



Date: February 6, 2025

To: Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and Finance Committee Members

Reference: Senate Bill 353-Food Deserts Workgroup-Establishment

Position: Favorable with Amendment

Dear Chair, Beidle and Committee Members,

On behalf of LifeBridge Health, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on SB353. LifeBridge Health is a regional health system comprising Sinai Hospital of Baltimore, an independent academic medical center; Levindale Hebrew Geriatric Center and Hospital in Baltimore; Northwest Hospital, a community hospital in Baltimore County; Carroll Hospital, a sole community hospital in Carroll County; Grace Medical Center (formerly Bon Secours Hospital), a freestanding medical facility in West Baltimore; and Center for Hope a center of excellence focused on provided hope and services for trauma survivors in Baltimore City.

Research has shown that social and economic factors, such as housing and food, account for 40% of the factors that contribute to health. Access to and knowledge about healthy foods was identified as a top five social concern across all the LifeBridge Health hospitals Community Health Needs Assessments. For the past year, all LBH entities have been screening for this social determinant health in both in and outpatient setting. Food insecurity limits people from consuming a balanced diet, increasing their risk for chronic disease and mental illness.

Food insecurity can lead to obesity and diabetes. Insufficient food intake or malnutrition can increase the risk of hypertension, asthma, tooth decay, anemia, infection, and birth defects. Individuals living in food-insecure households are often unable to purchase healthy food, may have been unable to eat regular meals and snacks as recommended for disease management, and may frequently run out of food, leading to poor disease self-management.

Improving the health of the community using upstream interventions that are affordable, patient-centered, and equitable has become part of the mission of our hospitals. Food security is a critical social determinant of health and key to our hospitals strategy to address chronic illness and child development. LifeBridge Health is committed to supporting food related strategies and partnerships to maintain health in our hospital service areas and reduce readmissions, preventable ED visits. As the state enters into a new agreement with CMMI under the AHEAD model, the issue of food insecurity will be a key factor related to health equity initiatives and barriers we can collectively work together to address.

For all the above stated reasons, we request a Favorable vote with one amendment on Senate Bill 353.

Amendment: We would ask to be included as a representative or participant on the task force or have the Maryland Hospital Association include to coordinate with their members including LifeBridge Health.

For more information, please contact:

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CARE BRAVELY