



June 27, 2022

**2022 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY  
Bill 20-22: Office of Food Systems Resilience - Established**

**BILL:** Bill 20-22: Office of Food Systems Resilience - Established  
**POSITION:** Testimony of Support of Bill 20-22  
**BILL ANALYSIS:** This bill would establish an Office of Food Systems Resilience in Montgomery County as a non-principal office of the Executive Branch and prescribes the authorities and responsibilities of that office.

Dear Members of the Montgomery County Council:

The Montgomery County Food Council (Food Council) would like to thank the County Council for the continued investment in our work, as well as for understanding the essential need for community-based coordination and sector-specific support in food systems change. Although community leadership is critical, increased government capacity is vital as well, especially related to strategic use of resources and breaking down silos. Therefore, **the Food Council urges you to SUPPORT Bill 20-22, which will establish an Office of Food Systems Resilience (OFSR) in Montgomery County.**

As our County faced surging food insecurity and empty pantry shelves during the COVID-19 pandemic, the critical need for government response in coordination with community partners became more clear than ever. The establishment of the Food Security Task Force (FSTF) created a public-private partnership in response to this crisis that enabled an unprecedented expansion in food system efforts, leveraging the unique tools of government, nonprofit, philanthropy, and the broader private sector to ameliorate food insecurity in Montgomery County while building resiliency for future crises. Now that the County has moved to the recovery phase, the Office of Food Systems Resilience will continue the valuable work of recently disbanded FSTF, to provide the dedicated government component of a community-based, systems-oriented, and data driven approach toward lasting positive change in our local food system. The OFSR must lead on policy strategies and strategic investments, centered around a systems focus for the County to move beyond emergency food and build on unique assets and opportunities in Montgomery County to build on our lessons learned from the pandemic to be better prepared for future crises and stronger as a community.



Affecting real change in our food system requires a holistic approach that recognizes the need for complementary strategic investments in programs and projects. Investments that not only address food insecurity and hunger, but also consider broader issues like supply chain resilience, local food production, equitable economic opportunity, and sustainability. The OFSR will leverage its expertise to inform and ensure that all countywide planning and budget processes consider food system impacts and build resilience. A preview of the types of food system disruptions that will come with climate change and global political crisis was provided via the COVID-19 pandemic. It is imperative that the County establish this office so it is better prepared to meet these coming challenges. By employing teams of experts that can coordinate cross-agency partnerships and effectively use public resources to support our extensive network of local food systems partners, this office will be able to create and execute strategies to guide public policy and resource allocation.

The Office of Food Systems Resilience would be responsible for partnering with the Food Council and broader community to create and implement a long-term, cross-agency strategic plan that will more effectively and efficiently use public funds to combat food insecurity and build a resilient local food system. While Montgomery County has made considerable investments toward food system issues, our funding and energy will be more effectively spent on sufficient staffing focused specifically on the food system and this long-term strategic plan that will be centered on equity, social justice, the entire food system, and data-informed approaches. While our robust and highly skilled nonprofit sector is adaptable, resourceful, and collaborative, there are some tools only available to local government, particularly during a crisis. Dedicated internal government staffing with policy and best practice expertise, as well as decision-making authority, over resources including Federal funding allocation, institutional procurement, legislative action, and cross-jurisdictional coordination, is necessary to steward these resources both in emergencies and blue-sky times. **In addition to sufficient staffing and budget resources, in order to ensure transparency, accountability to County Council and the community, and long-term alignment with countywide priorities, the Director of the Office of Food Systems Resilience should be an appointed position.**

The Office of Food Systems Resilience will transform how we approach and measure the creation of a stronger food system. No longer will we only track the number of pounds of food and families served. This office will conduct research to identify gaps in food assistance service and expand SNAP access points. It will prioritize strategies that look to reduce the number of people reliant on food assistance by addressing the root causes of food insecurity and inequity. It will consider all levels of the food system in its strategies, seeking to enhance and expand local food production capacities, mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities, prevent, recover, and recycle wasted food, and create a more environmentally sustainable food system. This office will also seek to meet the



practical, cultural, and nutritional needs of our diverse communities to ensure our residents' dignity is maintained and health emphasized.

Montgomery County has already taken major steps toward creating a stronger and more resilient local food system with the Food Security Plan and deployment of the FSTF. The recent establishment of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council provides Montgomery County with a strong foundation and blueprint toward developing a coordinated and cohesive long-term food system strategy. It is vital that we **pass** Bill 20-22 to build upon the momentum of these successes and ensure that Montgomery County will remain committed toward affecting transformative change in our food system. **For these reasons the Montgomery County Food Council is FOR Bill 20-22 and urges your support FOR this bill.**

*The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit organization that serves as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. Our work cultivates a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting our County's farms and food and beverage businesses, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, consumption and recycling on our natural resources.*

For more information, please contact: Heather Bruskin, MCFC Executive Director at the email and phone number below.

