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HB 1325 – Food Insecurity Zones

Position: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments in support of House Bill 1325. This bill requires the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Department of Planning to jointly produce a report and submit to the General Assembly for each State legislative district on its food environment on or before December 1, 2021 and every 2 years thereafter. The report is required to include the metrics that determine food insecurity zones, and follow the format of Baltimore City's state legislative distribution 2018 food environment briefs, produced by the Baltimore City Department of Planning and the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. The Departments are required to collaborate with any university in the state and any nonprofit organization that specializes in equitable food access in producing the report.

As part of our mission, CareFirst is committed to driving transformation of the healthcare experience with and for all our members and communities, with a focus on quality, equity, affordability, and access to care. According to the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement, health care only accounts for 20% of the overall external influence on a person's health, but socioeconomic factors, physical environment, and healthy behaviors such as diet (i.e. social determinants of health) contribute to 70% of that influence. We believe the report required by House Bill 1325 would provide valuable information about the root causes of food insecurity and where food insecurity exists on a local level, and help the General Assembly in developing meaningful and targeted solutions to address one of the most impactful social determinants of health—access to healthy food. This bill is an important step in the right direction in mitigating the impact of food insecurity, promoting access to nutritious food, improving health outcomes, and eventually reducing existing health disparities in Maryland.

CareFirst has committed \$10.5 million in regional funding to address diabetes and its upstream social determinants of health, in six targeted communities, including West Baltimore and Prince George's County, where many Maryland residents currently experience issues with food insecurity. We are also deploying place-based strategies to guide our community investment in social determinants of health and improve community health outcomes.

CareFirst strongly supports the policy goals advanced by House Bill 1325. We look forward to partnering with legislators, state and local agencies, food organizations, and other stakeholders to advance health equity, as we continue to focus on concrete strategies outside and within our own organization to ensure the health and wellbeing of our members, employees, and communities.

We urge a favorable report.

About CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield

In its 83rd year of service, CareFirst, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is a not-for-profit healthcare company which, through its affiliates and subsidiaries, offers a comprehensive portfolio of health insurance products and administrative services to 3.4 million individuals and employers in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia. In 2019, CareFirst invested \$43 million to improve overall health, and increase the accessibility, affordability, safety, and quality of healthcare throughout its market areas. To learn more about CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, visit our website at www.carefirst.com and our transforming healthcare page at www.carefirst.com/transformation, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#).