

ASSEMBLY COMMERCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO ASSEMBLY, No. 2458

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 6, 2025

The Assembly Commerce, Economic Development and Agriculture Committee reports favorably, and with committee amendments, Assembly Bill No. 2458.

As amended by the committee, this bill establishes the “Urban Gardening Pilot Program” in the Department of Agriculture (department) to provide grants to three qualified applicants to establish an urban garden in a low-income area of the State. The bill requires the department to award three qualified applicants a grant of up to \$35,000 each, which the applicant will use for an urban garden for the three-year pilot program. The goal of the urban gardening program is to improve the local neighborhood conditions and integrate residents of diverse communities.

The bill requires an agronomist or a qualified individual from the New Jersey Cooperative Extension Service to teach local residents how to plant and cultivate fresh produce or other agricultural products for consumption as food in the urban garden.

Within three years of the effective date of the bill, the Secretary of Agriculture would be required to prepare and submit a written report to the Governor and to the Legislature summarizing the activities and findings of the program. The report would provide information on whether the program provided benefits to the local communities, evaluate the effectiveness of urban gardening in low-income areas as a means of improving the neighborhood and integrating residents of different ethnic backgrounds, and provide recommendations for legislative action, including whether or not to make the program permanent.

The bill appropriates \$100,000 to the Department of Agriculture from the General Fund in order to provide grants to three qualified applicants as required under the bill.

This bill was pre-filed for introduction in the 2024-2025 session pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review, which has been performed.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to:

- (1) remove the provision that requires an applicant to the “Urban Gardening Program” to demonstrate they have or will have a contractual relationship with a licensed clinical social worker; and
- (2) make technical corrections.