

Joint Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries
Bill Summary

Bill Number: H.128

Title: An Act relative to establishing a food justice frontline

Sponsor: Representative Howard of Lowell

Cosponsors: Resentative Arena-DeRosa of Holliston; Senator Eldridge

Hearing Date: Wednesday, July 9, 2025 at 1:00 PM - 05:00 PM, A-1

Reporting Date: Sunday, September 7, 2025

Similar Matters: S.63 (Senator Jehlen - Identical)

Prior History

2023-2024: Filed as H.828; Referred to the Joint Committee on Environment & Natural Resources; Discharged to the Joint Committee on Agriculture; Accompanied a new draft H.4226; Reported favorably to the House Committee on Ways and Means where no further action was taken.

2022-2023: Filed as H.973; Referred to the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture; Reported favorably to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means where no further action was taken.

Current Law

Chapter 128 of the Massachusetts General Laws relates to agriculture.

Summary

This bill defines the terms “food security job,” “nonprofit food security organization,” and “overburdened community.” This bill directs the Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) to create a Food Justice Frontline Program. This program would fund nonprofit food security organizations to enable them to create new food security jobs and provide those jobs to individuals living within overburdened communities. MDAR would be charged with creating an application with which nonprofit food security organizations may apply to receive a financial grant, not to exceed \$500,000. MDAR will establish rules and regulations regarding the process and criteria for the grant application. The regulations must prioritize organizations that are planning to create food security jobs for those in overburdened communities.

The applicant must describe in detail the program(s) the nonprofit food security organization operates that provide land or food security jobs to low-income Massachusetts residents and the ways in which the organization would use the funding to create jobs for individuals living in overburdened communities. The organization must apply for multiple grants under this program. The organization that receives this grant must use the entirety of the money on programs that will create food security jobs for those in overburdened communities. The jobs must meet a certain criterion for the hourly wage.

The bill requires the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (HED) to establish a program to promote food security programs such as SNAP, HIP, and similar food programs. This program would work with residents under 18 and pay them \$15/hour to promote public awareness of these programs. The program would be conducted in multiple languages. The departments must prioritize working with Massachusetts residents who live in overburdened communities or Census Block Groups with a median household income that is below 80% of the statewide median household income. This program must be conducted in multiple languages. DTA and HED must apply for federal programs such as the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grants administered by the USDA to provide matching benefits to be deposited in the fund.