



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 116

Transportation - Complete Streets - Access to Healthy Food

TO: Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Demaune A. Millard, President & CEO, Family League of Baltimore
DATE: February 13, 2019

Family League of Baltimore (Family League) supports Senate Bill 116, which would provide significant supports for access to healthy food for Marylanders living in areas identified as “food deserts.” This bill would also encourage jurisdictions to develop ranking systems for projects that prioritize designs that create access to healthy options in food deserts and define “food desert” within the Complete Streets Program.

In the city of Baltimore, one in three school age children live in food deserts, limiting development opportunity and exacerbating intergenerational health issues such as obesity and heart disease. Johns Hopkins University, in partnership with Baltimore’s Food Policy Initiative, defines a food desert¹ as any area in which residents “lack both access and sufficient economic resources to purchase healthy food.”² Their study also identified significant discrepancies in equity. In Baltimore, while 8% of white residents live in food deserts, “African Americans have disproportionately low access to healthy food and are the most likely of any racial or ethnic group to live in a food desert neighborhood (approximately 34% of Baltimore’s African-American population). For other minorities, the percent of population in these areas range from 11% to 15%.”³

Studies have shown that children with access to nutritious food exhibit fewer behavioral problems, can better participate in school,⁴ and have better overall academic outcomes.⁵ Families in food deserts are doubly burdened as they lack access to markets or grocery stores with fresh, healthy, affordable food and yet, often have easy access to fast food restaurants and convenience stores with cheap, unhealthy, processed foods.⁶ Studies show that unbalanced diets heavy in salt, fat, and sugar contribute to obesity,

¹ Food desert is statistically defined as, “An area where the distance to a supermarket or supermarket alternative is more than 1/4 mile, the median household income is at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, over 30% of households have no vehicle available, and the average Healthy Food Availability Index (HFAI) score for all food stores is low.” Maryland Food System Map: A Project of Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. <http://mdfoodsystemmap.org/glossary/baltimore-city-food-deserts-2/>

² Behrens A, Freishtat H, Buzogany S. (2015) *Mapping Baltimore City’s Food Environment: 2015 Report*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Hopkins Future.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kleinman RE, Murphy JM, Little M, Pagano M, Wehler CA, Regal K, Jellinek MS. (1998) “Hunger in Children in the United States: Potential Behavioral and Emotional Correlates.” *Pediatrics*, 101(1):E3.

⁵ Wyon D, Abrahamsson L, Jartelius M, Fletcher R. (1997) “An Experimental Study of the Effects of Energy Intake at Breakfast on the Test Performance of 10 Year-Old Children in School.” *International Journal of Food Science and Nutrition*, 48(1):5-12.

⁶ Weisbecker A. Few Healthy Food Choices in Urban Food Deserts. Food Safety News website. <http://www.foodsafetynews.com/2010/05/few-healthy-food-choices-in-urban-food-deserts/#.WKXRrWQrJ00>. Published May 21, 2010. Accessed February 16, 2017.

diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease – the leading cause of death in Baltimore City.⁷ HB 82 would encourage a greater range of access to healthy and nutritious food options for families.

Family League is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and the designated Local Management Board for the City of Baltimore. Since 1991, we have served as an architect of change in Baltimore by promoting data-driven, collaborative initiatives and aligning resources to create lasting outcomes for children, families and communities. We support SB 116 in particular due to its alignment with Maryland’s Child Well-being Results of “Children are Healthy,” “Children are Ready to Learn,” and “Families are Safe and Economically Stable.”⁸

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⁷ Spencer M, Petteway R, Bacetti LV, Barbot O. (2011) *Healthy Baltimore 2015*. Baltimore, MD.

⁸ Maryland Governor’s Office for Children. “Maryland’s Child Well-Being Scorecard.” <https://goc.maryland.gov/reportcard/>