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FAVORABLE REPORT – SENATE BILL 0124: Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee,

We are writing in strong support of **SB0124** on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake, a coalition of seventeen Waterkeepers, Riverkeepers, and Coastkeepers working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable. As we here at Waterkeepers work to protect and maintain the ability of the public to safely enjoy the waters of our State, we also advocate for food resiliency across Maryland and enhancing efforts to address food insecurity issues across our state. The challenge of food security leaves underserved Maryland families unable to meet dietary needs for normal growth and a productive and healthy life. [In Maryland, 543,650 people are facing hunger](#) - and of them 167,020 are children. To make matters worse, this socially-rooted and systemic issue has only increased in prevalence since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Food System Resiliency Council (Council) brings together a broad range of practitioners, experts, advocates, and state agencies to strengthen Maryland's food system by [growing, fishing, processing, and distributing more local foods and increasing access for local communities](#) to be more self-sufficient. The Council has done much positive work over the past two years since its initiation, but it has more to do to prepare Maryland's food system resiliency for the changing climate. In these unstable times, discontinuing the Council would be folly. For this reason, **SB0124** seeks to build on the work the Council has done over the past two years and ensure that the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council remains a permanent part of the Office of Resilience in the

Maryland Department of Emergency Management. Establishing and keeping a state-wide body that supports the regional food system will best help Maryland residents emerge from food insecurity, and to be prepared when other food emergencies arise.

Multiple states, such as Maine, Connecticut and Massachusetts, have also enacted policies aimed at increasing food security. All of these efforts have similar goals of leveraging statewide food system relationships to increase food security, increasing production, sales and consumption of foods grown and made in-state, establishing protections for land and water resources, and strengthening partnerships between state agencies and community-based organizations. It would be incredibly unwise and counterproductive for Maryland to discontinue the Council and throw away the positive work it has done over the past two years. Addressing and eliminating racial inequities and diet-related public health disparities in Maryland's food system is too important to our citizens to not continue the good work that has been done.

For these reasons we support **SB0124** and its goals.

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