



## MARYLAND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH NETWORK

### **House Bill 0082- Transportation - Complete Streets – Access to Healthy Food**

Committee: Environment and Transportation

February 7, 2019

**Position: SUPPORT**

The Maryland Environmental Health Network supports Bills that are consistent with scientific research in the fields of public and environmental health, and those which advance social justice and equity. Marylanders are more likely to achieve health and longevity when we live in environments of clean air and water, strong local economies, and meaningful community engagement in policy-making. As a statewide network, we draw on a diverse constituency of health advocates, educators, researchers, health care professionals, and community leaders to evaluate legislative proposals.

The USDA defines Food deserts as parts of the country void of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas. To qualify as a “low-access community,” at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract's population must reside more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (for rural census tracts, the distance is more than 10 miles).<sup>1</sup> Further, the USDA states that this is largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and healthy food providers. As a Network focused on root causes and the development of systemic solutions, we are attentive to the patterns that lead to divestment and impoverishment as a means to upend these trends in the resource rich state of Maryland.

We vigorously support House Bill 0082 because we believe that sound science and environmental health study supports the importance of the built environment in impacting the conditions of health for residents. This includes the development of street features, designations and other structures crucial to health and wellbeing of the same. And requirements to support adequate development and maintenance of these structures. This Bill requires a complete streets policy to support access to healthy food options for vulnerable populations in our state and authorizes grants under the Complete Streets Program to be used to encourage necessary ranking systems to prioritize designs that respond to the urgency of access issues in food deserts.

In particular, we support this legislation as a public health organization because it speaks to health outcomes associated with limited access to complete streets. Physical structures in communities and health outcomes are interrelated including social cohesion in community, safety for the elderly and the very young, access, and social mobility, which work together as the

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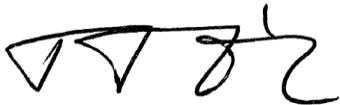
<sup>1</sup> USDA Economic Research Service, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/documentation/> Accessed, 1 February 2019

determinants of health in our state's communities. Therefore, we view policies such as that proposed by today's bill as necessary elements of health for all of us.<sup>2</sup>

When roads are safe, and consider the differing ways that we can be best positioned to move together, the likelihood of health outcomes increases. The U.S. Department of Transportation believes complete streets promote physical activity, mobility, and reduces long-term health burdens such as heart disease, high blood pressure, depression, and stroke. Adding explicit considerations of food access on strengthens that proposition.

Overall, we find this a dynamic and relevant approach to the failure of our transport to deliver options, investment and resulting health conditions and urge you to look upon this proposal favorably as a true win- win for the future of Maryland.<sup>3</sup>

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.



Tamara Toles O'Laughlin  
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<sup>2</sup> US Department of Transportation, <https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/complete-streets-policies>, Accessed 1 February 2019

<sup>3</sup> Gustat, J., Rice, J., Parker, K. M., Becker, A. B., & Farley, T. A. (2012). Effect of changes to the neighborhood built environment on physical activity in a low-income African American neighborhood. Preventing chronic