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#### Re: Testimony in Support of Land Bank Bill #130156

Good Morning Chairman Henon, members of the Committee, and of City Council. My name is Glenn Bergman. I am the General Manager of Weavers Way Co-op. I am testifying today on behalf of the Co-op and in my capacity as an appointed member of the Mayor's Food Policy Advisory Council.

Through Greenworks Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Food Charter, the City of Philadelphia sets targets to create more equitable access to healthy food in neighborhoods, improve the environment and public health and stimulate the economy by increasing access to local, fresh and healthy food. One of the mechanisms for fulfilling these goals was the creation of a Food Policy Council comprised of diverse, regional stakeholders."

The Food Policy Advisory Council was appointed in 2011 and tasked with advising the City on how to be a productive partner in the regional food system and how to improve food access.

Much has been written about the impact of Philadelphia's 40,000 vacant parcels. Many of these lots are located in low-income neighborhoods where there is a dearth of access to healthy foods. In addition, the 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District is the hungriest in the nation. We can do better!

Urban agriculture, which includes community gardening and market or community-supported farming, is integral to improving food access, creating economic opportunity, responsibly using land and stabilizing property values.

We can create a solution to our vacant-land problem that also triggers solutions to these other pressing needs by supporting Land Bank Bill 130156.

Let me introduce to you Weavers Way's mission as it pertains to this bill.

Weavers Way Co-op is a not-for-profit business with 155 employees, who are also owners along with more than 5,000 community member-owners. The Co-op had sales of over \$18 million in fiscal 2013, with a projection of \$19 million for 2014. Weavers Way also has a nonprofit that you will hear about today that provides nutrition and urban farming education programs in partnership with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, W.B. Saul Agricultural High School, Awbury Arboretum and many other organizations in the city associated with improvements in nutrition and production of food.

Community-owned food markets, open to the public.

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Weavers Way operates four stores and three farms, including a small farm at Stenton Family Manor, an emergency homeless shelter in Mt. Airy that houses 200 family members.

Weavers Way attempted to purchase land from the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority six years ago. The process was difficult. The land was technically “available for sale,” but we could not figure out how to obtain it. We met with a representative from RDA, but no one could really help us, and we never heard back. So we turned to Awbury Arboretum, where we rent 2+ acres for crop production. We then turned to Saul and Fairmount Park and now rent about 3 acres at the high school. Today, Weavers Way is the largest farming entity in the city, producing about \$140,000 of vegetables and selling:

- At the Head House Square Farmers Market on Sunday.
- At the two Weavers Way grocery stores.
- To more than 100 community supported agriculture subscribers at Saul.
- To the School District as of last month, when we started to sell vegetables for use in the Saul High School cafeteria.

The high school students at Saul are not only working with us at the farm, but they are also eating healthy vegetables grown there!

Weavers Way, and other organizations and individuals in the city welcome the opportunity to own land for farming purposes right here within the city. Weavers Way employs two full-time farmers (\$70,000 in wages) paying city wage tax, living in the city and spending their money in the city. We also have paid interns who are doing the same.

At Weavers Way, we have set a mission to increase our purchasing of locally produced food, and especially food grown in Philadelphia. In fact, we have a full-time local-product coordinator whose job it is to find local producers of all types of food and other supplies (soap, health and beauty aids, etc.).

We believe that urban farming can provide communities with healthy options and jobs. Urban farming can easily provide a 10- to 20-percent increase in income for working people. Urban farming can save families money on their food budget. Urban gardens and farming also increase community interaction and reduce crime.

Passing this legislation is one of the most crucial public-health initiatives the Council can implement while also increasing overall land value in Philadelphia. Weavers Way and the Mayor’s Food Policy Advisory Council see the inclusion of urban agriculture as a crucial component of the land bank bill.

Our City needs a land bank, a government agency laser-focused on getting land into the hands of caring neighbors, community groups, and nonprofit organizations, as well as developers and for-profit businesses, to turn blighted spaces into vibrant places. **Land Bank Bill #130156**, as introduced by Councilwoman María Quiñones-Sánchez, has the potential to meet these goals, if it maintains the following:



**Public land for public benefit** – The land bank’s mission and policies need to ensure land is used for community gardens and farms, affordable and accessible housing and neighborhood businesses, such as co-ops of all types.

**Community involvement in decision-making** – Community residents should have a voice in the future of their neighborhoods – through public hearings on land bank regulations, the land bank planning process and knowledgeable expertise on the board.

**Transparency and access to information** – Residents, community groups, and developers should be able to find out easily what land has been sold, to whom, for what price, and for what intended use. This will help restore the trust of community residents who have tried for years to gain legal access to vacant parcels. Additionally, there should be adequate noticing, at least 15 days, of upcoming sales posted on-site.

**Accountability** – The land bank should publish an annual impact statement and a corrective action plan if its target goals have not been met.

The appointed members of the Food Policy Council and Weavers Way Co-op support a Land Bank that is able to accomplish these goals.

Many thanks for the opportunity to speak to you today. I welcome the opportunity to work with City Council on passage of this bill, as do the members of the Food Policy Council.

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