



February 2, 2025

2025 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY  
SBo353: Food Deserts Workgroup -  
Establishment

**BILL:** SBo353: Food Deserts Workgroup - Establishment

**COMMITTEE:** Finance

**POSITION:** Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 353

**BILL ANALYSIS:** Establishing the Food Deserts Workgroup to study and make recommendations regarding solutions to eliminate food deserts in the State; and requiring the Workgroup to report its key findings and recommended solutions to eliminate food deserts by November 1, 2025, to the Governor and certain committees of the General Assembly.

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. The Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) urges you to SUPPORT the Senate Bill 353, which proposes the establishment of a Food Deserts Workgroup to study and recommend solutions for eliminating food deserts across Maryland. This initiative is crucial for addressing food insecurity and promoting equitable access to nutritious food for all residents.

In Montgomery County, food insecurity affects approximately 8.9% of the population, equating to 93,590 individuals. The annual food budget shortfall in our county is estimated at \$74,776,000, with an average meal costing \$4.52.



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The USDA identifies three census tracts within Montgomery County as food deserts, encompassing a population of 16,110 residents. These areas such as Wheaton and Germantown are characterized by limited access to supermarkets or large grocery stores, particularly for low-income households lacking reliable transportation.

### **Why This Matters for Montgomery County and Maryland**

The Food Council is a member of the Food Systems Resilience Committee which seeks to improve food systems across Maryland. Establishing the Food Deserts Workgroup will provide a comprehensive analysis of food deserts in the state, examining their health impacts, environmental concerns, and economic effects. The Workgroup's assessment of strategies to attract grocery stores and supermarkets to underserved areas, along with a review of existing incentives and financing programs, will be invaluable.

For Montgomery County residents, this bill holds the promise of targeted interventions to eliminate food deserts, thereby improving access to healthy food options. Such efforts are essential for enhancing public health, stimulating economic development, and fostering a more equitable community.

We urge the General Assembly to pass Senate Bill 353, demonstrating a commitment to addressing food insecurity and ensuring that all Maryland residents have access to nutritious food. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to improving Maryland's food system.

Sincerely,

Nanya Chiejine, MPH  
Executive Director,  
Montgomery County Food Council



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For more information, please contact Nanya Chiejine, Executive Director,  
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*The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources*



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