



November 15, 2021

S2580 Conference Committee
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St.
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairs Rodrigues, Michlewitz, and Hunt, Vice-chair Freidman, and Ranking Members Smola and O'Connor:

Thank you for your commitments to local food system needs in the ARPA spending bill (S2580). These investments and policies represent significant support for public health, local economic development, and the environment.

Line 1599-2049 is the most significant of these investments, proposing a commitment of \$60 million to local food system infrastructure. We note that the Senate bill contains more than \$30 million in earmarks, and the House version \$22 million. These commitments are almost exclusively to food pantries, food banks, and other stakeholders in the emergency food system, which are an essential part of ensuring that food is available to Massachusetts residents in need. We support these commitments.

However, the line states that funds are to be used to support “farms, retailers, fisheries, food system businesses and food distribution channels.” As noted, the earmarks that represent as much as half of the proposed spending are dedicated exclusively to the emergency food system, with none to supply chain businesses that are equally essential to food security. Our understanding is that the intent is that these funds are to be distributed through the Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) program, the first round of which was greatly over-subscribed, demonstrating significant need. To ensure equitable distribution of all of the funds, and to ensure that adequate funds are available, **we urge the conference committee to support the amount proposed in the House version of the bill, \$78 million, and to include language dedicating half of the total amount including earmarks be dedicated to the emergency food system, with the remaining half dedicated to farms, retailers, fisheries, and food system businesses.**

We **support the Senate versions of lines 1599-2030 and 1599-2031**, both of which include the Department of Agricultural Resources as participants in the decision-making process for these important investments in conservation and natural resource protection. These lines make note of the value of working lands and urban agriculture, and having farms represented by MDAR will ensure better outcomes of these efforts. We also support the Senate’s added language to 1599-2030 which strengthens reporting requirements to the joint committee on environment, natural resources and agriculture.

We **support the inclusion of Senate line 1599-2044**, which dedicates \$14 million to the commonwealth’s agricultural, commercial fishing and cranberry-growing industries.

We **support the Senate version of Section 99**, which explicitly includes “workers at farms, food production facilities, grocery stores and other service workers” in considerations for premium pay.

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 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, regulations, and investments related to food. We offer this testimony in accordance with the goals and recommendations of the Plan.

We appreciate the Committee's work in ensuring that a sustainable, equitable, and resilient food system is part of the Commonwealth's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Winton Pitcoff', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Winton Pitcoff
Director