



"Cultivating a collaborative, sustainable, and equitable food system for all Maryland communities."

FAVORABLE - HB 9
Public Safety – Food System Resiliency Council - Support of Definitions and Reports

Environment and Transportation

Maryland Food System Resiliency Council
Hearing Date: 29 JAN 2025

Honorable, Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement of record in **support of House Bill 9**.

This letter is submitted on behalf of the Maryland Food System Resilience Council (FSRC). The Food System Resiliency Council was established by the Maryland General Assembly during the 2021 legislative session to bring together 32 appointed council members from across the state, all with different points of entry and expertise, to work toward a more resilient food system and address the food insecurity crisis.

The FSRC members address their charge by holding regular meetings to understand and address the needs of a resilient and equitable food system in the state. Each year, the Council identifies approaches and provides the General Assembly with a report including recommendations that address these needs.

Over the past year, the Council identified two terms found in the original statute creating the Council that are outdated and confusing to those engaged in the work. The first of these terms is "food desert", which has become synonymous with urban areas that are lacking access to grocery stores or other sources of healthy food. In an effort to better define areas where access to healthy food is limited, the Food Council supports the widely accepted definition of "healthy food priority areas" which encompasses all predominantly lower-income areas that have limited access to retailers that sell affordable, healthy food. The use of this term will create a greater understanding of the breadth of the state's citizens being impacted by accessibility issues and developing appropriate responses.

Another term often cited in food system discussions is "food waste". The use of this term implies that the food being addressed is no longer of any use. Over one-third of the food produced in the United States is never eaten, wasting the calories and production resources used to grow food that could have fed more than 150 million people each year. The definition of the term, "wasted food" illustrates that food not used as intended for its original purpose can provide a useful benefit through donations to those in need, creating animal feed, providing composting opportunities, and energy generation. The proposed definition in HB9 would align the Council's definition with that of the US EPA's definition of wasted food



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(<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/sustainable-management-food-basics#Food%20Waste>) and the Maryland Department of Environment (<https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/land/RecyclingandOperationsprogram/Pages/Solid-Waste-Management---Organics-Recycling-and-Waste-Diversion---Food-Residuals.aspx>). The Council is supportive of the use of the term "wasted food" as it provides an overarching definition of many topics that are being addressed through the FSRC's recommendations.

The FSRC remains committed to addressing the original goals to improve the resiliency of the state's food system and addressing the food insecurity needs. Over the past four years, the Council has engaged individuals and organizations representing various sectors of the food system to provide insight to current food access and production situations and challenges. As a result of this information, the Council provides the General Assembly with a report each year including recommendations. The recommendations suggest approaches to increase the access of local foods to the state's citizens while providing the agricultural community with new opportunities. The recommendations are grounded in the Council's guiding principles to develop equitable and sustainable policy and address food insecurity in the State.

We recognize that the State's current financial situation presents a challenge. We also recognize and commend the State's approach to ensure that the agencies work closely together to ensure that issues are being addressed holistically through implemented policies and programs. The Council's work embraces this approach through the introduction of recommendations. One example is the Food System Resiliency Council 2024 Annual Report to the Maryland General Assembly, Recommendation 4.8: Incentive to Increase Locally Produced Food Served in Schools. This recommendation would provide increased access for students to local, healthy food and provide the state's agricultural community increased access to new markets.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony **in support of House Bill 9**. We look forward to continued engagement as we collectively work to increase access to healthy foods for all of the state's residents.

Sincerely,

Nancy Nunn, Co-Chair of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

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