



P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Testimony on: HB152 “Department of Agriculture-Urban Agricultural Grant Fund”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 23, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB152, as amended by the House, which would expand the Urban Agricultural Grant Program of Baltimore City in Maryland’s Department of Agriculture into a state-wide program. The bill would also direct that the program receive funding of \$100,000 annually in fiscal years 2025 through 2029.

HB152 could bring many benefits to the urban environment. Urban farms promote creation of a marketplace where fresh produce is available and affordable. Additionally, urban farms offer new jobs close to where people live, agricultural education, and other events that promote a shared gardening experience and interactions among neighbors for a strengthened community.

Farming in urban areas brings crucial green spaces that can benefit pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. The reintroduction of plant life to patches of impermeable asphalt and decaying buildings can result in less stormwater runoff and help mitigate heat islands. Expanding agriculture near food markets and restaurants where locally produced food is utilized reduces the need for long food transit routes and the associated fossil fuel consumption and emissions.

Through the Urban Agricultural Grant Fund, HB152 will encourage farming and farm ownership in historically underserved and marginalized communities. HB152 allows for a portion of the funding to be invested into technical assistance, capital improvement, and securing real property for generational wealth and financial security. HB 152 will place a portion of the grant into agricultural education for both farmers and the farmers’ community.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.