



Maryland General Assembly  
Annapolis Maryland

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HB0907: Support with Amendments presented by the Food Equity Council of Prince George's County, MD

Chair Atterbeary, VC Wilkins and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill. My name is LaWann Stribling, and I am an urban farm/homestead in Bowie, MD, Co Chair FEC, Board Member Mid Atlantic Black Farmers Caucus, employee of Founder of STRIB'ble District LLC. I appreciate the opportunity to submit my testimony today about the critical role the state's Urban Agricultural Property Tax Credit plays in supporting urban farmers and ensuring food security and access in Maryland.

First, I want to thank Delegate Roberson for sponsoring this essential bill. Urban agriculture has exploded in many areas of the state as a way to provide fresh, healthy food to communities. In Prince George's County, our urban farms are not only selling their produce and other ag products direct-to-consumer but donating or selling to food banks and other food assistance providers as well as educating multi generations of the healing powers in gardening. Our urban farms provide agricultural education, employment, internships, and community engagement opportunities for Marylanders.

I am here to speak in favor of HB0907 with the amendments presented by the FEC. I represent STRIB Flowers and Herbs Ancestral Farm, which is a growing urban farm dedicated to preserving my family's agricultural legacy here in Maryland. For generations, my family has lived, were enslaved and worked in this state. However, due to-increasing property taxes, red lining, lack of proper compensation and education my family faced the painful loss of land and several of our family homes between Maryland, DC and Virginia. This has not only disrupted our lives for generations, but also fractured our family's roots in the land and community that my ancestors worked and forcibly worked so hard to cultivate.

As property taxes continued to rise at a rate that far exceeds my family's ability to maintain the land, it became difficult and we lost all the properties and land that has been in our family for generations. Losing these homes has had a profound impact on our entire family—spanning generations—and has left us with the feeling that our ancestral connection to this land has been

slowly erased. It is a loss that cannot be measured in dollars alone, but in the culture, heritage, and sense of belonging that each generation has passed down.

This is why HB0907 is so crucial for families like ours. By reducing the yearly increases in property taxes, this bill provides an essential measure of protection for families with agricultural roots who are struggling to hold onto their land. For STRIB Flowers and Herbs Ancestral Farm, this bill offers a lifeline, allowing us to keep our farm and the valuable resources we are building for our family and community. It offers the chance to continue fostering this space as a place for healing, education, and sustainability.

Our farm serves as more than just a place to grow plants. It's a sanctuary where we provide opportunities for youth to engage in gardening and farming. Through hands-on activities, children and young adults have the chance to learn about how food, herbs, and flowers are grown, which not only sparks an interest in agriculture but also nurtures a deeper understanding of the importance of eating healthy, growing your own food, and living sustainably. We've seen first-hand how these experiences benefit the youth mentally, encouraging them to be more conscious of what they consume, where their food comes from, and how they can contribute to the well-being of their families and communities.

By providing a safe, educational, and empowering space for youth, STRIB Flowers and Herbs Ancestral Farm works to promote full-rounded wellness and synergy within families. Through these experiences, the youth gain valuable life skills while being part of something bigger than themselves—reconnecting with nature, their culture, and their heritage. This not only strengthens individuals but strengthens our community as a whole especially in food desert neighborhoods.

HB0907 represents an opportunity to support families like ours, to help us maintain our urban farm, and to preserve the long-standing cultural traditions that have nourished our community for generations. I respectfully urge you to support HB0907 with amendments, so we can continue to grow, educate, and inspire future generations while keeping our family's agricultural roots alive without the fear of tax increases.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

LaWann Stribling