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*Susan O'Neill, Chair*

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Testimony in Support of  
HOUSE BILL 56 - PROCUREMENT - STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION - CONTROL AUTHORITY  
- LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING  
House Health and Government Operations  
Committee  
February 4, 2025

The Rural Maryland Council **SUPPORTS** House Bill 56 – Procurement – State Department of Education – Control Authority – Local Food Purchasing. This bill gives the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) the authority to control procurement of food by local school systems without the approval of any other primary procurement unit. It further (1) requires MSDE, in consultation with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), to establish a platform to facilitate procurement of food by local school systems; (2) exempts procurements by MSDE for the purpose of master contracts from oversight by the Board of Public Works (BPW); and (3) requires MSDE to report annually on such procurements.

Passage of this bill will ease regulatory burdens in local food procurement making it easier for farmers to access institutional markets. It further supports the Certified Local Farm and Fish Program, created in 2020 to encourage state agencies to buy food from local farms. The program's goal is for state agencies to buy 20% of their food from certified local farms.

According to the USDA Farm to school census, Maryland hosts 1,457 schools and 895,078 students. <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/census-results/states/md>. In 2024, Maryland schools spent over \$19 million on paid school lunches and \$8.3 million on paid breakfasts. Maryland spent \$72.3 million on Free Breakfasts and \$206 million on Free Lunches for a total of \$305 million in annual spending on food each year. Capturing 20% of that spending would result in \$61 million for local food procurements. ([https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/JCR/2023/2023\\_177-178.pdf#:~:text=The%20Maryland%20State%20Department%20of%20Education%20\(MSDE\),maximum%20reimbursement%20rates%20for%20the%20school%20meals](https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/JCR/2023/2023_177-178.pdf#:~:text=The%20Maryland%20State%20Department%20of%20Education%20(MSDE),maximum%20reimbursement%20rates%20for%20the%20school%20meals))

Increased local food procurement will help improve farm profitability and supports the rural economy.

The Rural Maryland Council has supported the Certified Local Farm and Fish and the Chesapeake Invasive Species Provider Programs. The Chesapeake Invasive Species Provider Program addresses the highly invasive blue catfish which has the potential to cause substantial harm to the Chesapeake Bay food web as it has a long lifespan and an expansive diet, which can include many native species that call the Bay their home such as menhaden and blue crabs.

The Rural Maryland Council supports and encourages efforts to promote local food production and farmer profitability. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 56.

*The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.*

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”