

KATIE FRY HESTER
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Education, Energy, and
Environment Committee

Chair, Joint Committee on
Cybersecurity, Information Technology
and Biotechnology



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB 177- Procurement - State Department of Education - Control Authority - Local Food Purchasing

January 20, 2025

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of SB 177 - Procurement - State Department of Education - Control Authority - Local Food Purchasing, which will simplify the food procurement processes to make it easier for small farmers to get their products purchased by schools.

Farm to School programs help students, small farmers, and the community. Students get to eat fresh, healthy local foods. Small farmers gain access to bigger and more stable financial opportunities by selling to schools. The community benefits by having healthier children, more job opportunities, and a stronger local economy.¹

However, complicated procurement processes make it difficult for many small farmers to get their products purchased by schools. Currently they must engage separately with multiple school systems.

This bill:

- Allows the Maryland State Department of Education to create “master contracts” with local farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors, and other local food businesses. Local school systems can then purchase from these master contracts, making it easier for small businesses to engage in procurement with several local school systems.
- Includes Certified Chesapeake Invasive Species, with the goal of increasing Blue Catfish in school meals and decreasing the presence of this invasive (but nutritious) species from the Chesapeake Bay.

This bill represents a rare opportunity to meet multiple critical goals with one swift action. By streamlining procurement, we empower our local farmers, fishers, and food enterprises, bolstering our economy and supporting sustainable agriculture. By prioritizing fresh, locally sourced foods, we enhance the health and well-being of our students. And by addressing the invasive Blue Catfish, we protect the Chesapeake Bay while providing a healthy addition to school meals. It is a win for our economy, our environment, and our children’s education. For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on SB 177.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Katie Fry Hester'.

Senator Katie Fry Hester
Howard and Montgomery Counties

¹<https://www.farmtoschool.org/>