



House Bill 156

Local Governments – Urban Agricultural Incentive Zones – Authorization

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

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From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 156. This bill will grant more flexibility and resources to counties seeking to expand urban agriculture in their more developed regions.

Maryland’s growth comes with several challenges. One of the more significant hurdles facing local jurisdictions is the issue of food deserts—neighborhoods with few if any retailers or distributors of healthy and fresh foods. According to a study by Johns Hopkins University, neighborhoods with higher levels of poverty have decreased access to supermarkets. Aside from the accessibility issue, the transportation infrastructure for food also comes with significant environmental costs. These costs primarily arise from emissions and food waste.

HB 156 will give localities the power to establish urban agricultural zones while at the same time unlocking grant funding to develop those zones. Expanding agricultural production closest to the people who need it offers a path for neighborhood revitalization. New localized food production will spawn sensible growth, while also lessening food waste and emissions from transportation.

MACo supports HB 156 because it gives counties another “tool in the toolbox” to fight hunger, climate change, and poverty. It is common sense policy to incentivize local governments to establish urban agricultural zones. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for HB 61.