

January 30, 2026

The Honorable Heather Bagnall
Chair of the Committee on Health
240-241 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter of Support for HB 181

Dear Chairwoman Bagnall,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations we strongly support HB 181. We believe that this bill will improve food safety for the 600,000 people in Maryland with food allergies by requiring restaurants to document the top 9 allergens in a written format. The bill allows for flexibility in the format of disclosure, including an online option or on main menus, allergen charts, allergen menus, allergen chalkboards, or other similar formats.

An estimated 600,000 Maryland residents live with food allergies.^{i,ii} Exposure to allergens can lead to severe reactions, including anaphylaxis and, in some cases, death. Because there is no cure to this chronic illness, people with food allergies must practice strict avoidance. As such, access to clear allergen information is critical. While federal laws have made it easier for individuals to avoid allergens in packaged foods, the labeling of restaurant food remains a significant gap in consumer safety.ⁱⁱⁱ

In fact, dining in restaurants represents the highest risk setting for food allergy reactions. Nearly 50% of reported fatal food allergy reactions are a result of food consumed from a restaurant or food establishment, and 75% of all food allergy reactions occur in a restaurant setting.^{iv} Without menu disclosures and food-allergy trained staff, individuals with allergies must rely on verbal assurances from staff and spend significant amounts of time researching safe places to dine.^v

More than half of parents of children with food allergies (53%) that AAFA surveyed in a regular patient study reported that they have left a restaurant in the middle of dining as a result of an allergy, and nearly 90% of parents have avoided certain restaurants altogether due to their child's allergy.^{vi} Surveyed parents communicated the need for greater availability of information about the contents of restaurant meals and asked regulators to prioritize better food labeling inside restaurants.^{vii} This bill would provide this critical transparency, making it easier for consumers to make safe choices and reducing the risk of life-threatening reactions.

Allergen disclosures take up minimal space on a menu and serve a vital public health function by helping consumers avoid potentially fatal allergic reactions.^{viii} Countries around the world already require restaurants to disclose allergens.^{ix} Many have already drawn parallels between the EU allergen restaurant labeling laws and the potential for states to improve allergen labeling laws in restaurants.^x This bill offers Maryland residents the chance to adopt a similar, common-sense approach to protect the millions of residents managing food allergies

By enacting this bill, Maryland would position itself as a leader in food allergy protections, setting a critical example for other states to follow. We urge the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 181 and take an important step toward preventing needless allergic reactions and deaths.

Sincerely,

Maryland-based organizations

Maryland Chesapeake Chapter of NAPNAP
Maryland Public Health Association
MDAAP (Maryland Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics)
The Nurse Practitioner Association of Maryland

Other organizations

Allergy & Asthma Network
AllergyStrong
Alpha-gal Foundation
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
CertiStar
CURED Nfp
Elijah-Alavi Foundation
Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Connection Team (FAACT)
Food Allergy Science Initiative
Foodini
FOODiversity
Institute for Public Health and Medicine, Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine
MenuTrinfo, LLC
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Celiac Association
No Nut Traveler Inc 501c4

Nut Free Wok
SnackSafely.com
Spokin
The Love for Giovanni Foundation
The Natalie Giorgi Sunshine Foundation
thrive! meetings & events

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, January 26). *More than a quarter of U.S. adults and children have at least one allergy*. National Center for Health Statistics.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). *National population totals and components of change: 2020–2023*. U.S. Department of Commerce.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kids With Food Allergies. (n.d.). *Food allergen labeling*. Kids With Food Allergies. Retrieved February 27, 2025, from <https://kidswithfoodallergies.org/living-with-food-allergies/choosing-safe-foods/label-law-food-allergen-labeling-consumer-protection-act/>

^{iv} Radke, T. J., Brown, L. G., Faw, B., Hedeem, N., Matis, B., Perez, P., Viveiros, B., & Ripley, D. (2017). Restaurant food allergy practices—Six selected sites, United States, 2014. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 66(15), 404–407. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6615a2>

^v Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. (2019). *My life with food allergy: Parent survey report*.

^{vi} Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, 2019, p. 16

^{vii} Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, 2019, p. 38

^{viii} Doctorov, E. C. (2023). Fearless dining: Mandating universal allergen disclosures on restaurant menus. *California Law Review*, 111(6). <https://doi.org/10.15779/Z385T3G14X>

^{ix} European Commission. (2017). Commission notice of 13 July 2017 relating to the provision of information on substances or products causing allergies or intolerances as listed in Annex II to Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the provision of food information to consumers (2017/C 428/01). *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 428, 1

^x Baker, R. (2018). The global status of food allergen labeling laws. *California Western Law Review*, 54(2), Article 4. <https://scholarlycommons.law.cwsl.edu/cwlr/vol54/iss2/4>