

RE: Written Testimony of Support of Bill 20-22: Office of Food Systems Resilience

Dear Montgomery County Councilmembers:

My name is Susan Eisendrath and I am writing to register my support of Bill 20-22: Office of Food Systems Resilience. While I am active in the county efforts to improve our food system as a former member of the Montgomery County Food Council, former Co-Chair and current member of the Environmental Impact Working Group, current member of the Racial Equity Committee and as a Master Gardener/Composter and through my volunteer work with the Climate Action Plan Coalition, I am not representing these organizations. I am a home-based food grower, with a front-yard farmette in Rockville and I fully support the establishment of the Office of Food Systems Resilience since it would bolster the County Council's commitment to ensuring the food system work is more coordinated and integrated into both community-based organizations and government programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the need for our County to focus resources and support to address the increase in food insecurity and this Office should serve as a hub for coordinating efforts. I applaud the work that the The Food Council has done to expand services during the past few years and I appreciate the work of the Food Security Task Force (FSTF) which strengthened the collaborative work of government, non-profit, and community partnerships to meet family needing additional assistance during the pandemic.

The Office of Food Systems Resilience will build upon the foundation of the unique cross sectorial work related to food insecurity and other social services and it will also provide a base for strengthening the development of food system analysis and research, program and policy planning and targeted investments.

Addressing food insecurity in relation to building a more resilient food system will require the County to also analyze issues related to climate change and how our County will be impacted by food and supply chain disruptions, climatic challenges (such as temperature increases, weather related damages-hail, heavy rains, drought, etc.) that alter food production capacity within the county and globally. Just to provide one scientific reality based example of the challenges we are and will increasingly be faced with, in relation to food production and climate change: Most plants have a maximum temperature production range and when temperatures are above 75 to 95 degrees F, the heat stress causes flowers to deteriorate, tomatoes drop flowers at sustained temperatures of 85 degrees F during the day and 70 degrees F during night. We are already seeing such "heat stress" negatively impact crops, even in our County.

In addition, political global conditions and situations propose challenges to the food system and these realities must be taken into consideration in order to plan a more sustainable and resilient food system locally. Rising food prices are a result of a variety of global factors, most notably we've experienced disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine, which has created volatile energy supplies, decreases in access to fertilizers, restrictions on certain food imports and challenges to other critical aspects of the food system.

Since the County Climate Action Plan does not focus squarely on the impacts of climate change and the food system, I strongly urge the Council to add explicitly to the charge of the Office of Food System Resilience, that it will also be responsible for:

Analyzing the potential and pending impacts of climate change on the food system and establishing resiliency focused plans to address the negative impacts, which may include but are not limited to:

- Establishing the barriers and opportunities for increasing local food production
- Identifying land for food production and expanding access to support food production within the county Identifying barriers and opportunities for coordinating regional food production systems to establish resilient localized food production
- Identifying the necessary support for farmers and residents to expand food production (e.g., these might include effort such as promoting and supporting Climate Victory Gardens and efforts to address temperature increases and food production challenges, etc.)
- Applying an equity and social justice lens needs to all these efforts
- Establishing a system to include community input in planning and execution of food production programs
- Identifying and applying policies and programs that are based on environmentally sustainable and resiliency rooted best practice planning to address climate change challenges

Finally, in order to establish a solid commitment to continued work on food system resiliency, I urge the Council to make the Director of the Office of Food Systems Resilience an appointed position, with adequate staffing to and resources to launch and sustain this critical service to improve our county and meet the needs of our residents.

Thank you for your time and commitment. Susan Eisendrath, MPH, Rockville, MD Resident