



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 98

### Department of Housing and Community Development – Food Desert Study

*Finance Committee*  
February 7, 2024, 1pm

*Submitted by Mark Huffman, Co-Chair*

#### **Member Agencies:**

211 Maryland

Anne Arundel County Food Bank

Baltimore Jewish Council

Behavioral Health System Baltimore

CASH Campaign of Maryland

Energy Advocates

Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

Family League of Baltimore

Fuel Fund of Maryland

Job Opportunities Task Force

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services,  
Inc.

League of Women Voters of Maryland

Loyola University Maryland

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Maryland Community Action  
Partnership

Maryland Family Network

Maryland Food Bank

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Paul's Place

St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore

Welfare Advocates

#### **Marylanders Against Poverty**

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**Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports SB 98, which requires the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to conduct a study on the location and impact of food deserts in the state and later issue a report with recommendations on how to reduce the number of food deserts.**

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders is at risk of food insecurity. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations that are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, including communities of color, families with children, and older adults. The drivers of food insecurity are complex and often include additional factors such as low income, lack of reliable transportation, and access to healthcare.

The State of Maryland designates an area a food desert based on several factors, including availability of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthy foods, income levels of residents, transportation availability, and comments from local government. The study authorized by SB 98 on the location of these areas and the impact they have on the local population will allow DHCD to better understand what creates a food desert and identify these issues to help fight the root causes of hunger. Many residents of Baltimore City live in a food desert, but these areas are not limited to urban regions. Though suburban and rural food deserts have different parameters regarding distance to a grocery store - the lack of access to nearby, healthy food options affects Marylanders across the state.

A report outlining the effects food deserts have in generating and sustaining food insecurity across Maryland and how to reduce the number of these areas would be beneficial in locating and addressing root causes of hunger statewide. Marylanders Against Poverty appreciates SB 98 for its inclusion of DHCD into the work of analyzing food deserts and considers this bill a meaningful step towards their elimination.

**MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 98.**

*Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.*