

Letter of Support for HB 535

March 20, 2026

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Finance Committee,

On behalf of End Chronic Disease, I am writing to express our support for House Bill 535. This legislation takes a practical and meaningful step toward improving public health by expanding opportunities for small-scale food entrepreneurs while increasing access to clean, whole foods across Maryland communities.

Chronic disease remains the leading cause of death and disability in the United States, with diet-related conditions such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease accounting for a significant share of this burden. Currently, one of the major drivers of chronic disease is an overconsumption of ultra-processed foods, which is made worse by a lack of access to fresh, minimally processed foods. Policies that make it easier for individuals and small businesses to produce and sell wholesome foods are an important part of reversing these trends.

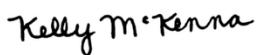
House Bill 535 supports this goal by raising the revenue cap for cottage food businesses from \$50,000 to \$100,000. While modest in scope, this change meaningfully expands the ability of local producers to grow and sustain their businesses without facing immediate regulatory barriers that are often cost-prohibitive at early stages. In doing so, the bill helps foster a more diverse and resilient local food ecosystem.

Cottage food businesses frequently provide minimally processed foods made in small batches with greater transparency around ingredients. By enabling these businesses to scale, HB 535 can increase the availability of healthier, whole-food options in both urban and rural communities, including areas that may be underserved by traditional grocery retail – where rates of chronic illness are often the highest. This helps shift food environments toward options that are more aligned with long-term health.

In addition, empowering local food entrepreneurs strengthens community-based economies and shortens supply chains, making it easier for consumers to access foods that are fresher and less reliant on industrial processing. These structural improvements to the food system are directly connected to chronic disease prevention. HB 535 accomplishes these benefits without requiring new state spending or altering existing food safety standards. It is a low-cost, high-impact policy lever that supports both economic opportunity and public health.

For these reasons, End Chronic Disease strongly supports House Bill 535 and encourages its favorable consideration. We appreciate the Finance Committee's attention to policies that can help create healthier communities across Maryland.

Sincerely,



Kelly McKenna
Chief Executive Officer
End Chronic Disease