

# **SB 353 - Maryland Food Bank - FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Anne Wallerstedt

Position: FAV

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.

**ANNE WALLERSTEDT, ESQ.**  
Vice President, Government Relations and Strategic Initiatives  
[awallerstedt@mdfoodbank.org](mailto:awallerstedt@mdfoodbank.org)  
C: 410.991.7285

**MATTHEW CAPODANNO**  
Manager, Government Relations  
[mcapodanno@mdfoodbank.org](mailto:mcapodanno@mdfoodbank.org)  
C: 908.984.4400

MEMBER OF  
**FEEDING  
AMERICA**

# **MAND Testimony 2025 - Support - Senate Bill 353 -**

Uploaded by: Daniel Shattuck

Position: FAV

## MARYLAND ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS



**Date:** February 6, 2025  
**Bill:** Senate Bill 353 – Food Deserts Workgroup - Establishment  
**Committee:** Senate Finance Committee  
The Honorable Pam Beidle, Chair  
**Position:** SUPPORT

The Maryland Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND) is an organization representing approximately 1,000 licensed dietitians and nutritionists, dietetic interns, and students within the state of Maryland.

Senate Bill 353 will establish “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.”

Millions of people in the US and around the world live in food desert areas where it’s hard or even impossible to find healthy foods. These deserts promote poor health outcomes, strain our economy, and reinforce the worst effects of social determinants of health.

Food deserts are known as areas without access to nutritious, high quality, and affordable food. The USDA describes them as any area with a 20% or greater poverty rate, and where a third or more of the residents live more than a mile away from a supermarket.<sup>1</sup>

Food deserts are predominantly found in low-income areas where residents often lack access to cars. This is a recognized public health issue, with poorer health outcomes for lower-income individuals. Additionally, studies have shown that Black Americans are nearly 400% more likely than white Americans to live in neighborhoods that do not have a full-service supermarket.<sup>2</sup>

There is a great need for Senate Bill 353 to assist with the elimination of poor health due to lack of nutritious and affordable food.

We ask that there be purposeful and active stakeholder engagement throughout the work of the commission. MAND stands ready as a resource and partner in this important undertaking.

For these reasons we ask for a FAVORABLE report on Senate Bill 353.

Sincerely,

**Tia Jeffery, PhD, RDN, LDN**  
MAND President  
[president@eatwellmd.org](mailto:president@eatwellmd.org)

**Ilene Cervantes del Toro, MSPH, RDN, LDN**  
&  
**Arelis Torres RDN**  
MAND State Policy Representatives

**Jessica Kiel, MS, RDN, LDN**  
MAND Public Policy Coordinator

<sup>1</sup> Reference: From Food Deserts to Food Oases: Addressing Access to Healthy Food. food revolutions.org  
Ocean Robbins. Sept 11, 2020. Retrieved Feb 3, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Same as above

# **SB0353-FIN\_MACo\_SUP.pdf**

Uploaded by: Karrington Anderson

Position: FAV



**MARYLAND**  
*Association of*  
**COUNTIES**

## **Senate Bill 353**

### *Food Deserts Workgroup - Establishment*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Finance Committee

Date: February 6, 2025

From: Karrington Anderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 353. This bill establishes the Food Deserts Workgroup to study and recommend solutions to eliminate food deserts across the state. The Workgroup's findings and recommendations will be critical in identifying strategies to ensure all Marylanders have reasonable local access to fresh and healthy food.

According to the Maryland Food Bank, one in three Marylanders faces food insecurity. While food deserts manifest differently in urban, suburban, and rural counties, their impact on public health remains significant, contributing to poor nutrition, higher rates of chronic disease, and economic hardship.

Creating this Workgroup ensures a coordinated, statewide approach, bringing together policymakers, stakeholders, and local leaders to develop meaningful, actionable solutions. MACo supports the inclusion of three county representatives in the Workgroup, ensuring a diverse perspective that reflects the unique needs of jurisdictions across Maryland. Counties play a pivotal role in land use, economic development, and public health efforts that intersect with food access, making their participation essential to crafting effective solutions.

