

February 5, 2025

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB56: Procurement - State Department of Education - Control Authority - Local Food Purchasing

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk:

I am writing to express my support for HB56 to permit the State Department of Education to procure local foods for use in school meals. This bill will expand the use of local foods in Maryland schools, and it is expected that this will also improve the quality of school meal programs. The Department of Education is aware of the specific capabilities of schools to prepare healthy meals for children, and this process may streamline access to local foods as part of the overall school experience.

According to the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), over half of all Maryland students receive free school meals.¹ The inclusion of local foods will mean our school children will have access to fresh foods, cultivated by Maryland farmers. School meals are a lifeline for Maryland children and families; thus, the Community Coalition for Lifelong Health and Wellness enthusiastically supports HB56.

Sincerely,



Arti Varanasi, PhD. MPH, CPH
President & CEO, Advancing Synergy

On behalf of the [Community Coalition for Lifelong Health and Wellness \(CCLHW\) Founding Partners](#): Advancing Synergy, BE Rehab Services, Care for Your Health, CASA, Community Engagement and Consulting Group (CE-CG), Community FarmShare

¹ Eppes E, New Nutrition Programs Data for All 24 Maryland Jurisdictions in Maryland: A Hunger Solutions Profiles Report, Food Research and Action Center, <https://frac.org/blog/maryland-hunger-solutions-profiles-2023#:~:text=In%20Maryland%2C%20approximately%20one%20out, enrollment%20rates%20below%2070%20percent.>