



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 352  
WITH AMENDMENT  
Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2025**

February 27, 2025

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Dear Chairs and Distinguished Members of the Committees,

On behalf of the Anne Arundel County Food Bank (AACFB), I strongly urge your Committees to support the reinstatement of full funding for the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), as they play a pivotal role in supporting local farmers, promoting agricultural education, expanding the local rural economy, and fostering sustainable practices.

As the countywide food bank in Anne Arundel County since 1986, AACFB regularly procures fresh, nutritious produce from local farmers. This produce is distributed to community members experiencing food insecurity through our network of 70+ partners across 100+ distribution locations. The Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission's work is essential to the success of our local food system, and we respectfully ask that you reinstate full funding of \$1 million for SMADC in the FY2026 budget so that they can continue their important work to cultivate a dynamic food system.

It is important to note that this is not new funding for SMADC; it is current, existing funding that comes into the state every year from the Cigarette Restitution Fund (CRF), of which 5% was promised to SMADC twenty years ago upon its creation during the Tobacco Buyout.

The CRF fund itself is continual and non-lapsing, and these funds that come into the State are directed to either the Maryland Department of Health or SMADC. The Health Department gets approximately \$108 million annually from this CRF fund, plus their additional funding. SMADC requests their fair share of the CRF – which is \$1 million annually, as decided by the Maryland Legislature in a bi-partisan bill passed just last Session - so they can continue to support the farmers in their region and across the state who are growing healthy food and a healthy community.

Unfortunately, the Governor's proposed Budget Bill now cuts \$250,000 from SMADC funding for FY26. This will deeply impact the agricultural community in Southern Maryland and the farming programs that SMADC promotes statewide. Full funding supports the agricultural economy, small business innovation, and food and farming education. It is worth noting that with just our \$900,000 in base funding last fiscal year, SMADC leveraged that to bring in over \$2 million additional dollars in grants to the region. This is a significant return on investment.

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SMADC's success has been proven. In FY24 alone, they awarded 30 Farm Mini-Grants to the community totaling \$60,000, awarded scholarships and sponsorships totaling \$10,050, awarded \$15,000 to youth farmers in the SOMD Meats Program, grew the Maryland Market Money matching program for low-income families at the farmers market to 60+ locations and over 720 farmers/producers, directly served 448 farms through grants, marketing, resources, and events, and much more through all our active programming.

We respectfully ask that you reinstate full funding of \$1 million for SMADC in the FY2026 budget so that they can continue their important work to cultivate a dynamic food system in Maryland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leah Aiello Paley".

Leah Aiello Paley, LMSW  
Chief Executive Officer  
Anne Arundel County Food Bank