By bringing together state and local leaders to comprehensively address food insecurity, SB 353 represents a meaningful step toward eliminating food deserts and improving health outcomes for Maryland residents.

For these reasons, MACo respectfully urges the Committee to give SB 353 a **FAVORABLE** report.

# **NAL Letter of Support for MD 353 Food Deserts.pdf**

Uploaded by: Kerry Hawk Lessard

Position: FAV



**Senate Finance Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
February 3, 2025**

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

On behalf of Native American LifeLines, a Title V Urban Indian Health Program serving the Native American community in Maryland, I submit this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 353, which seeks to establish the Food Deserts Workgroup. This initiative is essential to addressing the persistent and harmful impact of food deserts on historically marginalized communities, including the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population in Baltimore and throughout Maryland.

Food insecurity is a critical issue for Native communities, disproportionately burdened by diet-related illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. These conditions are exacerbated by a lack of access to fresh, nutritious, and culturally relevant foods. Many of our clients live in areas where corner stores, which primarily stock processed, shelf-stable foods high in salt, fat, sugar, and starch, are the primary food source. Limited transportation options make accessing grocery stores with fresh food difficult, leaving families to rely on calorie-dense but nutritionally poor options.

A recent study by Dr. Tara Maudrie, conducted within the Baltimore Native American community, highlights the unique challenges that Indigenous peoples face regarding food security. As one participant noted:

“I think food security...should be more than just caloric needs met. I think it should also include culturally relevant foods, but I know that food security isn't always connected to culturally relevant foods.”

Dr. Maudrie's research further emphasizes that Indigenous food security is not simply about having enough food to survive but about having access to the foods that nourish our bodies, spirits, and cultural identities. Traditional foods such as wild game, fish, and harvested plants are not readily available in urban environments, severing a crucial link between food, health, and cultural continuity.

For Indigenous peoples, food sovereignty—having the ability to access, produce, and share traditional foods—is foundational to community well-being. However, current food systems often neglect this perspective, focusing solely on individual caloric intake without recognizing the deeper cultural and social dimensions of food security. As Dr. Maudrie and her colleagues have written:

“Food security also extends beyond the tangible food items and to the environment and systems that enable those food sources. A freezer full of salmon may not feel like food security if the spawning rivers and streams are suffering.”

**Main Office:** 1 East Franklin Street • Suite 200 • Baltimore, MD 21202 • 410-837-2258 • FAX 410-837-2692

**Boston Office:** 2077 Centre Street • West Roxbury, MA 02132 • 857-203-9680 • FAX 857-203-9653





Senate Bill 353 is an important step in addressing food insecurity as a social determinant of health, particularly for communities like ours that experience high rates of poverty, chronic illness, and systemic barriers to healthy living. By establishing this Workgroup, Maryland can take a proactive role in identifying and implementing solutions that address not just food access, but the broader systemic inequities that create food deserts in the first place.

I urge this committee to advance Senate Bill 353 and take an essential step toward ensuring that all Maryland residents—particularly those in historically underserved communities—have access to the fresh, healthy, and culturally relevant foods they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Sincerely,**

Kerry Hawk Lessard  
Executive Director  
Native American LifeLines

# **Maryland Catholic Conference\_FAVSB353\_.pdf**

Uploaded by: Michelle Zelaya

Position: FAV



February 6, 2025

**SB353**

**Food Deserts Workgroup - Establishment  
Finance Committee**

**Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers this testimony in support of **Senate Bill 353**. The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

**Senate Bill 353** creates a workgroup to examine and develop recommendations for addressing food deserts in Maryland. The workgroup will study the causes, effects, and potential solutions to eliminate these areas where access to affordable, nutritious food is limited. A report outlining key findings and solutions will be submitted to the Governor and relevant General Assembly committees by November 1, 2025.

