SENATE DOCKET, NO. 1036 FILED ON: 2/10/2021

# SENATE . . . . . No. 502

## The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

***Joanne M. Comerford***

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act promoting equity in agriculture.

PETITION OF:

| NAME: | DISTRICT/ADDRESS: | |
|---|---|---|
| *Joanne M. Comerford* | *Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester* | |
| *Hannah Kane* | *11th Worcester* | *2/22/2021* |
| *Brendan P. Crighton* | *Third Essex* | *2/24/2021* |
| *Brian W. Murray* | *10th Worcester* | *2/24/2021* |
| *Paul A. Schmid, III* | *8th Bristol* | *2/26/2021* |
| *John C. Velis* | *Second Hampden and Hampshire* | *2/26/2021* |
| *Erika Uyterhoeven* | *27th Middlesex* | *2/26/2021* |
| *James B. Eldridge* | *Middlesex and Worcester* | *3/1/2021* |
| *Michael O. Moore* | *Second Worcester* | *3/2/2021* |
| *Joan B. Lovely* | *Second Essex* | *3/5/2021* |
| *Anne M. Gobi* | *Worcester, Hampden, Hampshire and Middlesex* | *3/12/2021* |
| *Susannah M. Whipps* | *2nd Franklin* | *3/31/2021* |
| *Alan Silvia* | *7th Bristol* | *9/16/2021* |
| *Sal N. DiDomenico* | *Middlesex and Suffolk* | *10/4/2021* |

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# SENATE . . . . . No. 502

By Ms. Comerford, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 502) of Joanne M. Comerford, Hannah Kane, Brendan P. Crighton, Brian W. Murray and other members of the General Court for legislation to promote agriculture. Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture.

## The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Second General Court**
**(2021-2022)**

An Act promoting equity in agriculture.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

(a) As used in this section, the following words shall, unless the context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:-

"Department", the department of agricultural resources.

"socially disadvantaged groups", people who have, or whose lineage has, been historically been historically or systematically excluded from, or have had less access to resources and opportunities based on cultural, racial, or ethnic prejudice based on their identity as a member of a group rather than for their individual qualities. These groups include, but are not limited to, African Americans, Cape Verdeans, Hispanics, Asians Americans, Pacific Islanders, Caribbean Islanders, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives.

(b) There shall be a commission on agricultural equity to develop recommendations for supporting racially equitable investments, policies, and practices to promote equity in agriculture in the commonwealth.

The commission shall consist of 15 members, including the commissioner of agricultural resources or a designee; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the legislative food system caucus, to be selected through an open nomination process under criteria developed by the caucus; 2 of who shall represent nonprofit organizations whose primary purpose is working with farmers from socially disadvantaged groups, to be selected by the commissioner through an open nomination process under criteria developed by the department; 2 of whom shall be chosen by Buy Local organizations funded by the department; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative; 2 of whom shall be chosen by the commission on Indian affairs to represent Native American farmers; 1 of whom shall be chosen by Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation; and 1 of whom shall be chosen by the University of Massachusetts Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment.

The commission shall be co-chaired by the commissioner of agricultural resources and a member of the commission chosen by the members.

The commission shall hold 3 or more public hearings in various regions of the state, including 1 in a rural area and 1 in an urban area with potential for increased urban agriculture.

(c) The commission shall investigate and study ways to increase equity in agriculture in the commonwealth, and shall prepare a report that includes:

(1) recommendations for data collection and dissemination, benchmark development, targeting practices, and transparency for grantmaking to promote equitable access to grant programs and equitable distribution of funds to socially disadvantaged groups;

(2) recommendations for how laws, regulations, and other policies that regulate and support agriculture in the commonwealth could more equitably serve socially disadvantaged groups;

(3) recommendations for how programs and services offered by the department, including, but not limited to those programs regarding land access and protection, farmer technical assistance and education, marketing, and others, could more equitably serve socially disadvantaged groups;

(4) recommendations for how regulatory and other departmental decision-making processes could more equitably serve socially disadvantaged groups;

(5) recommendations for the ongoing role of the commission or another representative body in supporting implementation and monitoring of these goals; and

(6) a plan for implementation of these recommendations, including a timeline.

The department shall furnish reasonable staff and other support for the work of the commission. Members may receive reimbursement for the reasonable expenses incurred in carrying out their responsibilities as members of the commission under procedures established by the department.

The department may fund the expenses of the commission from the Massachusetts Farmer Equity Commission Fund, without further appropriation.

(d) The Commission shall, no later than 12 months following the date of enactment of this act, report to the general court on the results of its investigation and study together with its findings, recommendations, and drafts of legislation, if any, necessary to carry out those

recommendations. The report shall be posted on the web site of the department and shall be submitted to the speaker of the house, the senate president, the house and senate committees on ways and means and the committee on energy, natural resources and agriculture.

(e) There shall be established and set up on the books of the commonwealth a separate fund, to be administered by the commissioner of the department of agricultural resources, which shall be known as the Massachusetts Farmer Equity Commission Fund. The Fund shall consist of all revenues from public and private sources as appropriations, gifts, grants, donations, and grants-in-aid or other receipts to be disbursed by the commission to provide stipends for time spent furthering the cause of the commission made by non-governmental members of the commission.