



Thursday, May 6, 2021

Joint Committee on Public Health
24 Beacon St.
Room 413-C
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Support for H.2329/S.1386 An Act relative to accelerating improvements to the local and regional public health system to address disparities in the delivery of public health services

Dear Chairs Comerford and Decker:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this testimony in response to H.2329/S.1386 An Act relative to accelerating improvements to the local and regional public health system to address disparities in the delivery of public health services.

The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations, working to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. The Plan was developed for and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council, a 17-member entity comprising state agency, legislative, and industry representatives, established by the Legislature and Governor to develop recommendations, including legislative and regulatory changes, to promote sustainability, equity, and resilience in the Commonwealth's food system.

The Plan emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to food system policy, where issues of economic development, natural resources, equitable access to resources, and others are all taken into account when considering laws and regulations related to the food system. Many of the Plan's recommendations reflect the fact that the needs of farms and other food system businesses, as well as emergency food providers, are often at odds with the current structure of municipal boards of health. The Plan notes that an increase in cross-jurisdictional sharing of resources, more resources and education to increase the capacity of board members and health agents, and better collection and dissemination of data to inform the work of boards would all greatly improve not only the relationships between the boards and the regulated stakeholders, but also the ability of those stakeholders to meet the needs of their communities.

In the summer of 2020 the Collaborative facilitated a series of listening sessions around the Commonwealth to assess progress toward the recommendations of the 2015 Plan, and identify areas where more work is needed. Those listening sessions consistently reflected ongoing concerns about the challenges faced by local food system stakeholders when interacting with local boards of health and health agents. The need for greater consistency was highlighted as a critical element toward improving those working relationships so that the food supply can remain safe and the local food system can remain sustainable, equitable, and resilient. H.2329/S.1386 would represent a significant step toward that goal.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Winton Pitcoff", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Winton Pitcoff
Director