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January 6, 2021

Dr. Alvin Thornton
Chair, Prince George's County Board of Education
14201 School Lane
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

RE: Letter of SUPPORT for Adoption of a Resolution Committing to Implementation of a Climate Change Action Plan Focus Workgroup

Dear Dr. Thornton,

On behalf of Friends of the Earth U.S. and our members and supporters in Prince George's County, we are writing to express our support for the Prince George's County School Board adopting a clear timeline to eliminate landfilled food waste through increased composting and waste reduction, shift to more climate-friendly menus, and reduce the external waste associated with food packaging, production, and serving in schools. We are also writing in support of initiation of a Focus Workgroup to develop a School Climate Change Action Plan that will outline how to implement these goals in a timely, cost-effective, and equitable manner.

Friends of the Earth U.S. fights for a healthy and just world. Our Climate-friendly Food Program leverages the purchasing power of large institutions — including K-12 schools — to shift to more plant-forward menus as a climate mitigation and public health strategy.

Friends of the Earth commends this proposal for including a shift to more climate-friendly menus in Prince George's County Public Schools. Climate-friendly food choices protect the planet, promote health, and reduce health costs.

Research has shown that diets high in plant-based foods and low in animal products, particularly red and processed meat, can reduce heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and even some forms of cancer.¹ Diets high in plant-based foods, on the other hand, have been shown to mitigate these diet-related diseases.² Here in Prince George's County, 19.3% of high school students are overweight and 16.4% have obesity.³ The vast majority of these students are students of color, who experience obesity at a rate two times higher than

¹ Barnard, N. D., & Leroy, F. (2020). Children and adults should avoid consuming animal products to reduce risk for chronic disease: YES. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 112(4), 926–930. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqaa235>

² Marshall, P., & Marinova, D. (2019). Health Benefits of Eating More Plant Foods and Less Meat. *Environmental, Health, and Business Opportunities in the New Meat Alternatives Market*, 38–61. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-7350-0.ch003>

³ Health Department Prince Georges's County. (2018). *PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY 2018 HEALTH REPORT*. <https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/21710/2017-Health-Report-PDF>

white students.⁴ Shifting to healthier school meals is a direct point of leverage to mitigate racial health disparities⁵ and establish better dietary quality and eating patterns that will affect children's long-term health outcomes.

Reducing food waste and plant-rich menus were ranked as the third and fourth most effective climate mitigation strategies by Project Drawdown, a renowned research initiative led by Paul Hawken.⁶ Plus, they are highly cost-effective. Oakland Unified School District reduced meat and cheese on its menus by 20% over two years and realized a 14% reduction in its carbon footprint.⁷ The switch saved money that the district invested in more fresh and local produce and a smaller amount of high-quality meat, and even after that, they saved \$42,000 annually. To achieve those same carbon reductions by installing rooftop solar panels, it would have cost them \$2.1 million. Student meal satisfaction also improved over the same period.

Once the resolution is adopted and action plan is implemented it will:

- Reduce the amount of food that enters the waste stream
- Increase the use of alternative food disposal means such as composting
- Reduce food-related emissions by 25% by 2030 through reducing food waste and shifting to plant-rich menus

We believe that the Prince George's County School Board should adopt a resolution committing to implementation of a climate change action plan focus workgroup to implement these and other climate mitigation goals. Thank you for your consideration of our position. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you would like more information.

Sincerely,
Chloë Waterman

CC: Edward Burroughs III, Vice Chair, District 8
David Murray, District 1
Joshua M. Thomas, District 2
Pamela Boozer-Strother, District 3
Shayla Adams-Stafford, District 4
Raaheela Ahmed, District 5
Belinda Queen, District 6
Kenneth Harris II, District 7
Sonya Williams, District 9

⁴ American Heart Association. (2011). *Obesity Doesn't Affect All Children Equally*. Understanding Childhood Obesity, 2011; American Heart Association. http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm_476865.pdf

⁵ Mlilo, M., & Waterman, C. (2020, July 15). *Healthier school food is key to fighting COVID-19 and systemic racism*. Friends of the Earth. <https://foe.org/blog/healthier-school-food-is-key-to-fighting-covid-19-and-systemic-racism/>

⁶ Hawken, P. (2017). *Drawdown: The most comprehensive plan ever proposed to reverse global warming*. New York, New York: Penguin Books.

⁷ Hamerschlag, K., & Kraus-Polk, J. (2017, February). *Shrinking the Carbon and Water Footprint of School Food*. <https://foe.org/resources/shrinking-carbon-water-footprint-school-food/>

Paul Monteiro, Appointed
Sandra D. Shephard, Appointed
Curtis Valentine, M.P.P., Appointed
Ninah Jackson, Student Member of the Board