Catholic social teaching emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all individuals have access to the necessities of life, including nutritious food. This bill aligns with the Church's principles of solidarity and care for the poor by seeking to address food deserts, which disproportionately affect low-income and marginalized communities. Supporting this initiative reflects a commitment to promoting justice, human dignity, and the common good.

This legislation has the potential to significantly improve public health and community well-being by addressing food insecurity in underserved areas. By identifying sustainable solutions, the workgroup can help provide access to healthy, affordable food for vulnerable populations, support local economies, and reduce health disparities caused by poor nutrition. Ultimately, these efforts can foster stronger, more equitable communities across the state. Creating a stronger and healthier community for all Marylanders.

The MCC appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a favorable report for **Senate Bill 353**.

## **SB353\_MoCoFoodCouncil\_FAV**

Uploaded by: Nanya Chiejine, MPH

Position: FAV



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.



P.O. Box 32212 | Bethesda, MD 20814 | 310-637-7071  
mocofoodcouncil.org | info@mocofoodcouncil.org

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



P.O. Box 32212 | Bethesda, MD 20814 | 310-637-7071  
[mocofoodcouncil.org](http://mocofoodcouncil.org) | [info@mocofoodcouncil.org](mailto:info@mocofoodcouncil.org)

For more information, please contact Nanya Chiejine, Executive Director,  
at [nanya@mocofoodcouncil.org](mailto:nanya@mocofoodcouncil.org)

*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*



P.O. Box 32212 | Bethesda, MD 20814 | 310-637-7071



P.O. Box 32212 | Bethesda, MD 20814 | 310-637-7071  
[mocofoodcouncil.org](http://mocofoodcouncil.org) | [info@mocofoodcouncil.org](mailto:info@mocofoodcouncil.org)

[mocofoodcouncil.org](http://mocofoodcouncil.org) | [info@mocofoodcouncil.org](mailto:info@mocofoodcouncil.org)



P.O. Box 32212 | Bethesda, MD 20814 | 310-637-7071  
[mocofoodcouncil.org](http://mocofoodcouncil.org) | [info@mocofoodcouncil.org](mailto:info@mocofoodcouncil.org)



# **2025 Moveable SB 353 Senate Side.pdf**

Uploaded by: Robyn Elliott

Position: FAV



**Committee:** Senate Finance Committee

**Bill Number:** Senate Bill 353 – Food Deserts Workgroup - Establishment

**Hearing Date:** February 6, 2025

**Position:** Support

---

Moveable Feast supports *Senate Bill 353 – Food Deserts Workgroup – Establishment*. The legislation establishes a workgroup to study and report on food deserts in Maryland. The study would help inform policy initiatives to address the impact of food deserts on Maryland communities.

Moveable Feast’s mission is centered on health equity. We provide medically tailored meals to improve the health outcomes of people with serious chronic or life-threatening disease. Many of our clients live in food deserts, which are defined as a “low-income census tract with limited access to healthy and affordable food” by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.<sup>i</sup> The health of our clients, their families, and their community members has been compromised by food deserts.<sup>ii</sup> We support this legislation as part of Maryland’s efforts to address social determinants of health.

We ask for a favorable report. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Robyn Elliott at [relliott@policypartners.net](mailto:relliott@policypartners.net).

---

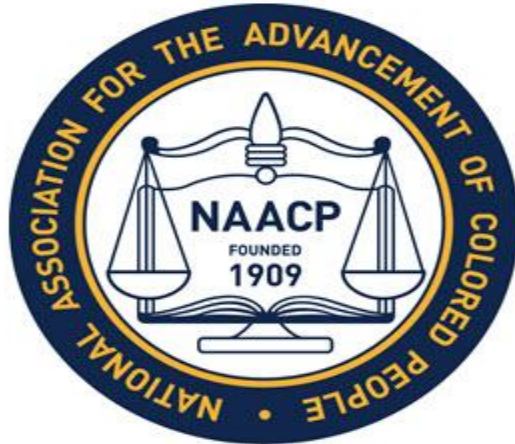
<sup>i</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2011/december/data-feature-mapping-food-deserts-in-the-u-s>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.nimhd.nih.gov/resources/understanding-health-disparities/food-accessibility-insecurity-and-health-outcomes.html#:~:text=Food%20insecurity%20and%20the%20lack,disorders%20and%20other%20chronic%20diseases%20>

