



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)**

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

February 7, 2024

### ***Senate Bill 0098: Department of Housing and Community Development - Food Desert Study***

#### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

*Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0098: Department of Housing and Community Development - Food Desert Study*

*Food deserts are any geographical areas where there is an absence of supermarkets or grocery stores. Food deserts often look different between urban and rural areas, but their impact on community health remains the same. For rural areas, any location where there are no supermarkets or large grocery stores for at least 10 miles is considered to be a food desert. 1 in 3 Maryland residents face food insecurity, many of which are children. According to a Hunger Map created by the Maryland Food Bank, the average percentage of people living in rural counties with food insecurity is nearly 11% (n.d.). From lack of transportation, affordability, to convenience are a few of many factors that prevent people from acquiring nutritious foods. Despite the barriers to food accessibility, action must be taken to ensure that residents of Maryland are able to have access to affordable food. An intricate issue such as food insecurity requires an intentional intervention. In order to serve Maryland residents effectively and efficiently, a study on the nature of food deserts in Maryland should occur. By understanding who is most impacted by food deserts, how geographical location impacts accessibility, what disparities put some residents at a higher risk, or what specific aspects of current programs may or may not be working to address food insecurity in Maryland, the State of Maryland can establish a program to reduce the presence of food deserts across the state. Gathering information from the very communities that live in food deserts (whether they are rural or urban) may also bring to light unforeseen barriers that policy-makers and public health officials can address.*

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,  
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