



January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Testimony of Laura Hale  
American Heart Association  
**Support of HB 147- Maryland Farms and Families Fund**

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. The American Heart Association extends its support for House Bill 147 Maryland Farms and Families Fund. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association.

Access to nutritious healthy food is essential for long term heart health. Unfortunately, too many Marylanders do not have access to healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables, living in food deserts/swamps. In these food deserts/swamps many Marylanders rely on convenience stores which primarily sell high salt food with low nutritional value. It is difficult, if not an impossible for these Marylanders to regularly get to a supermarket and have healthy foods. As such, Marylanders living in these areas suffer from higher rates of obesity and cardiovascular disease. These disparities have been even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. This legislation puts forwards a variety of ways to address this need.

For those who are food insecure, this issue of access is often compounded by the fact that these individuals only have limited funds for food and transportation and do not have access or money for healthier options. Farmers Markets are able to serve areas that do not have healthy food options. Farmers Markets have the flexibility to go into these food deserts and create options. Pairing this programming with funding for those on WIC and other government programs assist those with food insecurities to extend their dollars and provide more healthy options for their families.

This legislation is an important step towards creating access and availability to healthy foods for those who are food insecure. House Bill 147 creates a system that will continue to support farms and communities by bringing healthy food into the areas of high need as well as supporting those with less income to be able to provide healthy food for their families.

The funding appropriated in the bill is an important investment in the health and wellbeing of Marylander who struggle with food insecurity and live in food deserts where healthy food options are extremely limited. The American Heart Association recommends a higher appropriation for the Maryland Farm and Families Fund of \$500,000 as an initial investment in this essential program.

The American Heart Association urges a favorable report on House Bill 147 to support the health of all Marylanders.