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Economic Matters Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Chairman Korman
Vice Chair Boyce
Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee
250 Taylor House Office Building
251 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen St
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

March 4, 2025

Testimony of Delegate Marlon Amprey in support of HB 1434 Food Desserts Workgroup - Establishment

Dear Chairman Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 1434, which seeks to establish the **Food Deserts Workgroup** to examine and propose actionable solutions to eliminate food deserts across the state. Limited access to fresh, nutritious food—especially in low-income, predominantly Black and Brown communities—exacerbates health disparities, perpetuates cycles of poverty, and contributes to poor health outcomes. Currently, one in three Marylanders faces food insecurity, including approximately 216,000 children, underscoring the urgency of this issue.¹

This proposed workgroup will comprise a diverse coalition of stakeholders, including two members each from the Senate and House of Delegates, as well as designees from the Maryland Departments of Aging, Commerce, Health, Housing and Community Development, Human Services, and Planning. Additionally, the State Superintendent of Schools, members of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council, and representatives from the Maryland Municipal League and the Maryland Association of Counties—including designees from a rural county, a suburban county, and Baltimore City—will contribute their expertise. Their mandate will include analyzing food deserts and their public health, environmental, and economic implications, as well as developing strategies to attract and sustain grocery retailers in high-need areas. A comprehensive report outlining key findings, policy recommendations, and implementation strategies will be submitted to the Governor, the General Assembly, and relevant committees.

The public health consequences of food deserts are profound. Limited access to nutritious food significantly increases the risk of diet-related illnesses. Obesity, for instance, is linked to a 50% higher mortality risk from COVID-19, while undernutrition weakens the immune system, heightening vulnerability to infections.² These disparities reinforce the critical need for a systemic approach to food equity.

¹ Maryland Food Bank. *Hunger in Maryland: The Facts*.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Obesity and COVID-19: Increased Risk for Severe Illness*.

Ensuring access to healthy, affordable food is not merely a policy consideration—it is a fundamental human right that demands urgent legislative attention.

Research from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) underscores the importance of considering socio-economic factors such as income levels, vehicle ownership, and public transportation access when developing food accessibility policies.³ The Baltimore City Department of Planning, in partnership with the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, has provided valuable data on the local food environment. According to the 2018 Baltimore City Food Environment Report, 23.5% of city residents live in Healthy Food Priority Areas, with Black residents (31.5%) and children (28%) disproportionately affected.⁴ Notably, the report found that since 2015, approximately 5,000 fewer residents live in these areas due to the opening of a new supermarket—illustrating how strategic interventions can yield tangible improvements in food access. Additionally, the report explores supplemental strategies such as nutrition assistance programs and urban agriculture initiatives, which serve as critical alternative food sources. Expanding such research statewide will enable policymakers to develop targeted solutions tailored to Maryland’s diverse communities and encourage grocery stores and community-based food vendors to establish locations in high-need areas.

Addressing food insecurity requires an acknowledgment of the systemic inequities that sustain it, including structural racism and transportation barriers. Sustainable, data-driven solutions necessitate substantial investments in research and stakeholder engagement. County-level food environment assessments, modeled after Baltimore’s comprehensive reporting, should be conducted across the state to ensure evidence-based policymaking. By integrating insights from public health experts, urban planners, community organizations, and economic development leaders, Maryland can foster an equitable food system that prioritizes the well-being of all residents. Access to healthy food is a basic human right, and we must act now to advocate for equitable food access in our communities.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1434.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marlon Amprey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "A".

Delegate Marlon Amprey
40th Legislative District - MD

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). *Food Access Research Atlas*.

⁴ Baltimore City Department of Planning & Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. *2018 Baltimore City Food Environment Report*.