



Susan O'Neill, Chair

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

March 28, 2023

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chairman, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

**RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT
House Bill 152 – Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grant Programs –Alterations**

Dear Chairman Feldman:

The Rural Maryland Council supports as amended House Bill 152 – Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grant Programs - Alterations. The purpose of this program is to increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban grown foods. The bill modifies the *Urban Agriculture Grant Program* by mandating \$100,000 annually for the program from FY2025 through FY2029. Additionally, it expands the eligibility for grants under the program and modifies provisions relating to the grant process and the use of grants.

Access and availability to food impacts the health, culture, and a person's quality of life and resources. In the United States, healthy food is difficult to access for nearly 24 million people who live in areas without a grocery store. Recent reports from the *Preventative Medicine and Education for Health* show that low-income neighborhoods have 25% fewer grocery stores than middle and high-income neighborhoods. This disparity contributes to higher rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. House Bill 152 is an investment in urban agriculture, an investment in our urban communities, and investment in a healthier Maryland. This Program and Fund enable resources to reach meaningful initiatives with the potential to grow healthier communities, food diversity, accessible markets, job opportunity, and build a sense of ownership and well-being through agricultural related activity in urban areas.

Rural Maryland Council looks for strategic partnerships to bridge rural and urban communities. The agriculture sector can help bridge the gap between these two communities. The Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 152 as amended.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Davis
Executive Director

Cc. Delegates Wells, Addison, Allen, Baker, Barve, Boyce, Ciliberti, Foley, Guyton, Healey, Holmes, Jacobs, Lehman, Love, T. Morgan, Nawrocki, Otto, Ruth, Stewart, Terrasa, and Zeigler