



July 17, 2023

Joint Committee on Education
24 Beacon Street
Room 511B and 473G
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Testimony in support of H.558 and S.243, An Act establishing farm to school grants to promote healthy eating and strengthen the agricultural economy

Dear Chairs Lewis and Garlick, and members of the Committee:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this testimony in support of H.558 and S.243, An Act establishing farm to school grants to promote healthy eating and strengthen the agricultural economy. The establishment of this permanent competitive grant program within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would provide eligible schools and early education and care programs the critical funds needed to start up or expand farm-to-school activities such as purchasing and serving local foods in school meals, educating students on nutrition and food systems, and providing garden-based learning opportunities.

The Collaborative leads the Campaign for Food Literacy to ensure that all K - 12 students learn about the food system in school. This campaign focuses on providing the infrastructure necessary for teachers to integrate lessons about agriculture, nutrition, food justice, and culinary skills into their classrooms. While students are learning about healthy, local food in the classroom, they should see and eat healthy, local food in the cafeteria. This grant program will enable more schools to source, prepare, and serve healthy food from local farms and producers.

The Collaborative also supports these bills as they would serve to increase the customers base for local farmers and producers now and for years to come. Farmers in Massachusetts struggle to remain viable in a globalized food system, on average earning just 96 cents for every dollar they spend producing food. Connecting farmers with more schools will help local economies and the local food system.

This grant program builds on the successful ARPA-funded Massachusetts FRESH (Farming Reinforces Education and Student Health) Grant which received 1.6 million dollars in requested grant projects with \$500,000 available in its inaugural round and is currently funding projects in

seventeen communities across the state. A permanent grant program will help meet the demand and continue to positively impact kids and communities for years to come.

The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations, working to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. We offer this testimony in accordance with the goals and recommendations of the Plan. You can find the Plan and how these issues fit into the context of Massachusetts' food system as a whole at mafoodsystem.org/plan.

The Collaborative is available to provide additional information and connections to practitioners and advocates who can offer specific insights on this legislation, at the pleasure of the Committee. We appreciate the Committee taking up these issues, and urge you to report these bills out favorably. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brittany Peats
MA Food System Collaborative
Boston, MA