



Maryland Senior Citizens Action Network

MSCAN

AARP Maryland

Alzheimer's Association,
Maryland Chapters

Baltimore Jewish Council

Catholic Charities

Central Maryland
Ecumenical Council

Church of the Brethren

Episcopal Diocese of
Maryland

Housing Opportunities
Commission of
Montgomery County

Jewish Community
Relations Council of
Greater Washington

Lutheran Office on
Public Policy in
Maryland

Maryland Association of
Area Agencies on Aging

Maryland Catholic
Conference

Mental Health
Association of Maryland

Mid-Atlantic LifeSpan

National Association of
Social Workers,
Maryland Chapter

Presbytery of Baltimore

The Coordinating Center

MSCAN Co-Chairs:
Carol Lienhard
Sarah Miicke
410-542-4850

Testimony in Support of SB 98- Department of Housing and Community Development – Food Desert Study

Finance Committee

February 8, 2024

Support

The Maryland Senior Citizens Action Network (MSCAN) is a statewide coalition of advocacy groups, service providers, faith-based and mission-driven organizations that supports policies that meet the housing and care needs of Maryland's low and moderate-income seniors.

MSCAN supports SB98, which would establish a study on food deserts in Maryland.

Approximately 64.28% of Maryland's zip codes fall into the category of food deserts, where residents are situated 10 miles or more away from the nearest grocery store. Within these areas, over 31% of the population is black, and 30% are families without vehicles. These figures represent how food deserts disproportionately affect lower-income and racially diverse communities throughout Maryland. Addressing the challenge of food deserts through research would not only tackle systematic inequalities but also provide equitable food access to those who deserve it. Passing SB98 wouldn't just signify progress in combating these disparities; it would also enhance our understanding of how food deserts impact residents.

Trapped in these areas of food deserts, individuals resort to gas stations, corner stores, and food pantries for their daily food needs, resulting in a diet dominated by highly processed and pre-packaged or canned foods, largely without fresh produce or proper grocery options. This has significant health implications, particularly for vulnerable groups like young children and older adults who require consistent nutrition for their well-being. Older adults are particularly susceptible to being trapped in food deserts due to additional limits on transportation needs to access proper grocery stores and food pantries. This leads to an increase in diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, increased intake of sodium, and lack of overall proper vitamins and nutrition that one would normally obtain from fresh produce. These factors then lead to increased health issues in older adults such as increased hospitalizations and higher rates of food related diseases among low-income older adults in food deserts.

Supporting SB98 ensures that families, children, and older adults facing food insecurity receive the nutrition and assistance they rightfully deserve. By delving into research on Maryland's extensive number of food deserts, we aim to unravel the complex issues stemming from food deserts and take a meaningful step towards resolving the broader problem of food insecurity across the state.

For these reasons we support SB98 and ask for a favorable response from the committee.

