

The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future  
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Written Statement Submitted for the Record to the  
Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee  
For the Hearing on  
House Bill 82: Transportation - Complete Streets - Access to Healthy Food  
(Delegate Charkoudian)  
February 7, 2019

SUPPORT

*The opinions expressed herein are our own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University.*

Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. We are researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, an interdisciplinary academic center based within the Bloomberg School of Public Health in the Department of Environmental Health and Engineering. The Center engages in research, policy analysis, and education activities guided by an ecologic perspective that diet, food production, the environment, and public health are interwoven elements of a complex system. We have extensive experience in studying food retail and food environments as well as advising local jurisdictions and food policy councils on how to improve food access for their residents. Through the Center's Maryland Food System mapping project, we host the nation's most comprehensive statewide map of the food system, mapping over 140 layers of data to help policymakers, non-profits and communities use data for decision making on an interactive, geospatial platform. Our work with Baltimore City government has drawn international acclaim and we have worked with multiple food policy councils on food access issues throughout the Mid-Atlantic region and across the U.S. We have been invited by Delegate Charkoudian to present this written statement and oral testimony at the hearing for House Bill 82 (HB 82), Transportation – Complete Streets – Healthy Food Access. Recognizing the important role transportation plays in helping residents reach retail options selling healthy food, we support HB 82.

Living in areas with poor access to supermarkets and grocery stores is correlated with higher rates of diet-related disease and poorer quality diets. Transportation issues are frequently cited by low-income communities as one of the barriers they experience in seeking healthy foods. Bus lines are not routed with the intention of reaching supermarkets in a timely manner and some studies have found that even supermarkets a few miles away can take over an hour to reach by bus because of multiple transfers. Parents with young children are frequently forced to bring

their children with them on these long bus trips. Elderly and differently-abled people have an additional burden of transporting groceries on and off buses.

In Maryland, the households that report not having access to a vehicle are also the households with highest poverty levels. The Center has conducted nine community food assessments in neighborhoods across Baltimore City, surveying approximately 900 low-income residents. After rent and utilities, they reported the cost of transportation as one of the key barriers in accessing healthy food. Between 20 to 40 percent of respondents in all the assessments cited city buses as their means of getting to the supermarket.

Transportation is an underutilized strategy in helping to improve food access. In a review of food systems policies in Maryland by Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic, transportation was identified as a promising strategy. HB 82 would help local jurisdictions to use this promising strategy to improve food access for their residents who live in areas with poor healthy food access. The bill would offer grants to jurisdictions to develop creative solutions to overcome transportation barriers and, more importantly, provides them resources to implement those projects.

There are examples from around the country in which cities are adopting transportation strategies to help residents reach healthy food. Hartford, Connecticut, re-routed buses for the purpose of accessing supermarkets. Austin, Texas created a specialized grocery shuttle, which is now integrated into the regular transit schedule. Lynchburg, Virginia offers a free grocery bus service on Saturdays. Baltimore revised bus routes so that new routes now travel to 12 supermarkets. Kansas City, Missouri just approved new bond funding to support a complete streets ordinance, new trip planning tools and bus stop signage to improve access to supermarkets.

Food access is a complicated issue that is exacerbated by poverty, low education and unemployment, all systemic problems that require long-term and resource intensive solutions. Improving transportation can help some of Maryland's neediest residents who want to change their diet and purchase the foods they need to thrive. We applaud Delegate Charkoudian for sponsoring HB 82.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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