

SB0098
Interagency Food Desert Advisory Committee - Food Desert Study
Environment and Transportation Committee
March 26, 2024
Favorable

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB0098, which mandates the Interagency Food Desert Advisory Committee to conduct a comprehensive study aimed at reducing the prevalence of food deserts in Maryland. This initiative aligns with our longstanding commitment to addressing hunger and improving the lives of Marylanders in need.

For over a century, Catholic Charities has been dedicated to enhancing the lives of Marylanders in need, with a longstanding focus on addressing hunger. As the state's second-largest human services provider, we play a key role in addressing this critical issue. **In 2023 alone, our programs, including Our Daily Bread, Sarah's House, and My Brother's Keeper, collectively provided nearly 500,000 meals to individuals and families facing food insecurity.**

Amidst this pressing need, it's concerning to note that in Maryland, 600,970 individuals are experiencing food insecurity, including 164,160 children.¹ Highlighting the urgency of addressing this issue, recent research conducted by Johns Hopkins University's 21st Century Cities Initiative further underscores the gravity of the situation, shedding light on the widespread nature of food insecurity in Baltimore, where one in five residents are affected.² Additionally, a study by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future revealed that one in four city residents reside in areas known as food deserts.³ While charitable programs offer support, they are unable to fully address the needs of those experiencing hunger. Both charitable initiatives and government assistance programs are essential in bridging the gap to ensure individuals have access to adequate meals.

A study would aid in pinpointing the locations of these food deserts and assessing their impact on local communities. By understanding the root causes of food deserts, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) can better address these issues, contributing to the fight against hunger. It's crucial to recognize that food deserts are not confined to urban areas but also affect suburban and rural regions, highlighting the statewide impact of limited access to healthy food options.

The passage of SB98 would establish a strategic framework for identifying and addressing food deserts, facilitating targeted interventions to enhance access to healthy food options across underserved areas in Maryland.

Given these compelling reasons, Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB98.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy.

1. Feeding America. Maryland | Feeding America. [www.feedingamerica.org. https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maryland#:~:text=In%20Maryland%2C%20600%2C970%20people%20are](https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maryland#:~:text=In%20Maryland%2C%20600%2C970%20people%20are)
2. A Portrait of Baltimore: Results of the 2023 Baltimore Area Survey. 21st Century Cities Initiative. Published December 5, 2023. <https://21cc.jhu.edu/a-portrait-of-baltimore-results-of-the-2023-baltimore-area-survey/>
3. Johns Hopkins Center for Livable Future . 1 in 4 Baltimore Residents Live in a Food Desert. Center for a Livable Future. Published June 10, 2015. <https://clf.jhsph.edu/about-us/news/news-2015/1-4-baltimore-residents-live-food-desert>