

April 5, 2016

Chairwoman Eileen Donoghue
Chairman Joseph Wagner
Joint Committee on Economic Development and Emerging Technologies
State House
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Comments on H3983, Harnessing the Power of Food Sector Entrepreneurs to Drive Economic Development

Dear Chairwoman Donoghue and Chairman Wagner:

We are writing to ask for your support to authorize funds for the Massachusetts Food Trust Program as part of H3983. We thank you for your past support for this program and your commitment to promoting economic development in all regions of the Commonwealth. In order to launch this important community-based economic development program, **we respectfully request that \$10 million in bond funds be authorized for the Food Trust Program over the five year life of the bill.**

The Massachusetts Food Trust Program, established in statute in 2014 within the Massachusetts Office of Business Development, is designed to provide flexible financing to address the needs of food sector businesses with loans, grants, and technical assistance. Such early money helps food retailers and other food sector businesses overcome the barriers to entry or expansion in low- and moderate-income communities. In doing so, the Food Trust Program can create community-based opportunities to drive economic development, improve health and wellness, and alleviate poverty across the Commonwealth.

Reducing barriers to successful food sector businesses in low- and moderate-income communities will help the state reach the goals set by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development to promote innovation, invest in infrastructure, and to make it easier to do business in Massachusetts. **Across the country, financing programs similar to the Food Trust Program have successful track records of driving economic growth. Programs in Pennsylvania and New York have leveraged \$9 to \$15 in private and federal funds for every \$1 of state seed funding.** Additionally, Illinois, California, Maryland, New Jersey, Michigan, and Ohio have seen promising results through similar initiatives.

The Food Trust Program was developed because too many Massachusetts communities have poor access to healthy food and lack strong job opportunities. A 2010 study by the Massachusetts Grocery Access Task Force—a public-private partnership—found that more than one million Massachusetts residents, including 300,000 children, live in communities with limited access to grocery stores. Many of these same communities are struggling economically

and lack job opportunities for local residents. Both of these problems can be addressed by supporting food sector entrepreneurs to open and expand businesses in Massachusetts.

Examples of what the Massachusetts Food Trust Program could do include:

- Provide loans to grocery store operators for land acquisition, construction, or renovation in underserved communities (i.e. food deserts);
- Provide grants and technical assistance to corner stores, farmers' markets, and mobile markets to address capital needs; and
- Provide working capital for community kitchens, food co-ops, indoor and outdoor greenhouses, and food distribution hubs; among other uses that advance the goals of the program.

We look forward to partnering with you to make these goals a reality in every corner of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Nathaniel W. Karns, Executive Director
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission



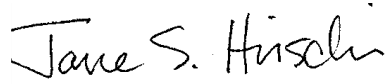
Michelle Volpe, President, Boston Community Loan Fund
Boston Community Capital



Keith Mahoney, Interim Vice President for Communications and Public Affairs
The Boston Foundation



Michael Gallerani, Executive Director
Brockton 21st Century Corporation



Jane Hirschi, Executive Director
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Member, **Massachusetts Food Policy Council**



Josh Trautwein, Co-Founder/Executive Director
The Fresh Truck



Janice B. Yost, Ed.D.
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Lead Funder, **Worcester Regional Food Hub**



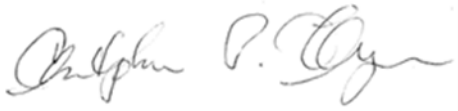
Dave Christopolis, Executive Director
Hilltown Community Development Corporation



Andrew Kendall, Executive Director
Henry P. Kendall Foundation



Joe Kriesburg, President
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Christopher Flynn, President
Massachusetts Food Association



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Tim Brennan, Executive Director
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Jason Barbosa, President
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Yvette Dyson, Executive Director
Worcester Common Ground, Inc.



Timothy P. Murray, President & CEO
Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce