

Dave Lines Letter of Support SB432

Dear Senator Ellis --- Dave Lines here of the Charles County Farm Bureau. I am asking for your support of SB 432 which increases the maximum allowed capacity of agricultural buildings for agritourism events from 50 persons to 200 persons. I was one of nine (9) members of the "Rural Zoning and Planning Task Force" appointed by our County Commissioners last year. Our goal was to identify areas in the County regulations where changes would improve the economic posture of agricultural and the agritourism industry in Charles County. We met 13 times over a five (5) month period and presented our recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. We spent many, many hours of our volunteer time on this.

One of the recommendations was in the form of SB 432 which was simply an effort to level the playing field by allowing Charles County to have the same rules regarding use of ag buildings for agritourism as ten (10) other Maryland counties already have. Those counties are St. Mary's, Prince Georges, Anne Arundel, Howard, Baltimore, Cecil, Alleghany, Carroll, Garrett and Kent. Our current regs allow a maximum capacity of 50 persons --- we want 200 persons which is the same as these other counties. Our county is promoting many types of "value added alternative agriculture" such as vineyards, distilleries, craft breweries, wedding venues, aquaculture, etc. and a 200 person capacity would allow larger events. Remember --- our County is in competition with the rest of these counties as well as Virginia locations for this business. Agriculture in Charles County is struggling and will not survive by just producing low value/high input commodities like grain and cattle --- we need "value added" products and venues.

I understand that Delegate Patterson and Delegate Davis were concerned about the potential safety of this idea to increase the capacity to 200 persons. Please be assured that the same high standards of safety will be required as are already in place for the 50 person capacity. This bill was fully vetted and supported by the local fire and EMS folks, the Department of Planning and Growth Management, the Economic Development Department and was unanimously approved by the Charles County Board of Commissioners. There was no opposition to this bill until now by Delegate Patterson and Delegate Davis --- and I hope they will change their minds and lend their support.

Please add your support to SB 432 by speaking with Senator Miller. Tell him you support this bill --- and vote for its approval.

Thank you. Best, Dave Lines, 7970 Bel Alton Newtown Road, La Plata, MD 20646 --- cell (240) 427-7062 --- dave.lines@earthlink.net