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MAYOR

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HB 0009

January 23, 2025

TO: Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 0009 – Public Safety - Food System Resiliency Council - Definitions and Reports

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 0009.

HB 0009 updates definitions related to the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council; defines “Healthy Food Priority Areas”; and updates reporting provisions for the Council. The switch from “food deserts” to “Healthy Food Priority Areas” is a positive step forward. We have been using the term Healthy Food Priority Areas in Baltimore City for over a decade now, and many other cities and states across the country have followed our lead. Conversations with our Resident Food Equity Advisors and our Food Policy Action Coalition as well as community groups, residents, and national leaders revealed that the term “food desert” is often met with critique or disapproval. “Food desert” suggests there is no food, when in urban environments there is an imbalance between healthy and unhealthy food. Additionally, the term puts the whole area in a liability framework and does not acknowledge the amazing grassroots work occurring on the ground to fill the gaps. While the frame changed, the definition did not.

In addition, the Baltimore City Food Policy and Planning Division is an active member of the Maryland Food System Resilience Council and agrees that the updated definitions and reporting provisions will benefit the Council as a whole.

For the above stated reasons, the BCA respectfully request a **support** report on HB 0009.