## **SB 0353 Support.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ryan Coleman

Position: FAV



# Randallstown

Po Box 731 Randallstown, MD 21133

February 4, 2025

Finance Committee  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

## **RE: SUPPORT SB 0353, Food Deserts Workgroup - Establishment**

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and Members of the Finance Committee:

The Randallstown NAACP is a 500 member branch located in Baltimore County, Maryland. We have members in Baltimore County and Baltimore City. One of primary focuses is ensuring that all residents, especially Black Marylanders, have access to healthy food options.

A food desert is defined as an area that lacks access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Living in a food desert can have an adverse impact on the health of those living in the area.

Both Baltimore County and Baltimore City have almost the same percentage of zip codes that are considered food deserts. In Baltimore County, 64.29 percent are food deserts. In Baltimore City it's 64.58 percent. The definition of a food desert is different for urban and suburban areas compared to rural. In rural areas, it is considered a food desert if some or all of the population is 10 miles or more from a grocery store. In urban and suburban areas the definition is being located a mile or more from a food desert. This bill will give us the tools to start to fight food deserts.

The Randallstown NAACP supports SB 0353, Food Deserts Workgroup - Establishment. ***The Randallstown Branch of the NAACP urges a favorable report from the committee on SB 0353.***

.  
*yours*

Ryan Coleman  
Randallstown NAACP, President  
<https://randnaacp.org/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/NAACPrandallstown>  
<https://www.instagram.com/naacprandallstown>

# **LBH FAV with Amendment Senate Bill 353-Food Desert**

Uploaded by: Jennifer Witten

Position: FWA



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:

Jennifer Witten, M.B.A.

Vice President, Government Relations & Community Development

[jwitten2@lifebridgedhealth.org](mailto:jwitten2@lifebridgedhealth.org)

Mobile: 505-688-3495

**CARE BRAVELY**

2401 W. Belvedere Ave., Baltimore, MD 21215-5216 • [lifebridgehealth.org](http://lifebridgehealth.org)

# **WRITTEN TESTIMONY.pdf**

Uploaded by: johnny salling

Position: FWA



JOHNNY RAY SALLING  
*Legislative District 6*  
Baltimore County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Public Safety, Transportation,  
and Environment Subcommittee



James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street, Room 321  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3587 • 301-858-3587  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3587  
JohnnyRay.Salling@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 6, 2025

Finance Committee  
Senator Pamela Beidle  
Senator Katherine Klausmeier  
3 East  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

To the Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you to the Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Finance Committee to allow me to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 353.

Food deserts have begun to increase in our State. Recently, a grocery store in a central community in Baltimore County closed, which concerned many residents.

As you can see, I requested an amendment that changes the entirety of the bill. The amendment requires the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council to identify areas where residents have limited access to affordable and nutritious food, identify the health and public safety risks residents face due to living in food desert areas, and help promote social equity by addressing disparities in access to healthy food options. They will assess potential economic opportunities, such as the potential for new businesses, and the use of existing financial incentives for grocery stores and supermarket retailers to move into these areas.

Throughout the interim, I worked tirelessly meeting with various stakeholders. They are heavily invested in forming a work group comprised of many State departments and local non-profits. They have extensive knowledge and years of experience in researching the substantial impacts food deserts have on our diverse communities throughout the State.

I respectfully request that the Committee and the Food System Resiliency Council take this into consideration and welcome these stakeholders into the conversation so our communities may benefit from the information and guidance they can provide.

Thank you for allowing me to speak here today and I would ask for a favorable report on this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Johnny R. Salling".

Senator Johnny Ray Salling