the good they have done on behalf of so many thousands of needy families in central Maryland.

At this stage, the programs of First Fruits Farm have grown so extensive that they have outrun the ability of Rick and Carol Bernstein to pay for them with their personal resources. They need some financial assistance. That’s why SB 311 is being introduced.

The purpose of Senate Bill 311 is to establish the *Maryland Food and Agriculture Resiliency Operating Fund*. The fund will be a non-lapsing fund with \$1 million deposited into it by the State each year. As written, the Fund will provide annual grants to qualifying non-profit farms and community gardens which operate on at least 250 acres of land that is conserved within a land conservation program, which grow between two to three million pounds of produce annually and which exclusively donate said produce to Maryland food banks and other charitable food providers at no cost.

I call your attention to the fact that the Secretary of Agriculture is represented at this hearing. In recent days, the Secretary contacted me and suggested that the qualifying parameters of this bill should be somewhat loosened so that other non-profit farming operations in Maryland could qualify for financial assistance from the Fund. Rick Bernstein was totally amenable to the Secretary's suggestions. Accordingly, a friendly amendment has been prepared along the lines suggested by the Secretary.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 311 and would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

Maryland Catholic Conference_FAV_SB311.pdf

Uploaded by: Jenny Kraska

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

January 23, 2024

SB 311

Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program - Expansion

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 311 expands the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program (Grant Program) in several areas, most importantly by allowing certain, qualified nonprofit organizations to qualify for grant funding.

The Grant Program plays a crucial role in promoting sustainability, resilience, and innovation within our agricultural sector. By broadening the eligibility criteria to encompass qualified nonprofit organizations, the State of Maryland has the opportunity to further enhance the positive impact of this program.

Nonprofit organizations often bring unique perspectives, community engagement, and innovative approaches to addressing challenges in the food and agricultural space. Including them in the grant program would not only strengthen the diversity of the Grant Program but also help foster collaboration between governmental and non-governmental entities.

Additionally, many nonprofits have a proven track record of implementing successful programs that contribute to the overall well-being of our food systems in Maryland. Granting qualified nonprofits access to this Grant Program would help to amplify the program's effectiveness in achieving its goals in helping to supply agricultural food products to our state's food banks and charitable emergency food providers.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 311.

SB 311 - Maryland Food Bank - FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Anne Wallerstedt

Position: FWA

Senate Bill 311
Agriculture – Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program –
Expansion
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
January 23, 2024

Position: Support with Amendment

Senate Bill 311 creates the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Operating Fund and mandates \$1 million for the fund for the operating costs associated with qualifying farms providing local, Maryland products to food assistance organizations.

The Maryland Food Bank would not be able to feed the 1 in 3 Marylanders who are at risk of food insecurity without a strong local food system, and the foundation of our food system is the farms and farmers located throughout the state. Local farms and our relationships with farmers are extremely valuable (and have been particularly beneficial since the start of our Farm to Food Bank Program in 2010) and necessary to ensure that food insecure Marylanders and their families are able to regularly access nutritious produce and other agricultural products. Through our Farm to Food Bank Program, we contract grow with, glean from, and accept donations from local farms whose products go directly into food insecure communities through our network of 330 partner organizations and 1,100 distribution sites all across the state.

The Maryland Food Bank is very supportive of efforts that strengthen the local food system, and for SB 311 specifically we applaud the establishment of this Fund which will provide much needed opportunities for financial support for farms, including those that help support the work of the Maryland Food Bank by providing local products we can distribute to food insecure communities all across the state. As this is such needed investment in our local farm partners, the Maryland Food Bank believes this funding opportunity should benefit as many farms throughout the state as feasible under the MFARM program. Strengthening our local food system and ensuring that our partners, including local farms, have the resources they need to continue their operations and support the Maryland Food Bank is a top priority of ours.

SB 311 helps achieve this as a solid first step, yet we'd ask that as many of our local farms be eligible for funding like this as possible. Many of our farm partners may be smaller, less resourced, or have very little financial flexibility, and maximizing access to grant funding such as this for their and as many farms as possible under the MFARM program access is paramount in ensuring equity in our local food system.

For these reasons, the Maryland Food Bank respectfully requests a favorable report after amendment on SB 311.

Informational SB311 Agriculture - Maryland Food an

Uploaded by: Tyler Hough

Position: INFO



Maryland Farm Bureau

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January 22, 2024

To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau

Re: Information Only – SB0311 - Agriculture - Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program – Expansion

The Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program (MFARM) helps people who are food insecure to access the nourishment that they need, while providing a market for farmers to sell their products. The purpose of this program is to build food system resiliency by leveraging Maryland agricultural/seafood products and services to support the State's food banks and charitable emergency food providers to alleviate food insecurity.

The grant program allows Maryland's food banks and charitable emergency food providers to request funding to purchase and process surplus, seasonal, or contractual agricultural/seafood products listed in the Certified Local Farm and Fish Program and deliver it to Maryland families in need throughout the year.

Maryland Farm Bureau worked for the MFARM Program establishment in 2022 and is happy to see an opportunity to expand the grant program. We believe the current language for eligibility of “Qualified Nonprofit Organizations” is limiting to the operations that would qualify. We believe that less restrictive eligibility requirements would be beneficial to the grant program, and to the many charitable operations that donate to the Maryland Food Bank under the MFARM program to alleviate food insecurity.

Thank you,

Tyler Hough
Director of Government Relations

Please reach out to Tyler Hough at 443-878-4045 with any questions