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and Rhode Island Food Policy Council

FOR SB2335

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- Hi, my name is Amelia Lopez, I work at the Southside Community Land Trust and I am a South Providence native and part of a family that farms in the inner city for a living.
 - **I am here to testify on behalf of House Bill 7684 and Senate Bill 2335** which will relieve RI's small (<5 acres) and urban farmers of income, sales and property taxes entirely.
 - I would like to address this testimony to the Chair of Senate Finance, Chairman Lou DiPalma.
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- I have lived in South Providence my whole life. Greenery, trees and nature was something reserved for the occasional trips to Roger Williams Park. Otherwise, we had sandlot parks and pavement to play kickball and dodge cars pulling into their parking spots (it was kind of fun, my mom would disagree).
- Before farming, we spent much of our time inside.
- When my mom married a farmer from the DR in 2013 and began their inner city farming journey, I gained a completely different view on food, and for the first time, both my mom and step dad had a chance at owning their livelihoods.
- When moving to America, many people believe this will be the land of opportunity. That is certainly true for my mom and step dad, but they have also quickly learned that the opportunity to own their work is overshadowed by the multitude of expenses that come with owning a business, and specifically in farming.
- After Alaska, a literal tundra that can barely support agriculture, RI has the most expensive and least abundant percentage of farmland in the country. And despite that, the number of small and urban farms is growing. People are desperate to have easy access to healthy and culturally familiar foods. An effort that is most easily attained by allowing people to have ownership over their food production and options for consumption. Take for example the 60 community gardens that have popped up in the last few years.

- Farming is not just any other business. It is a step towards community health and engagement, improvement in the climate crisis, land conservation, and a chance for people to connect with a cultural side of themselves that can't be found in the average American grocery store.
- One of the skills that many immigrants have brought with them for survival is farming. This laborious work has been taken for granted by so many employers that underpay and overwork farmers trying to make a bare minimum living. And the ones that do pursue their own farming operations—operations that allow them to work with dignity and autonomy—barely break even in their yearly profits.
- Out of the 1054 farms counted in the USDA's 2022 Ag Census in RI, 81% of RI's farms, over 850 farms, accounted for only 8.4% of agricultural sales in 2022, leaving 3.9% of farms (41 farms) over 65% percent of total sales. An imbalance that is magnified by the lack of representation of smaller and urban farms that larger farms have been receiving for the last 30 years.
- Urban kids and adults like myself deserve to feel like we are worthy of healthy food. We should not feel as though "organic" and "local" is for the higher income folks that can afford to eat that kind of food. Instead, we get overtaken by Family Dollars' taking up real estate in our city, further adding to the influx of packaged junk food and boxes full of GMOs.
- These Family Dollar's could have been community farms and gardens where people come together, experience food security, improve their health and feel like our neighborhoods are taken care of. The urban farmers that I work with regularly clean up litter around the garden areas (sometimes taking it home in trash bags) to keep the spaces usable and safe.
 - In the face of climate uncertainty, and growing tensions between several of our primary importing nations, we believe that eliminating property, sales and income taxes will allow farmers to increase access to healthy and outdoor activities, as well as improved climate change mitigation strategies that are naturally implemented when urban farms are created.

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- With that being said, I am asking you to see how eliminating property, sales and income taxes for our small and urban farmers is a step towards a greener, more secure Rhode Island. Where people can feel more confident about where their food will come from knowing that farmers have the income available to reinvest into the food system and the environment.

- Thank you for your time, and for valuing the hard work that farmers do and the need for our food system to improve.