

Senate Bill 353  
Food Deserts Workgroup – Establishment  
Senate Finance Committee  
February 6, 2025

**SUPPORT**

Senate Bill 353 as introduced establishes a workgroup to assess food deserts in the state and make recommendations on how to eliminate them. As amended, it would specify the statutory requirement that the Food System Resiliency Council make recommendations to address food deserts.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders are at risk of food insecurity, in every corner of the state. There are certain populations more susceptible to food insecurity, including communities of color, families with children, veterans, and older adults. While financial instability is a leading driver of food insecurity, a lack of access to fresh and nutritious foods in areas commonly referred to as “food deserts” may overlap and compound such factors.

To form this understanding, we blend various types of information such as visual mapping, local relationships, research, and statistical data to assess and monitor food insecurity rates statewide. While the reasons that an individual or family face hunger are personal and unique, broader trends allow us to find common factors among many different communities. Many Marylanders live in communities that do not have sufficient places nearby to purchase fresh produce and nutritious food that they want and can afford. In these situations, the Maryland Food Bank and our nearly 800 partners step in to fill this gap. However, while the work we do is critical and extremely necessary, complete reliance on the charitable food system is not a sustainable or strategic approach to ending hunger for good.

In working to address this and other food-related priorities, the Maryland General Assembly statutorily established the Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) in 2021. The FSRC brings together state agencies, community-based organizations such as the Maryland Food Bank and the Capital Area Food Bank, and the private sector to recommend how to sustain and strengthen our local food system. Understanding the necessity of this partnership and coordination, one of the FSRC’s mandates is to make recommendations on addressing food deserts. Additional mandates include the creation of a food system map that tracks and illustrates, among other things, food insecurity throughout the state – which would include areas of unmet need. The Maryland Food Bank operates the Maryland Hunger Map showing detailed and overlaying analysis of food insecurity and its drivers in throughout the state. This and any similar or additional mapping can help guide this work, particularly in locating and illustrating the causes of food deserts and the effects on the Marylanders who live in such communities.

The Maryland Food Bank supports efforts to draw attention to food deserts, as solutions to this problem are complex and multi-faceted – and also want to ensure that such efforts are additive, not duplicative. With this, we appreciate the consideration of SB 353 and respectfully request a favorable report.

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