

Charles County Farm Bureau Inc.
P.O. Box 374
La Plata, Maryland 20646

February 28, 2020

To: Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

From: Charles County Farm Bureau Inc.

Re: Support SB 432- Charles County - Public Safety - Buildings Used for Agritourism

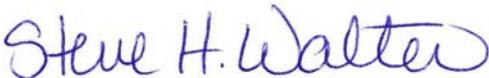
On behalf of our Farm Bureau member families in Charles County, I submit this written testimony in support of SB432, legislation that adds Charles County to the list of counties that exempt existing Ag structures that are going to be used for agritourism from being required to retrofit the structure with bathrooms, sprinklers and other high occupancy requirements. This exemption allows up to 200 people in the structure. The structure must still adhere to the structural integrity standards as well as entrance and exit requirements.

Maryland Farm Bureau (MFB) policy defines agritourism as activities conducted on a farm and offered to the public or to invited groups for the purpose of education, recreation, or active involvement in the farm operation. Directly related to this bill, MFB policy reads: We further support the inclusion of specific language in the building code to permit public access to existing, structurally sound, nonresidential buildings without mandated upgrades to the full current codes.

Allowing farms to diversify so they can improve their income generated from the farm, should be Maryland's top priority if there is to be increased financial sustainability for our farms in the future. The cost of producing agricultural crops in Maryland increases every year, yet the prices for these commodities remains flat or even in decline for some. The profit margins on agricultural crops are very small and leave very little room for added expenses. The next generation of farmers in Maryland will have to adapt and transition their farms to more profitable crops and practices to be able to remain on the farm. Several of those practices include Agritourism.

CHARLES COUNTY FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS SB 432.

Respectfully yours,



Steven H Walter
President