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TO: The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Office of the Attorney General

RE: HB 1325 – Food Insecurity Zones – State Legislative Districts – Reports – **Support**

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and distinguished Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee, please accept the following testimony in support of HB 1325.

House Bill 1325 would require the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Department of Planning (Planning) to jointly produce a report on or before December 1, 2021, and every 2 years thereafter, for each State legislative district. The report should include metrics that determine food insecurity zones for the respective legislative districts. The Departments are authorized to collaborate with universities and nonprofits in producing the required reports.

House Bill 1325 seeks to implement a COVID-19 Access to Justice Task Force's recommendation.¹ Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some 1.5 million Marylanders were food insecure, but during the pandemic that number rose to 2.5 million Marylanders.² The Task Force noted that, "[f]rom March to April 2020, there was a 400 percent jump in applications in Maryland for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) commonly known as food stamps."³ These increases led to "a record high 844,933 people receiving SNAP benefits—a staggering 14 percent of the State's population."⁴ With so many new SNAP enrollees, it was predictable that neophytes were unaware of the recertification process. Nonetheless, the Task

¹ See generally MD. ATT'Y GEN. BRIAN E. FROSH'S COVID-19 ACCESS TO JUST. TASK FORCE, CONFRONTING THE COVID-19 ACCESS TO JUSTICE CRISIS (Jan. 2021), https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/A2JC%20Documents1/AG_Covid_A2J_TF_Report.pdf.

² *Id.* at 7.

³ *Id.* at 20.

⁴ *Id.*

Force found that, “[i]n July, August, and September, a total of 143,057 SNAP cases were closed for redetermination issues even though many of these individuals and families never received the notice informing them of the need to complete a recertification.”⁵ The Task Force went on to note that “nearly 65,000 Marylanders who were terminated from SNAP during those three months were still not receiving benefits as of December.”⁶

These food insecurity findings suggested the need for greater executive agency coordination in identifying and addressing food insecure zones in need of remediation. Among other things, the Task Force recommended that executive agencies “[d]evelop an infrastructure and mechanisms to incorporate civil legal needs into the work of agencies that promote health, housing, food aid, safety, security, and connectivity to ensure inclusion of civil legal services as mission-critical.”⁷ House Bill 1325 is a step in the right direction of requiring DHCD and Planning to coordinate their efforts in addressing food insecurity zones.

For the foregoing reasons, the Office of Attorney General urges a favorable report on HB 1325.

cc: Members of the Committee

⁵ *Id.* at 21.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.* at 41.