

Hearing 3/25 1:00 PM  
Seva Gandhi  
Bethesda MD 20817

**TESTIMONY ON HB0009- POSITION: FAVORABLE**  
**Public Safety - Food System Resiliency Council - Definitions and Reports**

**TO:** Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**FROM:** Seva Gandhi

My name is Seva Gandhi. I am a resident of District 16 and a sophomore at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, MD. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0009, Public Safety - Food System Resiliency Council - Definitions and Reports.

As a high school student in the Leadership Academy for Social Justice pathway, I have not only learned firsthand about the disparities within different areas and communities concerning healthy food access but also about the profound impact of language.

HB0009 introduces the term "healthy food priority areas" to describe predominantly lower-income areas with limited access to affordable and healthy food retailers. This shift from the term "food deserts" aligns with contemporary understanding and emphasizes the immediacy of addressing food accessibility in these communities. Additionally, the bill adopts the term "wasted food," which is also used by the EPA, to describe food not used for its intended purpose and managed through various methods, including donations, animal feed, composting, anaerobic digestion, or disposal.

While these changes may seem minor, they are important. Language impacts how we perceive and address issues. The phrase "food desert" carries a negative connotation and often excludes rural areas facing similar challenges, and "food waste" is an inaccurate term. Standardizing Maryland's definitions with USDA and EPA standards ensures consistency in addressing food insecurity. Additionally, these changes display a commitment to equity in addressing food insecurity, something that needs to be taken into account. By redefining these terms, this bill encourages more accurate and respectful dialogue around food accessibility challenges, which is necessary for creating effective solutions.

As a student engaged in social justice work, I understand that words matter. HB0009 is an important step toward making sure that Maryland's policies reflect the reality of food accessibility challenges while also encouraging meaningful action to address them. I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB0009.