

House Bill 152

Department of Agriculture – Urban Agriculture Grant Fund House Environment and Transportation Committee February 8, 2023

SUPPORT

House Bill 152 expands the Urban Agriculture Grant Program beyond Baltimore City and to more diverse qualified applicants, and includes an annual budget appropriation of \$250,000 to the Urban Agriculture Grant Fund.

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders are at risk of facing food insecurity. Food insecurity means a lack of consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day. Some communities and populations are at a higher risk of food insecurity, including communities of color, older adults, and families with children. There are food insecure Marylanders in every corner of the state, and “root causes” that keep families stuck in a perpetual cycle of poverty and hunger.

One root cause of hunger is a lack of access to nutritious food, whether that is because of, for example, unmanageable or unaffordable transportation to places where food is sold or a general lack of availability of fresh produce or healthy food options in the immediate area. This can be particularly acute and oftentimes surprising in urban areas with dense population but few community resources. Urban farms are a tangible means of providing agricultural products, including fresh produce, to areas of unmet need. Farmers may also benefit Marylanders by growing crops more in line culturally or socially with their surrounding community. Supporting them, particularly financially, is a direct investment in the economic and physical health of Marylanders, their families, and their communities.

The Maryland Food Bank is similarly committed to supporting the growth of urban agriculture, recognizing its importance and potential to support new farmers, expand the options for culturally appropriate crops, and feed food insecure communities in a new yet effective way. In fact, the Food Bank has recently partnered with the Department of Agriculture to purchase agricultural products from urban farmers in Baltimore City over the next two years, and provide analysis as to the potentials and challenges of doing so for future similar partnerships. We are looking forward to doing our part in helping urban agriculture grow and thrive throughout the state.

For these reasons, the Maryland Food Bank respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 152.